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Los Angeles

***Soulfully Resistant *Transferistas*:***  
**Understanding the Chicana Transfer Experience**  
**From Community College and Into the Doctorate**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Education

by

Martha Alicia Rivas

2012

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2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Soulfully Resistant *Transferistas*:  
Understanding the Chicana Transfer Experience  
from Community College and into the Doctorate

by

Martha Alicia Rivas

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Daniel G. Solorzano, Committee Chair

U.S. doctoral production rates between 1990-2000 indicate Chicana recipients continue to be less than one percent in the nation (Solorzano, Rivas, & Velez, 2005; Watford, Rivas, Burciaga, & Solorzano 2006). However, during this time frame, one out of four Chicana/o doctoral recipients began their postsecondary pathway at the community college. Thus Chicana/os are more likely than any other racial group to obtain a doctoral degree through the community college entry point (Solorzano, et. al, 2005; Rivas, Perez, Alvarez, & Solorzano, 2007). Within this eleven year analyses, a consistent pattern emerge from 1998 through 2000: Chicanas transfer scholars experience a slight overrepresentation in doctorate production than their male counterparts. These data warrant queries on the Chicana experience and trajectories as they maneuver through to reach the last phase of the educational pipeline.

This study is the first attempt to document the perspectives of Chicana community college transfer students on their experience while at the four-year institution and their preparation towards graduate school. This study merges critical race theory and Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research to create a new lens – Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis. With these theoretical and epistemological frameworks, *Testimonios as platicas* was the primary method of data collection. *Testimonios as platicas* serve as the platform for the eight *Mujeres* in this retrospective study to speak, share and critique their educational journeys. Thus, in order to understand the Chicana transfer experience, their *Testimonios*—their voices—sharpen this body of work. This study discusses transfer-obstructive institutional barriers; transfer-supportive institutional factors; and Chicana transfer navigational tools employed while at the four-year institution and as they prepared to apply to graduate school. The concept of *Transferistas* – defined as a group of politicized Chicana transfer students soulfully resistant and committed to their own movement from community college to the doctorate – is discussed as a salient finding. Further, this study deconstructs how Chicana transfer students experience racism, classism, ageism, languageism and the intersectionalities with transferism – defined as the institutional neglect and disrespect against community college transfer students. This study provides research, programmatic and policy recommendations to strengthen the entire educational pipeline for Chicana community college transfer students.

The dissertation of Martha Alicia Rivas is approved.

Kris D. Gutierrez

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Professor Daniel G. Solorzano, Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

## DEDICATION

*Dedico este tesis del doctorado a mis padres,  
Fernando Rivas Trejo y Martha Alicia Rivas Maravilla.  
Ustedes me siguen enseñando el valor, dedicación, y perseverancia  
que se necesita para lograr nuestros sueños.  
Durante tiempos difíciles, en todo este camino académico,  
siempre recorde todos los esfuerzos y obstáculos  
que ustedes superaron para proveernos un futuro estable.  
Y aunque me quejé de levantarme a las 4 de la mañana para seguir escribiendo,  
Mi lujo siempre era de tener la habilidad y privilegio de levantarme a escribir.  
“A quemar pestaña” como dice mi papá.  
Sabieno muy bien que ustedes se levantan, a la misma hora a quemar su lomo.  
Y a quemar pestaña lo hize...  
para dedicarles todo mi sacrificio para obtener este título.  
Gracias, Amá y Apá por todo su apoyo incondicional...  
Me han enseñado, especialmente como inculcar  
la responsabilidad, perseverancia y dedicación a mis hijas,  
Alicia-Ixchel y Inez.*

*Ali y Inez,  
mucho antes de concebirlas,  
- por intuición -  
ustedes siempre me dieron la energía y motivación para seguir adelante.  
Todas mis luchas y sacrificios los hize para darles lo mejor  
que esta vida les puede ofrecer.  
Sean lo que sean sus sueños, metas y aspiraciones  
siempre las apoyaremos.  
Este título se los dedico - porque se lo merecen.  
Ustedes estuvieron conmigo  
- en mi vientre -  
escribiendo y en pensamiento,  
para lograr este sueño.  
Por ustedes y para ustedes,  
les dedico todo mi esfuerzo.*

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contribute to our lives. Everything I have accomplished and will continue to, is all for you - all for the both of you. *Las quiero muchisimo!*

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For all current community college students, transfer students, Students of Color in general – you are my inspiration to reach obtain my doctoral degree. For those of you enraged with the graduate and doctoral production rates for Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicana/o community – I know how you feel. I know what you may feel - know these were the exact emotional rage that got me through. *Si se puede por que, si se pudo!*

## PREFACE

Chicana Experiential Knowledge: *Mi Testimonio*

My historicity as a *Mexicana-Chicana, muxer*, working-class immigrant, first-generation college student, counselor, mentor, poet, mother *y tanto mas* – allow me to use my cultural intuition to reflect on my personal, academic, and professional experiences to complete this dissertation (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Intuitively, I reflect on my experiences, which purposely led to this work.

As I gave a speech at my high school graduation ceremony, I looked at the audience and was consumed with frustration to see how many bright and talented individuals had not been given the opportunity to pursue a postsecondary education at a four-year institution, as I would be. As an eighteen year old I was aware most of my peers, similarly to my older sister, were pushed into the community college system or systematically excluded from pursuing a postsecondary education altogether. I did not understand how schools failed to support most of my community. I was enraged and frustrated knowing it was at the expense of my family and peers' struggles that afforded me additional educational opportunities.

As an undergraduate student, most of my peers were community college transfer students and often told me, "You wouldn't understand how hard this is because you're not a transfer student!" These distinctions between first-time freshmen and community college transfer students invoked critical questions to understand what, exactly, were these distinctions.

These distinctions were further pronounced as I witnessed my older sister transfer to a nearby four-year institution where she, too often, expressed the feeling of being displaced on and off campus. I was a second-year undergraduate student at the time and though I attempted to

comfort her by sharing how I coped with my own struggles at a four-year institution, we knew there were major differences between our experiences. Differences we were unable to articulate, well at least not at that moment in time. Not able to “name” these experiences or know how to comfort my sister as a transfer student made me feel useless and frustrated; a frustration I also experienced as a young professional.

Professionally, I had the opportunity to facilitate academic and social mentorship as a peer counselor, teaching assistant and lecturer through UCLA’s Academic Advancement Program (AAP)<sup>1</sup> and the Transfer Summer Program (TSP). Through my conversations with transfer students, I witnessed—similar to my sister’s *testimonios*—their own frustration of feeling displaced and their voices being silenced on this campus—especially as Transfer Students of Color<sup>2</sup>. As I balanced the role of mentor and young scholar, knowingly the experiences of community college Transfer Students of Color continue to be marginalized in academe, the transfer students’ frustrations fed my own scholarly struggles.

Most recently, writing a policy brief on Chicana/o doctorate production on recipients who began at the community college, frustration came back to haunt me as I was unable to write. I struggled through the infamous academic writing process, trying to remind myself what led me to this work. Fortunately, my complicated state of mind was interrupted when a Chicana student asked to see what I was working on. The *Community College as a Pathway to Chicana/o Doctorate Production*<sup>3</sup> titled manuscript sitting on my lap caught her attention. As I read the

---

<sup>1</sup> The UCLA Academic Advancement Program serves low-income, first-generation, historically underrepresented undergraduate students transition and excel throughout their undergraduate career.

<sup>2</sup> The terms Students of Color, People of Color and Communities of Color are capitalized to challenge and reject the grammatical norm. Further, these terms define individuals and communities of Latino/Chicano, Native American, African American, and Asian Pacific Islander populations.

<sup>3</sup> Solorzano, D. G., Rivas, M.A., & Velez, V. N. (June, 2005). *Community College as a Pathway to Chicana/o Doctorate Production*. Chicano Research Studies Center, Latino Policy and Issues Brief no. 11. University of California, Los Angeles.



data, she mentioned she was a community college transfer student herself. Holding the manuscript before her, I explained out of all Chicana/o doctorates produced between 1990 and 2000 (n= 3,403), one out of four (n=771) began their postsecondary education at the community college. She stared at the title and clinged onto every word I shared, not looking my way, simply staring at the manuscript. I repeated the statistic. She slowly looked away from the document, stared into my eyes and with tears engulfed in hers, asked, “*So you’re telling me there’s hope?!*”

It is her hope that drives me.

It is the hope of many others...

It is my sister...

sisters, *comadres, hermana/os, estudiantes*  
and the many

too many

Students of Color

who

were willing

and continue

to share

their struggles

and experiences

as transfer students...

and the many

who

continue

to be pushed/forced/ultimately

W

A

L

K

this path...

to remind/reiterate/exclaim

there is hope!

It is this hope that guides me.

It is this hope that grounds and drives the purpose of this research.

## VITA

### EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

2003 UCLA M.A., Social Sciences & Comparative Education; Race & Ethnic Studies, specialization.

2002 UCLA B.A., Chicana and Chicano Studies; B.A., Comparative Literature; Education minor

### UNIVERSITY INSTRUCTION

**Instructor.** (a) California State University, Northridge. Graduate Seminar, *Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Organization and Administration of Community Colleges* (2004).  
(b) University of California, Los Angeles. Statewide Migrant Student Leadership Institute, *Humanities and Social Theory* (Summer, 2003).

**Teaching Associate.** University of California, Los Angeles. Education M102 - Chicana/o Studies M102, *Mexican Americans and the Schools* (Spring Terms: 2008, 2005, 2004).

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### SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Ceja, M., & Rivas, M.A. (2010). Faculty-student interactions and Chicana PhD aspirations. *Journal of the Professoriate*, 3 (2).

Rivas, M. A., Perez, J., Alvarez, C. R., & Solorzano, D. G. (2007). Latina/o Transfer Students: Understanding the Critical Role of the Transfer Process in California's Postsecondary Institutions. Chicano Research Studies, Research Report no. 9. University of California, Los Angeles. (May, 2007).

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Rivas, M. A. (2003). The RIVAS Experience: Revolucionando the Imposed Immigrant Identity via Academic Success. In A. C. Bermeo and B. Kijewski (Eds.) *Crossing Borders* (110-129). Regents

of the University of California, University of California, Los Angeles.

Rivas, M. A. (2003). *Transfer Counter-Spaces: Understanding the transition and retention of Transfer Students of Color at a public four-year university*. Unpublished Report . University of California, Los Angeles.

#### **SELECTED SCHOLARLY PRESENTATIONS**

*Employing Critical Race Theory in the Chicana Transfer Research Agenda*. Paper accepted for the Annual Conference of Critical Race Theory in Education; New York, NY; May, 2012.

*Systematically Excluded: Understanding Transferism in the Graduate School Choice Process of Chicana Transfer Students*. Paper presented at Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association (AERA); New Orleans; April, 2011.

*Time-Sensitive Access: Understanding the Critical Role of Research Mentorship for Chicana/o Community College Students*. Paper Accepted for the Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE); Jacksonville, Florida: November 5-8, 2008.

*Strengthening the Education Pipeline: Understanding Graduate School Outcomes and Implications for Latina/o Community College Students*. Presented at the 2007 University of California Office of the President's Statewide Puente Community College Counselor Summit. San Diego, CA; October 4-5, 2007.

*Latina/o Community College Students: Understanding Transfer Pathways and Critical Graduate School Outcomes*. Presented at the 2007 Chicano Studies Research Center's Latina/o Education Summit, UCLA. Los Angeles, CA; May 25, 2007.

*From Community College to the Doctorate: Understanding Chicana/o Postsecondary Education Trajectories*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE); Anaheim, CA: November 2-5, 2006.

*Sacrificio, Ph.D.: Nurturing and Birthing a New Vision for Our Future Generation*. Original abstract painting and poetry exhibit at the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies in collaboration with the 2006 Chicano Studies Research Center's Latina/o Education Summit; UCLA, Los Angeles, CA; March 24, 2006.

*Chicanas with PhD Aspirations: Understanding the Importance of Faculty of Color*, (with Miguel Ceja). Paper presentation at the Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research Seminar Series in Higher Education, Stanford University, Palo Alto, CA; March, 2006.

*Understanding the Importance of Faculty of Color as Role Models for Chicanas Aspiring Towards the Ph.D.* (with Miguel Ceja). Paper presented at Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE); Portland, Oregon; November, 2003.

*Meritocracy and Access in Higher Education for Latinos* (with Frances Contreras, Julie Figueroa, and Daniel G. Solorzano). Symposium presented at Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE); Portland, Oregon; November, 2003.

*Ownership of Educational Experience: Understanding how Chicana students excel in a top research institution*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS); Chicago, IL; March, 2002.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

Latina/os<sup>1</sup> continue to be one of the fastest growing racial/ethnic minority groups in the United States (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004; U.S. Census, 2001). However, within the Latina/o population there are differences among subgroups whose demographic shifts vary across regions. Thus, Chicana/os<sup>2</sup> are the fastest growing Latina/o subgroup in the state of California (Johnson, 2001; U.S. Census, 2000). Specifically within California public schools, of all Latina/o students, Chicana/os represent 85% of all K-12 student enrollment (Fry, 2002; Gándara, Larson, Rumberger, & Mehan, 1998). Despite these growing population trends, Chicana/o students continue to be relegated to overcrowded, underresourced schools, experience higher than average dropout rates from high school, and are too often tracked into vocational curricula limiting their exposure to college-going resources (Gándara, 1996; Gándara, et al, 1998; Oakes, 2004, 1985; Perez-Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez, & Solorzano, 2006; Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). Recent findings also indicate that the matriculation rate of Chicana/o students into higher education continues to be low compared to their overall population and other racial/ethnic communities.

Of the Chicana/o students who pursue a higher education, 60-65% begin postsecondary education at the community college (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004). Chicana/os are more likely than any other racial group to begin their postsecondary education in the community college

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<sup>1</sup> The umbrella term Latina/o refers to female and male populations of Latin American descent. The term Latina/o is referenced throughout this work to make inferences about the educational status of Chicana and Chicano students, where data on Chicana/o population is not available.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this study, the terms Chicana/os are defined as individuals of Mexican descent, living in the United States as permanent residents or U.S. citizens (naturalized or by birth), regardless of generational status. Please note, the terms Chicana/o also have a social, historical, and political dimension that will not be directly addressed in this particular study. Further, the term Chicana (as its suffix is inherently gendered) will be used when referring specifically to the female population of this community.

system (Fry, 2002; Martinez & Fernandez, 2004; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004). Many of these students perceive the community college as the vehicle to transfer to a four-year institution to obtain a baccalaureate degree. Indeed, as defined in the California Master Plan (1960), community colleges, one of the three-tier components of the public postsecondary education system, of which one of its three objectives is to assist students transfer onto four-year institutions<sup>3</sup>. However the transfer opportunity is not readily available to all students.

Though there is a constant debate as to how one measures “transfer rates,” some scholars argue that transfer rates should not be measured solely by comparing the number of students who transfer to four-year institutions in proportion to the overall campus student enrollment, these provide false perceptions of access to the transfer function (Rendón, Justiz, & Resta, 1988; Townsend, 2002;). Other scholars measure the effectiveness of the transfer function within community colleges by measuring students’ aspirations to transfer into a four-year institution and the percentage of those who fulfill this goal (Bensimon & Riley, 1984; Hagedorn & Cepeda, 2004; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004). While aspirational data for Latina/os vary slightly on a national and regional level, empirical data to measure aspirations continues to be weak and limited. However, analyzing various data sources, one can argue that of all entering Latina/o community college students, a great majority an average of 75-80% of students aspire to transfer but less than 10% succeed in doing so (Bensimon & Riley, 1984; Hagedorn & Cepeda, 2004; NCES, 2003; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Rendón, Justiz, & Resta, 1988; U.S. Department of Education, 2001). These drastic discrepancies lead many scholars to question the role of community colleges, as they are too often “cooling out” students’ aspirations and are unable to

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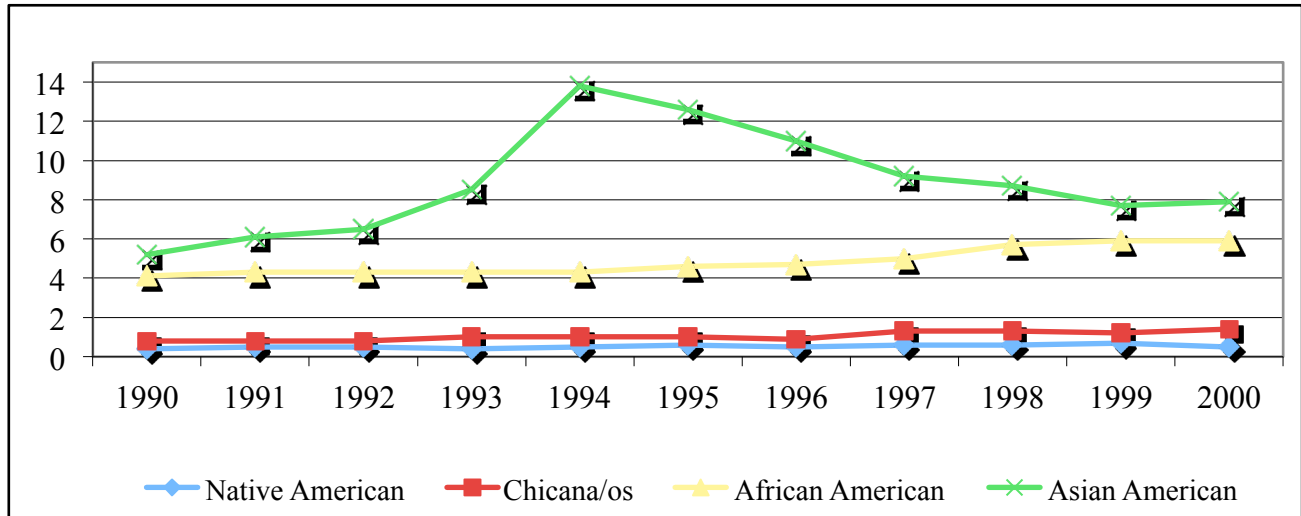
<sup>3</sup> The Master Plan recognized community colleges as a vital component of the 3-tier system of public institutions as it outlined for community colleges to meet three objectives: (1) offer academic courses for transfer to four-year institutions; (2) offer vocational training for career and occupation advancement; and (3) offer general and liberal arts courses leading to an Associate of Arts or Associate in Science degree (CPEC-98-1).

support to ensure Latina/o students transfer into a four-year institution (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Clark, 1960, 1980; Dougherty, 2001; Nora & Rendón, 1990; Ornelas, 2002). The constant “mismatch” between students’ aspirations and institutional support to meet these goals need to be critically examined and modified (Yosso & Solorzano, 2006). Thus, attending a community college may adversely affect the students’ opportunity to obtain a baccalaureate degree and beyond (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Clark, 1960, 1980; Ornelas, 2002). Nonetheless, despite multiple obstacles within the community colleges sectors, a small percentage of Latina/o students manage to transfer on to a four-year institution (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2001; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003).

Although studies on the experiences of community college transfer students at four-year institutions continue to be minimal, research specifically addressing the experiences of Latina/o or Chicana/o transfer students are virtually nonexistent. We do, however, know that community colleges transfer students often experience financial difficulties and an academic “transfer shock” at four-year institutions (Cejda, 1994, 1997; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Laanan, 1996, 2001; Pascarella, 1999). Of those managing to overcome these external factors, community college transfer students eventually reach a comparable grade point average and obtain a baccalaureate degree at the same rate as non-transfer students (Cohen 2003; UCLA, 2006). Thus, in order to strengthen the educational pipeline through academic opportunities beyond a baccalaureate degree for community college transfer students, we need to understand how these students manage to successfully navigate four-year institutions and prepare to enter graduate school. Further, when we analyze the overall doctorate production rates in the United States by race/ethnicity, the importance to increase the rate of Chicana/o transfer students at four-year institutions and facilitate entry into graduate school become apparent.

Compared to all other racial/ethnic groups, Chicanas/os are the most underrepresented population within doctorate production in the United States. As Figure 1 demonstrates, Chicana/o doctorate recipients between 1990-2000 continued to be severely underrepresented to less than two percent (n=3,403) of the total doctorate production for the eleven-year time frame (Solorzano, 2005). Although though data shows a slight increase in Chicana/o doctorate production, these gains are small in comparison to the population growth of Chicanas/os in the U.S. from 1990 to 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).

**Figure 1: Chicana/o doctorates continued to be severely underrepresented to less than two percent of the total doctorate production for 1990-2000**

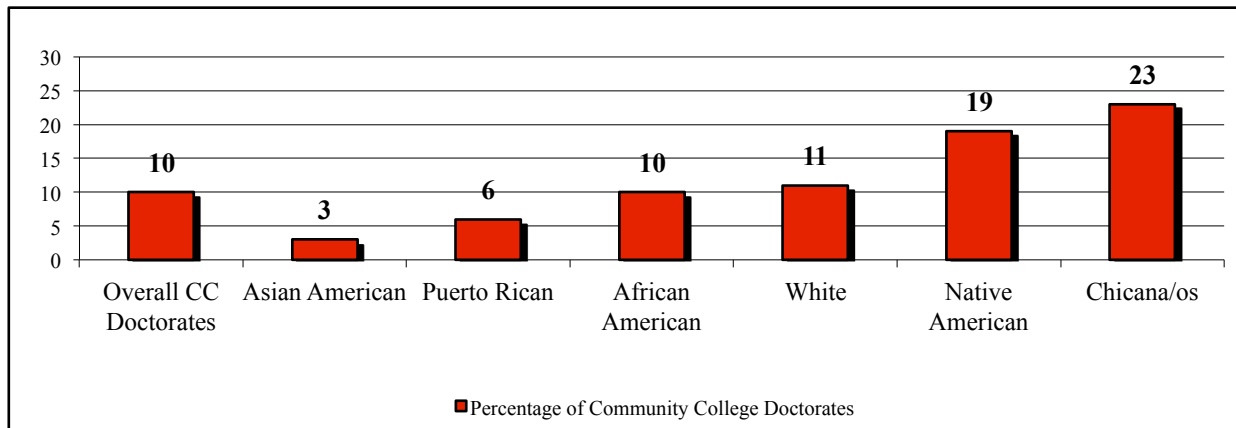


Source: NSF/NIH/USED/NEH/USDA/NASA, Survey of Earned Doctorates, 1990-2000; Solorzano, 2005  
 NOTE: Doctorates shown in data are U.S. citizens or permanent U.S. residents.

While there are small gains within Chicana/o doctorate production, when we analyze how many recipients began their post secondary education at the community college level, the value of the transfer function depict an unknown story for Chicana/o doctorate recipients. As Figure 2 illustrates, one out of four (n=771) Chicana/o doctorate recipients first attended a community college (Solorzano, Rivas, & Velez, 2005). Thus, Chicanas/os doctorates are most likely than any other racial/ethnic group to begin their postsecondary education at a community college in route

to the doctorate. This begs our efforts to document the experiences Chicana/o transfer students through each segment of postsecondary education to reach this level of graduate training.

**Figure 2: Of the total doctorates produced between 1990 and 2000, Chicanas/os are more likely than any of their counterparts to have attended a community college on their route to the doctorate.**



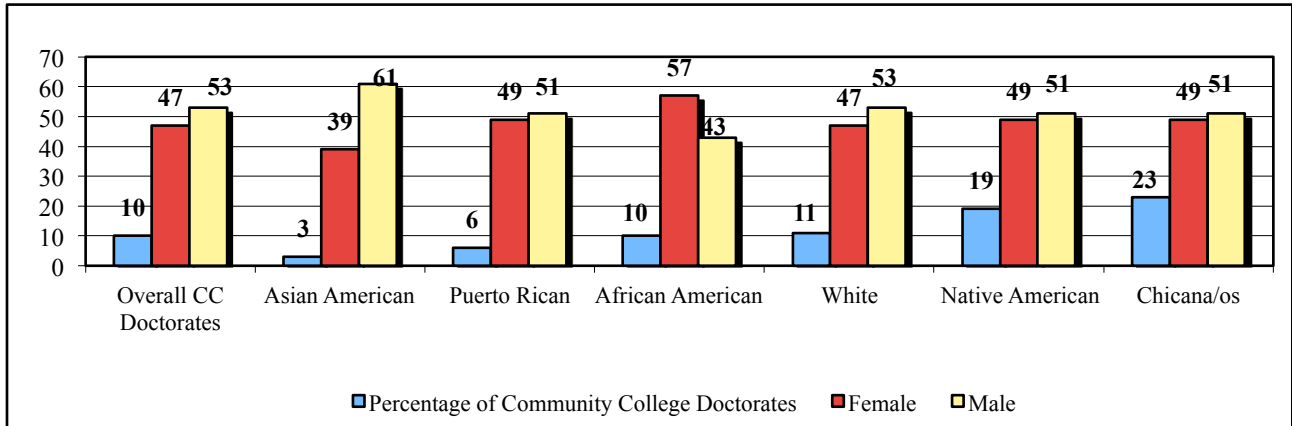
Source: Source: NSF/NIH/USED/NEH/USDA/NASA, Survey of Earned Doctorates, 1990-2000; Solorzano, Rivas, & Velez, 2005

NOTE: Doctorates shown in data are U.S. citizens or permanent U.S. residents.

Though this data highlight the critical role community colleges may play in the preparation of Chicana/o doctorates, when we analyze these production rates by gender we gain new insights as to which students gained entry to doctoral programs through this particular pathway. As Figure 3 illustrates, for the aggregate of the eleven-year time frame, of those who began at the community college level, Chicana doctoral recipients were slightly underrepresented than their male counterparts. However, when we disaggregate gender production rates by individual year, a new pattern begins to emerge for Chicana community college doctorates.



**Figure 3: For the eleven-year time frame between 1990 to 2000, there are fewer Chicana community college doctorates produced than their male counterparts**

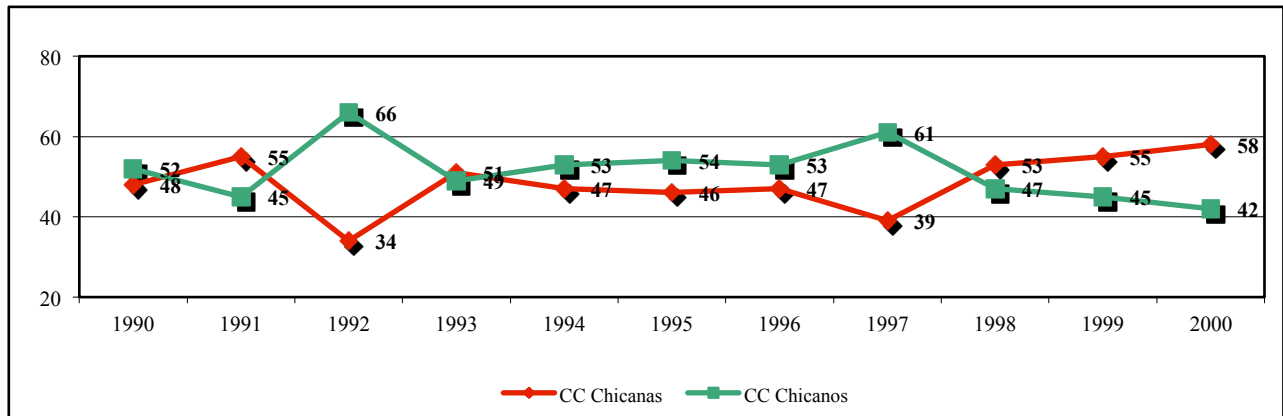


NOTE: Doctorates shown in data are U.S. citizens or permanent U.S. residents.

Source: NSF/NIH/USED/NEH/USDA/NASA, Survey of Earned Doctorates, 1990-2000; Solorzano & Rivas, in progress.

Figure 4 highlights the Chicana/o gender differences of doctorate production by individual year between 1990 and 2000. Though Chicana/o community college doctorate production by gender varied throughout the eleven-year time frame, we can see a consistent pattern emerge from 1998 through 2000. Here, Chicanas who began at the community college experience a slight overrepresentation in doctorate production than their male counterparts. As more Chicana community college transfer students receive more doctorates than their male counterparts, we find the need to document their trajectories as they have been able to maneuver through to reach the last phase of the educational pipeline.

**Figure 4: Between 1990 through 2000, Chicana/o community college doctorate production by gender varied over the years. However, as of last three years (1998 through 2000) there is a steady increase of Chicana community college doctorates produced**



NOTE: Doctorates shown in data are U.S. citizens or permanent U.S. residents.

Source: NSF/NIH/USED/NEH/USDA/NASA, Survey of Earned Doctorates, 1990-2000; Solorzano & Rivas, in progress.

At every transitional point in the educational pipeline (i.e. high school to college, undergraduate to graduate school), Chicana students dwindle resulting in a severe underrepresentation. Considering the multiple K-12 and postsecondary institutional impediments most Chicana students encounter, obtaining a doctorate degree may seem as an impossible goal to attain by most. However, while many Chicanas are increasingly attending community colleges as a pathway to the doctorate, one can only imagine the additional impediments these women must endure to obtain their educational degree. We need to understand these experiences and document the barriers and successes Chicanas may experienced through K-12, community college, four-year institutions and graduate school in the attempt to obtain a doctorate degree. These experiences will allow researchers, policymakers, and students to be informed regarding the experiences and resiliency by Chicana transfer students through post-community college institutions.

### *Research Objective*

Although understanding the quantitative data on Chicana community college doctorate production rates are important for this research, there are additional dimensions that may help understand the Chicana transfer experience from community college to the doctorate. There are few studies on the experiences of Chicana students as they navigate the community college in the attempt to transfer to a four-year institution (Ornelas, 2002; Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002; Suarez, 2003; Rendón & Hope, 1996; Nora & Rendón, 1990). To cite literatures explicitly addressing the experiences of Chicana community college transfer students while at four-year institutions is difficult, as they are virtually nonexistent. Further, literatures documenting the experiences of Chicana community college transfer students in graduate school, and particularly doctoral programs, are nonexistent. To contribute to the dearth of research in this area, I employed a retrospective study that explores and documents the experiences of current Chicana doctoral students who began their postsecondary education at the community college. I specifically focus on their experiences while at the four-year institutions and their preparation to apply to graduate school, while simultaneously completing their baccalaureate degree.

To understand the Chicana community college transfer experiences all along the educational pipeline, we must recognize the institutional obstacles these students have overcome to pursue a doctorate degree. Because I compliment quantitative data with qualitative data to document community college transfer experiences, I merge critical race theory and Chicana Feminist Epistemology frameworks (hereafter Chicana FE) to forge a Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis framework to ground this study on the Chicana transfer student perspective. These theoretical and epistemological frameworks afford me the methodological tools to conduct

research that is centered on the lived experiences told and shared by Chicana community college transfer students. Thus, the objective of this study is three-fold:

- First, this study begins to understand the Chicana community college transfer experiences through post-community college institutions. Specifically, this study documents the experiences of Chicana community college transfer students as they transitioned, maneuvered through the four-year institution, and as they prepare for the latter part of the educational pipeline: graduate and doctoral training.
- Second, this study initiates a new research agenda on community college transfer students by incorporating an analysis on race, racism, classism, and additional forms of marginalization, which shape the educational trajectories of Chicana students.
- Third, this study uses quantitative data to illustrate the status of Chicana community college transfer rates and their doctorate production in the United States. However, this study employs qualitative methods to ground and understand the lived experiences of Chicana community college transfer students. The lived experiences not only address and expand on issues quantitative data omits, but their lived experiences challenge traditional research paradigms which often distorts and omits lived experiences as valid forms of data (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Thus, Chicana transfer voices will guide us towards new ways of documenting the community college transfer experience.

### *Research Questions*

The importance of delineating a sequence of sublevel questions, allow me to approach the study in a multistep process. Understanding the overarching question helped me understand and

explain the purpose of the study. The subsequent purposeful questions, aligned to appropriate methodology and data analysis, yield appropriate data to structure the dissertation and understand a very particular educational segment of the pipeline (transfer into four-year institutions; experiences at four-year; and graduate school preparation), and ultimately answer the overarching question.

Overarching Question:

*What is the Chicana community college transfer experience en route to the doctorate?*

Purposeful Questions:

- What are the experiences of Chicana community college transfer students at four-year institutions?
- What are the experiences of Chicana transfer students as they prepare for graduate school?
- What were there institutional factors that assisted or interfered with the *Mujeres'* educational trajectories at four-year institutions and graduate school preparation?
- What were the navigational tools these *Mujeres* employed through their educational journey?

*Significance of Study*

As the Chicana/o population continues to increase, these students also continue to be overrepresented at the community college system. Chicana/o students perceive the transfer opportunity as the vehicle to acquire a baccalaureate degree and eventually enter graduate and doctoral programs (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2002; Ornelas, 2002; Solorzano, Rivas, & Velez, 2005; Suarez, 2003). Public postsecondary systems continue to systematically exclude Students of Color from postsecondary options, thus the significance of this study is to document how

Chicana transfer students were able to maneuver through various institutional obstacles to pursue a graduate and doctorate degree (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Ornelas, 2002; Laden, 1995).

Particularly with an increase of Chicana doctorates going through the community college route, we must understand how these experiences can inform researchers, policymakers, and students regarding issues of matriculation, participation, retention, and attainment within baccalaureate and graduate degree granting institutions. Further, with the low number of Chicana students transferring to four-year institutions, we must consider the long-term effects difficulty to transfer may have on this entire community and society in general. Hence, the significance of this study is multi-fold:

- Chicana/o students will represent the plurality in the K-12 education system in California. If education attainment levels continue as they have to date, Chicana/o students will continue to represent the majority of students in the community college system in California. Given that California has the largest community college systems in the country, we must understand how educational resources and processes within community colleges may help shape transfer opportunities of Chicana/o students.
- In the United States, the national status of Chicana/o doctorate production continue to be low. However, one of every four Chicana/o doctorate recipient began at their postsecondary education at the community college level. Clearly, community colleges may help shape the opportunity of Chicana/o students pursuing a doctoral degree. We need to further document how these processes help inform educators, researchers, and institutions at the local, regional, state, and national level how to address the educational needs of this growing population.
- Chicanas are more likely to go through the community college system, into four-year institutions, and eventually doctoral programs. Thus, this is the importance of this study, to

document how Women of Color, particularly Chicanas, are able to negotiate through various systems of oppression in the attempt to obtain their baccalaureate and graduate degree(s).

- Given this study is the first attempt to document the experiences of Chicana transfer students at the four-year institutions and through their preparation to graduate school, this study forges a new research agenda, centralizing on pivotal elements such as the *Mujeres'* navigational strategies to confront various social, political, and cultural transitions through each segments of postsecondary education.
- Additionally, this is the first study to document racial, gendered, and aged nuances often omitted from the literature on community college transfer students. By centralizing an analysis on race and racism, other forms of marginalization such as transferism, classism, ageism and languageism, these allow us to uncover the multiple complex layers which define the Chicana transfer experience. In other words, this research unapologetically names the wounds, assaults, and triumphs of the Chicana transfer experience.
- By employing *testimonios* through *platicas* as the primary method, this encourage researchers and practitioners to consider methodological platforms which: (a) welcome participants; (b) to guide the discussion; (c) allow reflection on what is important for participants; (d) permit participants to recapture, critique, analyze and share their educational trajectories, as they find fit.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

The purpose of this research study is to investigate and document the Chicana transfer experiences while at the four-year institution and preparation towards graduate school. In order to understand these trajectories, the main objective within the review of the literature was to synthesize studies that addressed the lived experiences of Chicana transfer students through the educational pipeline. However, given the dearth amount of literature on the Chicana transfer experience, the following discussion will draw on three major areas of research relevant to this study. The first section will introduce a brief overview of California's Master Plan (1960) to understand the role of the transfer function within the community college system. Additional factors such as student characteristics and institutional resources within community colleges will provide insight on the availability of the transfer function for Chicana students. The second section presents a brief discussion regarding the community college transfer experiences at four-year institutions. The third section borrows from a general body of work regarding Chicana experiences in doctoral programs. Though this section does not explicitly incorporate experiences of transfer students, empirical constructs pertaining to Chicana navigational experiences through graduate school are relevant to this study. To conclude, a discussion regarding the lack of literature documenting the lived experiences by Chicana transfer students along the educational pipeline will highlight the importance of this research study.

### **The Role of California's Community Colleges**

#### *California's Education Master Plan*

Established in 1960, California's Education Master Plan structured a public, three-tier post-secondary educational system. The three tiers of public higher education in California are the University of California (UC), California State Universities (CSU), and California



Community Colleges (CCCs). The admission criteria outlines the UC system to accept the top 12.5% of high school graduates and the CSU system admit the top 33% of all graduating high school seniors who meet the academic requirements. Whereas the admission criteria for Community Colleges remained as “open enrollment” for any individual who wished to pursue postsecondary opportunities<sup>4</sup>. The Master Plan recognized community colleges as a vital component of the 3-tier system of public institutions as it defines for community colleges to meet three objectives: (1) offer academic courses for transfer to four-year institutions; (2) offer vocational training for career and occupation advancement; and (3) offer general and liberal arts courses leading to an Associate of Arts or Associate in Science degree (CPEC-98-1).

Given these requirements, in order to pursue a formal education at a four-year institution, one must have received a wealth of educational resources to be academically “competitive” for admission. Although the Master Plan sought to structure a reasonable, equitable, and accessible system for all students wanting to pursue a postsecondary education, the admission requirements structured multiple levels of inaccessibility across racial/ethnic communities. The current academic tracking system has frightfully exposed the discriminatory effects the majority of Communities and Student of Color continue to suffer from institutional neglect and, by default, obtain inadequate levels of academic preparation to gain admission to a four-year university (Gándara, 1996; Gándara et. al, 1998; Oakes, 1996; Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995).

Although the California Master Plan indicates the community colleges should, indeed, function to assist students’ transfer to four-year institutions, the transfer function is not readily available to all students. Hence, many scholars question the role of community colleges as they are too often “cooling out” students’ aspirations and are unable to support to ensure that Latina/o students transfer into a four-year institution (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Clark, 1960, 1980;

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<sup>4</sup> The California Education Master Plan’s (1960) admission criteria for UC, CSU, and CCCs are currently active.

Dougherty, 2001; Nora & Rendón, 1990; Ornelas, 2002). Thus, attending a community college may adversely affect the students' opportunity to obtain a baccalaureate degree and beyond (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Clark, 1960, 1980; Ornelas, 2002).

### **Latina/o-Chicana/o Students at Community Colleges**

#### *Characteristics of Community College Students*

Although there is a lack of institutional commitment to Latina/o students contributing to their low transfer rates, there are additional factors that may pose as obstacles for community colleges students. For example, the majority of Latina/o community college students are often the first in their family to attend college. Being first-generation college students may pose as a barrier in accessing accurate information regarding the appropriate transfer curricula, what the transfer function entails, or how to obtain financial support to ease economic stressors (Laden & Turner, 1995; Nora & Rendón, 1990; Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Wassmer, Moore, Shulock, 2003). Further, Latina/o students often are from low to working-class backgrounds, which may require them to hold a job (or jobs) while being enrolled as part-time students (Adelman, 2005; Cohen, 2003; NCES, 2003; Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004). These students often attend school in the evening when most of the counseling centers or faculty office hours are inaccessible (Ornelas, 2002; Laden & Turner, 1995; Nora & Rendón, 1990). These external time sensitive obligations may delay students from completing a transfer curriculum and/or be disillusioned to attain their goal of transferring (Adelman, 2005; Laden & Turner, 1995; NCES, 2003; Nora & Rendón, 1990; Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Wassmer, Moore, Shulock, 2003). Scholars note that institutional agents must recognize and negotiate these factors in order improve the transfer function (Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Nora & Rendón, 1990; Perez-Huber, et. al, 2006; Solorzano & Yosso, 2006).

Presently, programs to assist and inform students regarding the transfer function (i.e. Puente, OSCAR, ASSIST) continue to suffer from budget cuts, further delimiting the opportunity for Latina/o students to access these resources (CPEC, 05-08). Considering the lived realities of Latina/o community college students, stronger institutional mechanisms need to be implemented to support, mentor, counsel, and academically prepare this growing population (Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Nora & Rendón, 1990; Wassmer, Moore, Shulock, 2003). Hence, the transfer function requires an integration of multiple programs, services, relationships to help increase transfer rates for Latina/o students.

### *Community College Transfer Culture*

In the attempt to eliminate institutional barriers and strengthen the transfer function within community colleges, the “transfer culture” literature has begun to recommend practical and programmatic restructuring and policy initiatives to increase Chicana/o transfer rates (Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004). The “transfer culture” would require community colleges to invest and prioritize their commitment to the transfer function. In doing this, administrators, faculty, counselors, staff and students all play a critical role in obtaining and sustaining this “transfer culture.” Ornelas and Solorzano (2004) define the “transfer culture” encompassing the following elements:

- provide accurate information regarding the transfer function and requirements to fulfill these
- provide funding for academic support programs (i.e. tutoring, mentoring)
- increase awareness regarding financial support for students
- ensure transfer curricula is available and articulation agreements are accessible

- counselors, faculty, and administrators receive recent data and information regarding transfer
- include family and community in these educational opportunities; and
- students must be proactive in seeking information, their agency through the transfer process is critical at all stages of the process

In summary, though these are factors that help integrate a “transfer culture” within community colleges, each institution may vary by degree of barriers already in place. Ornelas & Solorzano (2004) explain that the importance of a “transfer culture” within community colleges is that there is an institutionalized effort and expectation for students to transfer to a four-year institution. Ultimately students should be given accurate information so that they, in turn, make well-informed decisions regarding their educational futures (Adelman, 2005; Laden & Turner, 1995; Nora & Rendón, 1990; Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Rendón & Mathews, 1989; Rendón & Nora, 1989; Wassmer, Moore, Shulock, 2003). As many Chicana/o students perceive community college as their path to a baccalaureate degree, this body of work helps us understand how the transfer function is a vehicle to reach baccalaureate, graduate and doctoral degrees.

### **Community College Transfer Students at Four-Year Institutions**

#### *Academic “Transfer-Shock” Phenomena*

Although studies on the experiences of community college transfer students at four-year institutions continue to be minimal, research specifically addressing the experiences of Latina/o or Chicana/o transfer students is virtually nonexistent. However, the literatures discussed here help us understand how community college transfer students navigate four-year institutions. Thus, community colleges transfer students often experience financial difficulties and an

academic “transfer shock” at the senior institutions. Transfer shock here is defined as the decline of academic grades experienced during the mid-year of the first year at a four-year institution (Cejda, 1998; Cohen, 2003; Laanan, 1996, 1998, 2001; Tintiangco, 2000; Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). In addition to experiencing these obstacles, community college transfer students often feel marginalized from other students both academically and socially (Harrison, 1999; Kodama, 2002; Laanan, 2001; Tintiangco, 2000). Though studies that may help us understand the specific social factors impacting the experiences of community college students continue to be indiscernible, understanding how students are able to integrate into four-year institutions provide some insight on their navigational strategies.

#### *Transfer Student Integration at Four-Year Institutions*

Borrowing from Tinto’s (1987) research on social and academic integration at the four-year institutions, scholars argue that in order for community college transfer students to integrate into a new academic setting is by interacting with faculty members (Berger & Malaney, 2001; Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986). However, though these relationships are important, many transfer students’ availability to be on campus and seek these opportunities are very limited (Kodama, 2002; Tintiangco, 2000). As the previous discussion on the characteristics of community college students demonstrate, many transfer students have external responsibilities such as working one or two jobs, or have families of their own (Kodama, 2002; Laden & Turner, 1995; Nora & Rendón, 1990; Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Tintiangco, 2000; Wassmer, Moore, Shulock, 2003). However, other scholars argue that for transfer students, and particularly Transfer Students of Color, their interaction and involvement with student leadership programs and community-based organizations prove to be critical in their integration and

retention at four-year institutions (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003). Specifically, Wawrzynski & Sedlacek (2003) found that for Transfer Students of Color, having a “sense of community” was highly important for their academic and social integration at four-year institutions (p.498).

Additionally, Jain, Herrera, Bernal and Solorzano (2011) propose that in order for community college transfer students to excel at the four-year institutions, there must be a “transfer-receptive culture” at the receiving institution. The “transfer-receptive culture” is defined as the four-year institutional commitment to support transfer students navigate successfully throughout their pursuit of the baccalaureate degree in a timely manner. The “transfer-receptive culture” delineate the following five tenets (p. 258):

Pre-transfer:

1. Establish the transfer of students, especially nontraditional, first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students, as a high institutional priority that ensures stable accessibility, retention, and graduation.
2. Provide outreach and resources that focus on the specific needs of transfer students while complimenting the community college mission of transfer.

Post-transfer:

3. Offer financial and academic support through distinct opportunities for nontraditional, reentry transfer students where they are stimulated to achieve at high academic levels.
4. Acknowledge the lived experiences that students bring and the intersectionality between community and family.
5. Create an appropriate and organic framework from which to assess, evaluate, and enhance transfer receptive programs and initiatives that can lead to further scholarship on transfer students.

By incorporating a “transfer-receptive culture” at the four-year institutions, these would ensure support mechanisms are in place for newly admitted transfer students to successfully transition and navigate through the four-year experience. This new scholarship delineates possibilities and ways to ensure transfer students are supported in a timely manner to obtain their baccalaureate degree.

Despite institutional challenges encountered at the four-year campus, many transfer students eventually overcome these external obstacles and reach a comparable grade point average and obtain a baccalaureate degree at the same rate as non-community college transfer students (Cohen 2003, UCLA, 2006). Understanding how community college transfer students maneuver through institutional barriers while negotiating their personal obligations, highlight the resistance transfer students exude through their educational endeavors.

Though studies specifically addressing the Chicana community college transfer experience continue to be virtually non-existent, the body of literature discussed here provides empirical constructs to understand the transfer experience at four-year institutions. While the majority of the aforementioned studies rely primarily on quantitative measures of the transfer experience, documenting the lived experiences through qualitative methods can compliment and highlight distinct experiences among Chicana transfer students. Understanding how Chicanas transfer students navigate post-community college institutions may provide insight on their journey into graduate school, specifically since we know very little about this pathway to graduate and doctoral programs.

### **Chicanas in Doctoral Education**

Given the severe underrepresentation of Chicana students in doctoral programs, many educational scholars have documented the various ways these students are able to maneuver and

succeed through their doctoral training (Achor & Morales, 1990; Alva, 1995; Blea, 1992; Cantú, 2001; Cuádriz, 1996; Cuádriz & Pierce, 1994; Gándara, 1982, 1995; Sandoval, 1999; Segura, 2003; Solórzano, 1993, 1998a; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Watford, Rivas, Burciaga, Solorzano, 2006). These studies highlight how in many cases Chicana doctoral students are often the only Person of Color in their academic program or are made to feel as though they are alone as they navigate this academic journey (Cantu, 2001; Cuádriz & Pierce, 1994; Sandoval, 1999). Gloria Cuádriz and Jennifer Pierce (1994) define their own persistence to complete their doctoral program as “endurance labor.” Meaning, the labor they endured was beyond academic training and socialization within the academy. This meant that while on one hand they consistently challenged the racist, classist, and sexist mechanisms in the academy, these encounters also ignited anger and feeling the need to prove these stereotypes wrong by completing their program. Similarly, Solorzano & Yosso (2001) posit, “for Chicanas within the university setting, anger is necessary and good. It is often our anger that fuels our spirit, gives voice and direction to silence, and provides the energy to go on” (p.483).

This yearning to “prove them wrong” was also evident as Chicana students often challenge the deficit theoretical frameworks and methods that are employed to document the communities where these scholars came from. Chicana scholars’ narratives describe how involvement within their communities of origin is what often grounded their experiences, holding them accountable to remain in academia (Gonzalez, Marin, Perez, Figueroa, Moreno, & Navia, 2001). Here, Chicanas are able to succeed through their doctoral training by constructing ways to challenge and reject dominant discourses while simultaneously embracing institutional means of academic attainment, such as working hard and completing quality scholarly work (Cuádriz & Pierce, 1994).



Previous research documents how Chicanas experience covert forms of racial and gender microaggressions (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Solorzano (1998b) in a study of Chicana/o Ford Foundation Minority Fellows, documented covert forms of marginalization he called racial and gender microaggressions. Microaggressions are defined as systemic everyday racism and sexism used to keep Students of Color at the racial and gender margins. Microaggressions are often:

- *Subtle verbal and non-verbal insults* directed to People and Communities of Color, often done conscious or unconsciously;
- *Layered insults*, based on one's race, gender, class, language, immigration status, skin color, accent, language, surname, or in the case of this study, due to one's transfer status;
- *Cumulative insults* that eventually take a toll on Students and People of Color (Solorzano, 1998a)

These gender and racial microaggressions include women overhearing comments towards them based on the premise of their race, gender, age, language, and their presence being questioned or told they do not belong in higher education, or in academe (Watford, et. al, 2005; Gonzalez, Marin, Perez, Figueroa Moreno, & Navia, 2001; Williamson, 1994; Cuádriz & Pierce, 1994; Flores, 1988). Chicana graduate students report various experiences of being silenced by faculty of peers during classroom discussions. Often, Chicanas also recall being called when the professor deemed appropriate for their contribution. For example, many women recall becoming the spokesperson when issues of race or ethnicity were discussed in the classroom (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Watford, et. al, 2006). However, when topics did not regard issues of race, gender, or class these women are neither encouraged nor affirmed when they shared their opinions (Watford, et al, 2005; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Solorzano, 1998; Gonzalez, et al., 2001; Williamson, 1994). Microaggression scholarship is especially important to this dissertation as we

uncover what and how transfer-microaggressions impact the Chicana transfer trajectories through the four-year experiences en route to graduate school.

Despite these obstacles, Chicanas develop strategies that adapt to institutional norms of progress while at the same time counteract racist and sexist practices. Though current literature tends to focus on the “status” of Chicana doctoral students through quantitative data (Solorzano, 1993, 1998; Solorzano et al, 2005; Watford, et al, 2006), there are other appropriate methodologies to document how Chicana students navigate through educational inequities; how Chicana students gain personal, academic and social strength to attain their graduate and doctoral degree (Anzaldúa, 1987; Anzaldúa & Moraga, 2002; Delgado-Bernal, 1998). Documenting these resiliency mechanisms through lived experiences may inform scholars and communities how, indeed, one can learn from the perseverance Chicanas exude as they challenge multiple institutional barriers and various forms of oppression in academe (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 2002; Hurtado, 2003; Delgado-Bernal, 1998; Blea, 1992).

### **Chicana Community College Transfer Students: Gaps in the Literature**

The review of the literature discussed here ultimately help conceptualize some of the factors Chicana transfer students endure in higher education. Again, literatures that speak directly to the Chicana transfer student experiences through postsecondary institutions are virtually non-existent. We need to understand how and what Chicana community college transfer students endure as they maneuver through post-community college segments of the educational pipeline. Chicana students, those in doctoral programs in particular, have to negotiate racist, and classist assaults on a daily basis but are these experiences different for Chicana transfer students? How do Chicana transfer student who navigate through community colleges, four-year

institutions and prepare to enter graduate school experience schooling differently? Are Chicana community college transfer students more resistant than their non-transfer counterparts?

Though literature on community college transfer students in pursuit of a baccalaureate degree is virtually non-existent, the Chicana doctorate production data suggest that community colleges –and- the transfer function play a pivotal role in the educational trajectories of Chicana students. However, there is a limited discussion on how transfer students negotiate or confront issues of racism or other forms of marginalization in postsecondary education. Analyzing the racialized and gendered experiences can provide an understanding of the Chicana transfer experience. Although Tintiangco (2000) addresses race and gender as important constructs within the community college transfer experience at four-year institutions, her conceptualization of “women of color” as Latina/Chicana, African American, and Asian American women, provides a general depiction of these experiences. Consequently, the only discussion on community college transfer students at four-year institutions directly addressing issues of race perpetuate a black/white dichotomy as “white and non-white” (Laanan, 1996, 1998, 2001), or broadly speaking as “transfer students of color” (Wawrzynski & Sedlacek, 2003) or “women of color” (Tintiangco, 2000). Thus, in order to gain some insight as to how race and gender may impact the educational trajectories of Chicana transfer students, we must centralize these issues and the intersectionalities of other forms of oppression in our analyses.

In surviving and navigating the educational pipeline, Chicana community college transfer students can help us understand more about the little known path to graduate and doctorate production for this population. These experiences will allow researchers, policymakers, and students to be informed regarding the experiences of community college transfer students all along the educational pipeline. Currently, the majority of community college transfer literature is

grounded on a quantitative analysis of transfer status attainment. In order to compliment and strengthen this body of work, this study initiates a new research agenda on community college transfer students by incorporating the lived experiences as shared by Chicana transfer students.

### **Chapter 3** **Theoretical and Epistemological Frameworks**

In the attempt to document the Chicana community college transfer experience through post-community college institutions, using theoretical frameworks that provide a lens to centralize issues of race and other forms of marginalization in the analysis are critical to this research. Using critical race theory and a Chicana Feminist Epistemology (Chicana FE) initially afford the theoretical, epistemological, and methodological tools to document the Chicana transfer experience. In this section, I first outline the major premises of critical race theory in education. To compliment the use of critical race theory, I then discuss and highlight the importance of employing a Chicana Feminist Epistemology in educational research to document the Chicana transfer experience. By merging CRT and Chicana FE, the last section will discuss how these two frameworks merge to create the Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis framework.

#### *Critical Race Theory in Education*

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originates from legal scholars who unapologetically address the overt and covert forms in which legal discourses historically and presently function to sustain racism in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Delgado, 1995; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Crenshaw, 1997). Mari Matsuda (1991) defines critical race theory as,

“...the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination” (p. 1331).

Critical race theory, as a theoretical framework centralizes race as its focal lens in an attempt to deconstruct and dismantle social injustices in this country. Though race is placed as the central

point of analysis, critical race theory acknowledges the intersectionality with other forms of oppression. Hence, critical race scholars,

“adopt a stance that presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage along racial lines, including differences in income, imprisonment, health, housing, education, political representation, and military service. Our history calls for presumption...Critical race theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression. Racial oppression is experienced by many in tandem with oppression on grounds of gender, class, or sexual orientation” (Matsuda, et. al, 1993: 6).

When adopting a critical race theory perspective in a particular discipline like education, Solorzano (1998) explains,

“critical race theory in education challenges the dominant discourse of race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (p. 122).

Critical race theory in education seeks to answer specific questions analyzing how educational institutions’ discourses, structures, processes, and expectations influence and perpetuates racial discrimination and its intersectionality with gender, class, and other forms of subordination. In order to accomplish such tasks, critical race theory in education consists of at least five tenets<sup>5</sup> (Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001):

1. ***The centrality and intersectionality of race and racism:*** Critical race theory places race and racism at the center of its analysis (Solorzano, 1998; Delgado, 1995; Matsuda, et. al, 1993). Critical race scholars also acknowledge the intersectionality with other forms of oppression (sexism, classism, among others<sup>6</sup>). For example, for this study critical race

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<sup>5</sup> Although the explanation within each of the five CRT tenets found here address how CRT documents the experiences of Chicana/o students specifically, these CRT tenets are applicable and used to document the various educational trajectories experienced by Students of Color.

<sup>6</sup> The experiences of Communities and Students of Color are not monolithic. Thus, a Latino Critical Theory (LatCRIT), delineated from Critical Race Theory to address the various forms of subordination experienced by Latina/o communities, specifically. A LatCRIT perspective documents issues of marginalization based on language, accent, citizenship, nationality, and additional forms of exploitation

theory help me ask, “*How do the discourses, expectations, processes, and structures within community colleges/four-year institutions/graduate school help sustain racial/ethnic/gender/class discrimination in a transfer student’s attempt to pursue a doctorate degree?*” (Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2002). Hence, there are multiple forms of subordination in our educational system and in society. Critical race scholars document these intersections and sites of differences at every level of the educational pipeline (Solorzano, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2002).

2. ***To challenge the dominant ideology:*** Critical race theory in education challenges the dominant ideology of “meritocracy,” “color-blind” admission policies, objectivity, race and gender neutrality, and the discourse of equal opportunity for all students (Solorzano, 1998). There are certain assumptions that every individual in this society has equal access to the transfer function. However, critical race scholars in education combat these inaccurate assumptions by demonstrating the “mismatch” on aspiration and attainment to transfer opportunities by racial/ethnic group and institution (Ornelas & Solorzano 2004; Yosso & Solorzano, 2006). To challenge the dominant ideology, scholars seek to illustrate how racism is systemic and continue to be systematically institutionalized within various social sectors, but education specifically (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Crenshaw, 1997; Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Villalpando, 2003;).
3. ***The commitment to social and racial justice:*** Elaborating on the previous tenet, the unequal distribution of educational resources, information and opportunities among

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that other Communities of Color may not necessarily experience (see Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, 1995, 1998).

Chicana/o students guide critical race theory and scholars to have an overall commitment to document these disparities. Further, in documenting these multiple forms of subordination in education by Chicana/o students, critical race scholars have an overall commitment to change the social and racial injustices as an attempt to eliminate all forms of subordination (Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Villalpando, 2003).

4. ***The centrality of experiential knowledge***: Critical race theory acknowledges the importance to seek and incorporate the lived experiences of Women and Men of Color in educational research (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Villalpando, 2003). Critical race scholars acknowledge, value, understand, analyze and find the stories and voices of Chicana/os as imperative and legitimate in the research process. To ignore these voices and experiences is to perpetuate the dominant, hegemonic research agenda critical race theory attempts to dismantle. Critical race scholars use *counterstorytelling* as a method to challenge dominant, deficit narratives about Chicana/o students. Counterstorytelling highlight the communities' funds of knowledge by practicing and analyzing storytelling, family histories, *cuentos*<sup>7</sup>, *corridos*<sup>8</sup>, as existing forms of knowledge (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993, 1995; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Moll & Gonzalez, 1997; Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2002; Villalpando, 2003). Further, centered on the lived experiences of Chicana community college transfer student experience, a critical race theorist approach help me consider, "*How do Chicana students resist the educational discourses, expectations, processes, and structures that help maintain racial/ethnic/gender/class and other forms*

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<sup>7</sup> stories

<sup>8</sup> song ballads



*of discrimination in their attempt to transfer and obtain a graduate and doctorate degree?”*

5. ***The interdisciplinary approach:*** Critical race theory in education “challenges ahistorism and the unidisciplinary focus” to traditional paradigms of research (Solorzano, 1998; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Villalpando, 2003). Critical race scholars draw from a broad literature base (i.e. law, sociology, psychology, ethnic studies, women’s studies, economics, etc.) to document an accurate account of the lived experiences of how Chicana community college transfer students understand and experience racism, classism, and other forms of discrimination in education.

As research indicates Chicana/o community college transfer students educational opportunities and outcomes vary quite drastically compared to other racial groups (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Ornelas, 2002; Laden, 1995; Fry, 2002; Gándara, 2002). Here, critical race theory in educational research affords scholars a critical lens to centralize race and racism in their analysis of educational inequities. Critical race theory allows scholars to deconstruct and document how racism permeates through “powerful institutional arrangements and structures that shape the ways we negotiate our daily routines” (Holt, 2002: 15-16). Thus, the significance of critical race theory in education is that in grounding a discourse on race and racism, one begins to critique how these factors exist within social structures, discourses, and processes. Further, a critical race perspective recognizes that there are intersectionalities with other forms of oppression that must also be acknowledged as they interplay within the context of the lived experiences of Chicana transfer students (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Villalpando, 2003).

Critical race theory acknowledges the multiplicity of experiences among and between Chicana/o students. Thus, “the recognition of intersecting forms of subordination requires multiple consciousness and political practices that address the varied ways in which people experience subordination” (Matsuda, et. al, 1993: 6-7). Otherwise, to continue a research agenda that does not completely address various forms of subordination, research will continue to distort, omit, and further silence the real educational realities experiences by Chicana transfer students. Hence, including “marginalized” voices within a critical race analysis may allow scholars and Chicana transfer students to voice their experiences to combat racism and other forms of subordination.

In the process of understanding the use of theory in my research, I had to understand my role as a researcher and my relationship with theory. Thus, in the attempt to document the Chicana community college transfer experience, critical race theory affords me the tools to centralize the role of race and racism in education. Though critical race theory explicitly states the importance of combating other forms of subordination, race and racism are the “entry” lenses to discuss the intersectionalities among various forms of marginalization. In the use of critical race theory in education, I realized there are additional factors that lead me, personally, to understand this important theoretical framework.

Thus, theoretical frameworks provide researchers a lens and certain parameters to understand and analyze a particular phenomena. For example, in my attempt to understand issues of equity and access to postsecondary education for Chicana/o students, I began asking questions regarding the experiences of community college students where racial disparities and educational inequities became very apparent. Thus, the use of critical race theory helped me redefine the parameters to narrow my focus on how issues of race and racism affect the experiences of

community college students. As my research inquiries continued using the Survey of Earned Doctorates dataset, questions regarding community college students by racial/ethnic groups were imperative. However, as I began to analyze doctorate production rates by race and gender (gender as a second variable) I had to re-consider what perspectives lead me to this scholarly work and whether these types of questions stemmed from a gendered lens.

I reevaluated the purpose of theory: *How does theory guide my work? Does theory guide me –or- does my interpretation of theory guide how I design and implement and practice research?* With these questions, I realized in order for me to truly understand the purpose of critical race theory, I had to understand my personal experiences that led me to this point. Thus, my perspective in understanding my gendered experiences as a Chicana scholar, helped me understand the importance to access terminology and employ conscientious theories corresponding methods to explicitly acknowledge various forms of oppression experienced by Students of Color. In this particular study, I seek to document and understand the experiences of Chicana transfer students. Although I do not suggest a hierarchy in how one is able to use or understand theory, I acknowledge issues of race and gender are intricately intertwined in how we interpret and use theoretical constructs. However, in order to understand how I came to understand theory to help frame my research, it was equally important to consider my role as the researcher in how I came to understand theory to help ground *myself* in the research process. Thus, a Chicana Feminist Epistemology allows me to use my personal, social, and professional historicity to select appropriate theories, frameworks, and methods to document the Chicana community college transfer experience.

## *Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research*

Dolores Delgado-Bernal's (1998) *Chicana Feminist Epistemology in Educational Research*, allows Chicana researchers to explicitly address and document issues that have too often continue to be omitted from the traditional academic discourse and methodologies. Delgado-Bernal (1998) argues Chicana scholars possess a particular critical lens that is not always found in traditional paradigms. Chicana scholars have a "cultural intuition" based on her personal, social, historicity, and lived experiences which provide a lens to create critical protocols to understand her participants in the research process (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Anzaldúa & Moraga, 2002). Chicana Feminist Epistemology (hereafter, Chicana FE) allows scholars to document the lived experiences of Chicana students, as these help understand how they negotiate various forms of power and subordination within institutions of higher education. Influenced by Chicana feminist scholars, Chicana FE specifically highlights the importance to document Chicanas' educational experiences such as the various forms of marginalization, imposed silences, racial and gender microaggressions, racism, sexism, classism, and ageism within the academy (Achor & Morales, 1990, Anzaldúa, 1987, 1990, 2001; Cuádriz, 2005, 1996; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Gándara, 1982, 1995; Segura, 2003). These critical perspectives drive particular methodologies to portray a more accurate portrait of Chicana lived experiences. These particular questions, hypotheses, methods and theories all stem from the Chicana experience—the Chicana voice.

Chicana Feminist Epistemology notes that researchers cannot fully understand quantitative *or* qualitative methodologies if the Chicana voice is not central to the research process. Further, using the major tenets of Chicana FE, the following help us document and understand the lived experiences of Chicana community college transfer students:

1. ***Resists traditional methodologies and theories that distort or omit the Chicana experience and knowledge.*** In the attempt to document the Chicana community college transfer experience, a Chicana FE framework, for example, avoids focusing solely on the Chicana transfer rates but also consider how these students negotiate the “transfer function.” Unlike literature on community college transfer students, Chicana FE framework resists perpetuating research that does not address issues of racism, classism, and sexism in the Chicana schooling experience.
2. ***Chicana scholars/researchers bring a “cultural intuition” to the research process.*** Through their own personal, social, professional and academic experiences, Chicana researchers are able to understand their “cultural sensitivity” or “cultural intuition” to help guide critical questions to document a more accurate portrayal of Chicana experiences in higher education. As shared in the preface of this manuscript, it was my formal and informal conversations with community college transfer students which allowed me to know there are differences in how Chicana/o students experience postsecondary schooling. Further, my experiences as a young, first-generation, Chicana doctoral researcher allows me to ask how Chicana students negotiate their role as Women of Color in pursuit of academic degrees, such as a doctorate, on and off campus as their academic journey includes experiences well beyond the walls of the institution.
3. ***Construct appropriate protocol to incorporate and investigate critical data.*** Chicana researchers note that the “Chicana experience” is not only secluded within academic settings. Chicana scholars may pose questions to understand how being a Chicana student impacts the social and personal lives of students. Unlike traditional research methodologies that may consist of rigid one-on-one interviews, review of empirical data,

or quantitative analysis, a Chicana FE framework may incorporate new ways of collecting data. These may include analyzing Chicana students' personal journals, poetry, art, family home videos, or having a conversation, such as *platicas*, with the researcher through *testimonios*. Here, researchers and participants converse about the Chicana educational experience without needing to follow a strict interview protocol. During *testimonios*, participants are able to share their experiences while same time pose new questions and possible topics that the researcher may not have necessarily considered, initially. Specific examples of how I employ *testimonios* through *platicas* for this particular study are discussed in Chapter 4.

4. ***Research grounded on the life experiences of Chicanas.*** Chicana FE seeks to document the life experiences of Chicanas in education by asking Chicana students to share what these experiences are. Though quantitative data on Chicana educational status and attainment are helpful, Chicana voices speak to the intricacies of what these statistics omit. Similar to CRT counterstorytelling, Chicana FE acknowledges, values, understands, analyze and find the stories and voices of Chicanas as imperative and legitimate in the research process. To ignore these voices and experiences is to perpetuate the dominant, hegemonic research agenda Chicana FE attempts to dismantle. In this study, influenced by Chicana FE, using *testimonios* as the primary method will challenge dominant, deficit narratives about Chicana students. Chicana FE acknowledges participants as creators of knowledge and welcomes the opportunity for Chicanas to be part of the data analysis process. Using an epistemological framework highlights the imperative process of documenting the participants' ways of knowing and Chicana scholars document and learn these processes.

Although quantitative data on Chicana community college transfer rates and doctorate production help understand the educational status and attainment rates for Chicana students, it is not until we incorporate the lived experiences when we can fully understand what these statistics really mean. Thus, critical race theory and Chicana FE both are central to this research. However, to employ a theoretical and epistemological framework to this study allows for the opportunity to forge a new lens that notes the researcher and participants' use and understanding of theory and how they negotiate methods to yield critical praxis in the field.

#### *Towards a Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis*

When deciding to employ critical race theory and Chicana Feminist Epistemology for this study, I rooted my approach to research by simply understanding the basic definitions of these frameworks. As discussed earlier, I questioned by understanding and use of theory as these lead me to appropriate methods for this study. Additionally, I, too often, found myself challenging and academically seeking other scholars to define and articulate how critical race theory or any other theoretical framework informs their work – thus, I hold myself accountable to the same standards. As such, the following discussion provides defined contexts of my use of critical race theory, Chicana FE, leading to a Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis. This discussion will allow readers to understand how both CRT and Chicana FE are rooted and inform this body of work. As such, the synopsis of critical race theory engaged in this study is as follows:

Critical race theory is the work of scholars who are attempting to develop an explanatory framework that **accounts for the role of race and racism in education** and that works toward identifying and challenging racism as part of a larger goal of identifying and challenging all forms of subordination. (Solorzano, 1998; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Villalpando; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

However, to employ critical race theory in this study, the definition is further conceptualized, contextualized and defined as:

Critical race theory is an explanatory framework that accounts for the role of race and racism *in postsecondary institutions* that works towards identifying, *understanding*, and challenging racism as part of a larger goal of identifying and challenging all forms of subordination *as one attempts to obtain a doctorate degree*. (italicized added for emphasis).

By incorporating language and context to understand how critical race theory allows me to: (a) pose and ask critical questions; (b) engage and consider qualitative methods; and (c) centralize these processes on the lives of Chicana students – I also find the need to extend the aforementioned critical race theoretical definition to incorporate a Chicana Feminist Epistemological lens within this definition.

Dolores Delgado-Bernal (1998) does not prescribe a single definition to her framework, as this would counter-argue the purpose of one's interpretation of Chicana epistemology.

However, I propose the following working definition for Chicana Feminist Epistemology:

Stemming from a history of Chicana Feminisms and Chicana literature, Chicana Feminist Epistemology is an explanatory framework which accounts for one's multiple forms of knowing through the experience of racism and sexism in postsecondary institutions and works towards identifying, further understanding, and challenging additional forms of subordination as one attempts to obtain a doctorate degree and conduct research in academia.

Similar to the former discussion on redefining how critical race theory is employed and defined within the body of this work, I revisited my own prescribed definition for Chicana FE. The fact that I re-evaluate, re-conceptualize and re-define these framework to incorporate explicit language to support the research design and methodology for this study, leads me to propose a new framework for this body of work – Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis.

To expand and build on the two already re-conceptualized definitions for critical race theory and Chicana Feminist Epistemology, Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis is defined as:



First, stemming from a history of Chicana feminisms and Chicana literature, Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis is **an explanatory framework, which accounts for the researcher and participants' embodiment of multiple forms of knowing through the experience of racism, classism, sexism, and ageism in postsecondary institutions.** Secondly, Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis works to identify, further understand, and challenge multiple forms of subordination **as one practices research by redefining and renegotiating theories and methods produce "new" knowledge in academia while its applicability and practicality be articulated with multiple communities.**

The definition is presented in two parts to, first, highlight the use of Chicana feminisms and literatures to account for the Chicanas' historicity and embodiment of multiple forms of knowing (Anzaldúa, 1982; Cruz, 2008; Delgado-Bernal, 1998; Moraga, 1999). The second section note the role of both the researcher and rapport with participants to co-create "new" knowledge in academe. This co-creation of knowledge is heightened by the researcher's intuitive ability to (a) not only negotiate and select appropriate methods to gather critical data, but to (b) scientifically, intuitively, and conscientiously know how to present and articulate critical findings in various contexts, especially for audiences outside of academe. As discussed in later section in this chapter, employing *Testimonios* through *platicas*, was the most appropriate method for a retrospective study on the Chicana transfer experience while at the four-year and pursuit of their graduate degrees.

## Chapter 4 Methods

To document the lived experiences of Chicana doctoral students who began their postsecondary education at the community college, a Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis help guide the methods of this study. Thus, there are three major sections in this chapter: (1) *Testimonios* as primary method; (2) Data Sources; and (3) Data Analysis. First, *Testimonios* as the primary method of data collection for this study is introduced. An explanation on how *Testimonios* were employed through *platicas*, along with the conceptual protocols considered for each meeting with the participants are also discussed here. Within the data sources section, a description of the Survey of Earned Doctorate quantitative data used to understand the status of Chicana community college doctorate production is presented. Additionally, abbreviated description of the recruitment and demographic surveys employed to initiate the qualitative design are noted. Most importantly, *las ocho Mujeres*<sup>9</sup> in this study are introduced by detailing personal demographic information, educational backgrounds, schooling pathways specifically to the community college, and their trajectories to the four-year and graduate institutions. The last section, data analyses, describe the following: thematic coding and mapping *las platicas*; member-check processes employed to ensure analyses and interpretation of findings aligned to participants' reflections and experiences.

### *Testimonio As Primary Method*

Merging critical race theory and Chicana feminist epistemology to propose a Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis, allows me to note how imperative the methodology used in this project in centered on the lives of Chicana students. Thus, *Testimonios* were the principle method of data collection. *Testimonios* are beyond one-on-one interviews. Although as the researcher, I

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<sup>9</sup> The eight Women.

crafted a protocol, *testimonios* are a process where participants and researchers are able to create knowledge and theory through a conversation of collective lived experiences. As the Latina Feminist Group (2001) propose,

“*Testimonio* is often understood as a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere.”

However, the Latina Feminist Group argue *testimonios* are created when the personal and private become political—become an entity.

During *testimonios*, the participant shares her stories without holding or silencing her critique or analysis of any given experience. For example, a participant may share an experience of being silence in a classroom setting, provide details of what occurred during this time but also provide her own critique of sexism, racism, patriarchy, etc. Participants provide an analysis of their own lived experiences. Thus, *testimonios* are a tool where participants can “theorize oppression, resistance, and subjectivity” (Latina Feminist Group, 2001: 19). However, the researcher must acknowledge and document these processes, both during the interview and during data analysis. *Testimonios* call for participants to recall and share their many untold stories. Most importantly, *Testimonios* serve as, "...a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure" (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 2). A Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis lens reminds us, Chicanas are creators and embody knowledge and their *testimonios* help us document these moments.

#### *Testimonio through Platicas: Intuitive Role of the Researcher*

A Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis framework prescribes, my role as a Chicana researcher is also critical in how *testimonios* are facilitated and conducted. My cultural intuition

and physical body, as a brown woman, has a political, social, and historical connection to Chicana participants. Though I am not a community college transfer student, factors such as gender, race, and the intersections with various forms of oppression in the pursuit of a doctoral degree connect me to the participants. These factors help built a sense of *confianza*<sup>10</sup> that is needed for participants to share their experiences, and often, untold stories with anyone, aloud.

My own experience participating in other researchers' studies who employed *testimonios* as their primary method, allowed me to determine I did not want to conduct a *testimonio* session structured as an interview. What I refer to as the ping-pong process, other researchers would often ask a question and limit my response to answering only the question posed at a particular time. If I felt the need to elaborate or expand on an answer, these researchers would push me to stay within the parameters of the proposed question. This was confining—too constraining and counterintuitive to what I understood and proceeded *testimonios* to entail. I did not want to employ *testimonios* that would limit a participant's opportunity or willingness to share intimate details about her memories and recollections on her transfer experience. Thus, I employed *testimonios* through *platicas*.

*Testimonios* through *platicas* allow for participants to share their retrospective recollection of their educational experiences, as they find fit. By employing *testimonio platicas*, I stay true to the concept: it is an open conversation about the *Mujeres*' stories of their transfer trajectories. I often initiated a *testimonio platica* by asking a broad question, such as, "What do you remember about your transfer experience at the four-year?" This question allowed for the *Mujeres* to tell me their story as they found most appropriate. My role, then, was simply to be an active listener. Through their testimony, I sought answers to the research questions guiding this study. All while not interrupting the process the *Mujeres* chose to retell and, at times, re-live

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<sup>10</sup> trust

their experiences. What these *testimonios* through *platicas* allowed was for the *Mujeres* to share intimate details about topics they often felt they had forgotten about. Invoking their memory proved to be an essential process to critique and, indeed, note when their personal trajectories became political. *Testimonios* through *platicas* allowed for the *Mujeres* to expand on deep personal events that were intertwined with how they navigated their educational experiences. This meant during their *testimonios*, some *Mujeres* felt the need to narrate intimate details about personal events, such as coping with a family death, coping with severe illnesses or health and severe emotional distress such as having gone through a miscarriage. My own epistemology allowed the opportunity to provide the space and opportunities for the *Mujeres* and their stories to be shared, as they recalled them impacting their educational trajectories.

The purpose of implementing *testimonios* through *platicas* was for the *Mujeres*...

for the *Mujeres*  
to share  
detail  
critique  
be.  
be  
open  
honest  
vulnerable  
raw  
uncensored  
about their recollection  
as they found appropriate  
as they wished  
as they recalled  
in their terms.  
in their words.

My interpretation of *testimonios* was to allow for space and time for the participants, in this case eight Chicana doctoral transfer students, to recall and voice their retrospective recollection of their educational trajectories. These *testimonios* through *platicas* provided the platform for the

*Mujeres* to hear themselves speak and analyze their own experience in the process. I did, however, craft *testimonio* conceptual protocols and sent these via email a week before our *testimonio* sessions. As explained in the following section, these conceptual protocols were to simply pose themes or topics for the *Mujeres* to think about their educational trajectories. However, I never walked into a session with a protocol in hand. In fact, I never took notes while listening to the *Mujeres*' *testimonios*. My role during the *testimonio platicas* was to fully engage by listening to their lived experiences—listening to their voices.

### *Testimonio Conceptual Protocols*

*Testimonios*—*Testimonio* is the primary method of data collection. Given the retrospective nature of this study, *testimonios* were gathered in a 2-3 part series, each session lasting about two hours each. *Testimonio* conceptual protocol were structured to solicit the *Mujeres*' reflection on the following themes, per educational segment (See Appendices D-1, D-2, D-3):

#### *Testimonios Part I—In the Beginning:*

- High school experiences
- course taking patterns
- curricula track
- family roles and expectations
- personal aspirations
- understanding “college”
- pathway to the community college
- aspirations and goals prior and during community college

#### *Testimonios Part II—Community College Transfer Experiences:*

- aspirations and goals at community college
- resources
- mentorship

- the transfer process
- selecting, applying and choosing 4-year institution
- “transfer student” identity
- navigating a four-year institution
- community college transfer student expectations, self and by institution
- graduate school aspirations
- PhD aspirations
- personal goals
- family expectations

*Testimonios Part III—Community College to the Doctorate:*

- Expectations of doctorate program
- doctoral experiences
- aspirations post-PhD
- family/marriage/partnerships
- family roles and expectations
- issues of gender, class, age, sexuality
- financial obligations.

The *testimonio* conceptual protocols were sent a week before a scheduled *testimonio* session. The protocols were solely for the *Mujeres* to reflect and remember certain segments in their education. Whether it was experience while at the community college leading to transfer; transfer trajectories at the four-year; or navigation towards graduate school – the conceptual protocols provided possible topics for *platicas*. The email advised the *Mujeres* they were welcomed to take notes on the protocols, but I would not refer to the protocols as a script or interview tool. Our sessions were *testimonio platicas*—a conversation led by their perspectives.

## Data Sources

### *Quantitative Data*

The Survey of Earned Doctorates conducted by the National Opinion Research Center provides the most complete national source of information about the baccalaureate origins and doctoral experiences of doctorate recipients. The SED is a yearly survey completed by all doctoral recipients in the United States. Thus, the SED is not a sample of doctorate recipients rather these data provide demographic information of the entire universe of doctorates produced in the U.S. Data are collected in the seven broad fields of physical science, engineering, life science, social science, humanities, education, and professional. In addition to general demographic data, the SED generates information including recipients' baccalaureate and Master's degree origins, fields of study, financial support, time to degree, and postdoctoral plans. For the purposes of my analyses, using descriptive statistics, the overall Chicana/o doctorate productions rates within the 11-year period of 1990 to 2000 includes over 440,000 cases. I only included respondents that self-identify in the survey as U.S. citizens or permanent U.S. residents. The exclusion of foreign doctoral recipients reduces the dataset for this study to 329,437 cases (74.9% of overall doctorates earned). Further, U.S. citizens and permanent residents who indicated their specific race/ethnicity further reduced the dataset to 325,573 cases (73.9% of all doctoral recipients).

Given that my focus is on Chicana/o doctorate production, of these total doctorates produced, 3,403 (1.4%) were earned by Chicanas/os. Of these, 771 (23%) first attended a community college en route to the doctorate. As previously discussed, Chicana/os are more likely than any other racial/ethnic group to attend a community college as the entry way towards a doctorate degree. Without access and analyses of Chicana/o community college transfer



doctoral recipients, the premise and critical need for this dissertation would not be as clearly stated without these data.

### *Qualitative Data*

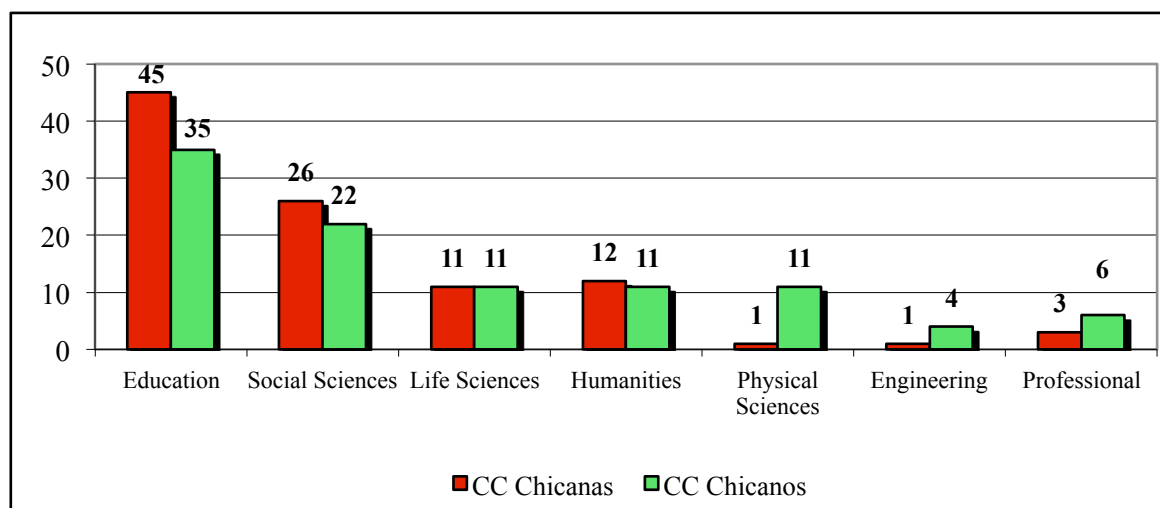
Given the retrospective nature of this work, I sought Chicana transfer students currently in doctoral programs to participate in this study. The following sections will provide detailed descriptions on how the qualitative component of this research documents the lived experiences of Chicana community college transfer students while at the four-year institution and their navigation towards graduate school.

### *Selection Criteria*

- My goal was to recruit 10 *Mujeres* for this study. Nine participants initially began this process, however one Mujer decided to withdraw after completing her *testimonio* sessions. As such, a total of 8 Mujeres contribute to this body of work
- I sought participants whom identify as Chicana, Mexican, Mexican-American, Latina/Hispanic of Mexican decent. All eight *Mujeres* identify as Chicanas.
- Criteria was for all participants to have started their postsecondary education at the community college. Seven of the *Mujeres*, indeed, began postsecondary education at the community college. One Mujer began at a UC campus, but after a quarter returned home and enrolled at community college. This process is known as the reverse transfer student experience and will be discussed later (also see Townsend, 2000; 2002).
- Given the retrospective nature of the study - all the *Mujeres* were current doctoral students at a UC Campus in Southern California willing to share their experiences through the entire educational pipeline.

- All doctorate disciplines of study were welcomed to participate. However, the majority (5) participants were doctoral students in education; one in Women Studies; one in World Arts & Culture; and one in Sociology. The concentration in education and the social sciences coincide with the Chicana transfer doctoral productivity rates by field of study (see Figure 5).

**FIGURE 5: 1990-2000 U.S. Chicana/o Community College Doctorates, production percentage by broad fields**



NOTE: Doctorates shown in data are U.S. citizens or permanent U.S. residents.  
 Source: NSF/NIH/USED/NEH/USDA/NASA, Survey of Earned Doctorates, 1990-2000  
 (Solorzano & Rivas, in progress)

### *Recruitment*

Purposeful sampling was employed to recruit participants for this study (Gandara, 1998; Patton, 1990). A purposeful sample may be employed when researchers understand the context and gaps within the area of research. Thus, one can “handpick the cases” and specific areas of inquiry by employing a purposive sample (Hoyle, Harris, & Judd, 2002: 187-188). Thus, Chicana community college doctoral students, as participants, provide student voices to understand the transfer experience. Further, E-mail messages were circulated with an official recruitment letter detailing the context and purpose of this study (see Appendix A). The original email requested for email redistribution to other Chicana community college doctoral students.

This allowed for a “snowball effect” as participants enlisted additional members to participate in the study (see Hoyle, Harris, & Judd, 2002). Chicana doctoral students who agreed to participate were asked to reply via email so that preliminary surveys be sent before the *testimonio* sessions were scheduled.

### *Demographic Surveys*

Upon confirmation to collaborate, a preliminary survey was sent to the *Mujeres* to gather demographic data before the first scheduled *testimonio*. Preliminary surveys asked for demographic information, for example: place of birth, parental education, age, marital status, dependents, community college, undergraduate, graduate institution, etc. (See Appendices C-1, C-2). Preliminary surveys allowed me to understand mentally prepare how to best approach their respective *testimonio* session. For example, though literature suggests that most community college transfer students are often head of households or have a family of their own (Adelman, 2005; CPEC, 96-4, 05-08; Laden, 1992; Nora & Rendón, 1996; Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas & Solorzano, 2004; Rendón, 1992), these preliminary surveys allowed me to ask questions that did not overgeneralize or assume this to be the case with all the participants. In fact, none of the *Mujeres* were head of households nor had children of their own when they transferred into the four-year, pursued their baccalaureate degree or when and applied to graduate school. Let us learn *las ocho Mujeres*’ personal background and experienced leading to the context of understanding their trajectories to the four-year institution and pursuit of graduate and doctoral degrees. As such, the following survey data provide a synopsis of *las ocho Mujeres* in this study.

## *Las Ocho Mujeres*

By employing a Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis lens, as the researcher I hold the responsibility to determine how to engage theory in to practice. This led to the creation of the preliminary surveys, completed before our meetings, to help me further understand and contextualize the *Mujeres'* experiences through their *testimonios*. As such, for me to understand their experiences as transfer student while at the four-year institution, I wanted to understand their personal background – what did they aspire to become when they were children; did they have any siblings; did having siblings impact their aspirations or trajectories; what about the role of their parents and their upbringing. Though rich qualitative data were gathered during the *testimonios*, Table 1 highlight critical components of the *Mujeres'* personal background.

**Table 1: *Las Ocho Mujeres* - Familial and Personal Background**

<i>Mujer</i>	Place of Birth	U.S. Born Generational Status	Birth Order	Father's Educational Level	Father's Occupation	Mother's Educational Level	Mother's Occupation
Andrea	CA	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	Eldest of 2	Unknown	Unknown	Some high school	Domestica
Citlali	Texas	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	Youngest of 4	Some high school	Laborer	High school	Craftswoman/Artist
Frances	CA	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	Eldest of 4	6 <sup>th</sup> grade education	Laborer	Some high school	Deceased
Luna	CA	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	Youngest of 5	Unknown	Unknown	Business School (Mexico)	Homemaker (now deceased)
Maria Trinidad	CA	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	Eldest of 5	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade education	Cook	6 <sup>th</sup> grade education	Sales
Monica	Mexico	-	Eldest of 4	4 <sup>th</sup> grade education	Gardener & Mechanic	8 <sup>th</sup> grade education	Domestica
Natalia	CA	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	Youngest of 4	High School graduate	Factory worker	High school graduate	Homemaker
Vanessa	CA	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	Youngest of 2	High school graduate	Retired Military	High school graduate	Payroll clerk

Aside from one *Mujer* born in Mexico, all others were born in the United States. Four are first-generation and three are second generation U.S. born. Despite these birth generational difference, all eight *Mujeres* first-generation college students. Half of the *Mujeres* were the eldest child of 2-4 children, while the other four were the youngest of 2-4 children in their families. The level of parental education varied from elementary school to high school graduates. In only once case, a mother obtained a business degree in Mexico. However, all of the *Mujeres*' parents held low-wage jobs such as gardener, mechanic, laborer or *domesticas*<sup>11</sup>. Given the limited educational opportunities their parents held, all eight *Mujeres* are the first in their families to pursue a college and graduate education. These experiences help us contextualize the important role their parents play in sustaining personal motivation to pursue the doctorate, as discussed in Chapter 5.

In addition to these important components of the *Mujeres*' historicity, it is equally warranted we learn about their formal education leading to the community college. Table 2 note the *Mujeres*' educational trajectories and pathways to the community college.

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<sup>11</sup> domestic worker.

**Table 2: *Las Ocho Mujeres* - Community College Pathways**

<i>Mujer</i>	High School Academic Track	Took SAT	Time lapse entering Community College	Development of Transfer Aspirations	Main Source of Transfer Information	Community College Duration	Total Community College Campuses Attended	Primary Source of Funding	Work Experience while at the Community College
Andrea	Honors/AP	Yes	1 semester (reverse transfer student)	Upon Enrollment	Friends, Self	6 years	2	Scholarships, Loans, Work	2 jobs
Citlali	General	No	None	2nd year Discovery	Older Siblings, Catalog, Self	5 years	2	Work	1-2 jobs
Frances	ESL/General	No	None	2nd year Discovery	Catalog, Friends, Self	5 years	1	Financial Aid, Work	1-2 jobs
Luna	ESL/General	No	1 year	Mid 1st year Discovery	Cousin, Self	4 years	1	Academic Scholarships, Work	1 job
Maria Trinidad	Continuation	No	None	Early 1st year Discovery	Catalog, Friends, Self	6 years	2	Financial Aid, Work	1-2 jobs
Monica	Honors/AP	Yes	None	Early 1st year Discovery	EOPS, Self	3 years	1	Financial Aid, Scholarships, Loans, Work	1-2 jobs
Natalia	General	No	None	Early 1st year Discovery	Catalog, Self	5 years	3	Parental Support, Work	1 job
Vanessa	Continuation	No	2 years	Late 1st year Discovery	Catalog, Puente Program, Self	3 years	1	Work	1-2 jobs

To understand the *Mujeres'* trajectories into the community college and navigation through the transfer process, it was important to know what level of commitment their high schools provided to their postsecondary education. As Table 2 highlights, two *Mujeres* attended a continuation high school; two were placed in English as a Second Language (ESL)/general track; two were tracked in the general academic track; while only two *Mujeres* were able to gain access to honors/advance placement curricula track. As such, only the two *Mujeres* in the honors/AP track accessed the opportunity to take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) as preparation for college admission. This factor will play a critical role in the *Mujeres'* transfer trajectories, as discussed in Chapter 5. However, despite the heterogeneity of experiences while

at the high school level, all eight *Mujeres* were placed into remedial courses upon entering the community college.

Three of the *Mujeres* experienced a time lapse after high school before enrolling into the community college. One *Mujer* was a reverse transfer student. Meaning, because she successfully accessed the honors/AP track, upon graduating from high school she was admitted directly into a four-year UC campus. However, due to familial medical obligations and poor academic counseling at the UC campus, after only a semester she withdrew from the four-year and enrolled into the community college. Yet, upon enrolling into the community college, she too was placed in remedial courses.

All of the *Mujeres* obtained information about the transfer function and opportunity once at the community college. Two of the *Mujeres* did not learn about the transfer function until well into their second year. Only Andrea, as the reverse transfer student, was aware of the opportunity she held to prepare and transfer into a four-year campus. Nonetheless, upon learning about the transfer function, all of the *Mujeres* heavily relied on their peers and catalog to navigate this process. In fact, only two *Mujeres* referenced a transfer-supportive program as the source of information for their transfer experience.

As noted, all of the *Mujeres* were raised in working-class households. As such, when they enrolled into the community college, they could not seek financial support from their families. The *Mujeres* maintained a full-time enrollment status while working 1-2 jobs, simultaneously. In fact, half of the *Mujeres* did not receive information regarding financial aid information until they transferred into the four-year institution. This heightened their need to work more than one job through their community college experience. Given their financial obligations and lack of institutional information on financial aid, the *Mujeres* remained at the community college for an

average of five years. Additionally, because many of the *Mujeres* did not consistent counseling or access to appropriate courses, many of the *Mujeres* attended more than one community college campus to fulfill their transfer requirements.

Despite facing institutional barriers while at the community college, all eight *Mujeres* were determined and committed to transferring onto the four-year institution. In fact, as Table 3 highlight, half of the *Mujeres* in this study transferred into the University of California (UC) system. Two of the *Mujeres* transferred to local California State Universities (CSU), while two transferred into private institutions.

**Table 3: *Las Ocho Mujeres* – Four-Year Transfer Trajectories**

<i>Mujer</i>	Four-Year Institution	Age Upon Transferring	Undergraduate Field of Study	Primary Source of Funding	Research Opportunity	Graduate Aspirations upon transferring
Andrea	UC	25	Sociology	Scholarships, Grants, Work, Loans	CC & 4-year	Ph.D.
Citlali	Private	25	Latin American History	Work	None	M.A.
Frances	UC	24	Chicana/o Studies	Financial Aid, Loans, Work Study	4-year	Ph.D.
Luna	Private	21	Education in Child Development; Biology minor	Financial Aid, Loans, Work Study	None	Ph.D.
Maria Trinidad	CSU	25	Chicana/o Studies	Scholarships, Grants, Work, Loans	4-year	Ph.D.
Monica	UC	21	Chicana/o Studies; Women Studies, Education specialization	Financial Aid, Scholarships, Loans, Work	4-year	JD/M.A.
Natalia	CSU	25	Liberal Studies	Parental Support, Work	None	Teaching Credential/M.A.
Vanessa	UC	21	Chicana/o Studies	Work, Loans, Scholarships	CC & 4-year	Ph.D.



The *Mujeres*’ on average were 25 years old when they transferred to the four-year institution. This factor will be further discussed to contextualize their transfer experience while at the four-year. The *Mujeres*’ undergraduate fields of study were concentrated in the social sciences. Once at the four-year, their primary source of funding were predominately financial aid assistance for all the *Mujeres*.

In their attempt to take full advantage of resources while at the four-year, only five *Mujeres* were able to access research opportunities as transfer students. The four *Mujeres* who transferred into the UC campus, all were invited to participate in research with Faculty of Color. As additional *Mujer* at the CSU institution sought a research opportunity on her own. Which means, three of the *Mujeres* in this study did not engage nor had the opportunity to participate in undergraduate research projects. However, all eight *Mujeres* held post-baccalaureate aspirations upon transferring into the four-year institution.

Given the context of this study, I want to understand the experiences of Chicana transfer students as they not only navigate their four-year experience but also as they prepare for graduate school. Though detailed narrative is shared in Chapter 5, Table 4 depicts the *Mujeres*’ post-baccalaureate pathways. Table 4 allows us to see only one *Mujer* decided not to apply to a graduate program immediately following her undergraduate career. Though this table is helpful to begin to understand the various post-baccalaureate pathways leading to graduate school, Appendix E details their full trajectory leading to graduate and doctoral education. However, what is important to note is that although seven of the *Mujeres* applied immediately into graduate school, only five were admitted to their respective programs.

**Table 4: *Las Ocho Mujeres* - Post-Baccalaureate Pathways**

<i>Mujer</i>	Applied to Graduate School Last Year in BA	Applied to Type of Graduate Program	Accepted into Graduate School	First Year Post-BA	Graduate Institution	Years of Work before Reapplying to Graduate School
Andrea	Yes	Ph.D.	Yes	Ph.D.	UC	
Citlali	No	N/A	N/A	work	N/A	4 years
Frances	Yes	M.A.	No	work	N/A	1 year
Luna	Yes	M.A.	Yes	M.A.	Private	3 years
Maria Trinidad	Yes	M.A.	Yes	M.A.	UC	N/A
Monica	Yes	J.D.	No	work	N/A	3 years
Natalia	Yes	M.A./Teaching Credentials	Yes	M.A./Teaching Credentials	CSU	6 years
Vanessa	Yes	M.A./Ph.D.	Yes	M.A.	UC	N/A

Two *Mujeres* applied directly into doctoral programs, however, only one was admitted immediately. Of the remaining applicants, two were not admitted to graduate school at all. All of these experiences will be highlighted and detailed within Chapter 5, especially as we learn how these transfer *Mujeres* prepared for the graduate school application process.

### Data Analysis

#### *Transcribing*

Upon written consent, all *testimonio plasticas* were audio recorded. Participants were asked to select their own pseudonym for purposes of confidentiality. Additionally, any persons identified through their *testimonios*, the *Mujeres* also prescribed their pseudonyms for purposes

of confidentiality. Though I never took notes during the sessions, participants were asked if they were comfortable and approve, written notes would be taken during the interviews. I did, however, keep a journal and debriefed on my own upon completing each *testimonio*. All recordings were manually transcribed, no analytical software was employed to transcribe the *testimonios*. Manually transcribing allowed me to further analyze data, first by listening to the *Mujeres*' experiences a second time, and lastly to ensure their voice were captured accurately onto text. These multiple opportunities for analyses allowed me to start initial segmentation analyses of their experiences as a cohort.

#### *Thematic Coding & Mapping las Platicas*

In addition to the analysis provided by the *Mujeres* during the *testimonios* (Anzaldúa, 1990, 1999; Anzaldúa & Moraga, 2002), where the "face to face theorizing and production" (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p.6) occurs, transcriptions were analyzed for thematic patterns (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data was analyzed to determine where certain themes could be combined into similar categories. Quotes from the transcriptions were identified and serve to illustrate various dimensions of the educational trajectories of Chicana community college transfer students while at the four-year and graduate preparation process.

Mapping *las platicas* refer to the segmentation analysis – given that the *platicas* allowed for the *Mujeres* to share their experiences as they felt most compelled – meant that often their *testimonios* were not shared in a chronological order. As such, my role as the researcher was to analyze data and start organizing salient themes to best answer the research questions. This required, literally, an entire map of how to strategically organize the *Mujeres*' trajectories within a cohesive narrative, eventually captured in this manuscript.

I employed a triangulation of data analysis by means of analyzing the National Science Foundation's Survey of Earned Doctorates national dataset, demographic surveys, *testimonios*, and member check for accuracy of analysis. The non-experimental quantitative inquiry of the SED NORC data, in addition to the *testimonio* approach was to appropriately in seek multiple ways to understand the status and experience(s) of Chicana community college transfer, through the latter part of the educational pipeline. *Testimonios* were used to incorporate student voices, anchoring this study.

#### *"Member-Check" Processes*

After preliminary analysis of *testimonio* data, the *Mujeres* were asked to participate in a follow-up one-on-one "member check" meeting. Here, participants were provided with coded quotes and analyses and asked to provide feedback regarding the accuracy of data analysis, coding process, and finding conclusions (Delgado-Bernal, 1998). As a "member-check" method of data analysis, participants were welcomed to agree or disagree with the status of data analysis and concluding findings (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Participants guided me as the researcher, with direction of analysis and summation. Though participants are the "experts" in sharing their experiences and perspectives on the transfer experience, as the researcher I hold the full responsibility to produce the final product of this research project.

Additionally, a focus group "member-check" meetings (after initial interviews are transcribed, coded, analyzed and written) were conducted. Similarly, participants were provided coded quotes and analyses and asked to provide feedback regarding the accuracy of data analysis, coding process, and finding conclusions (Delgado-Bernal, 1998). However, for the focus-group member check, findings were presented through a powerpoint presentation and an open discussion for further analyses allowed for collection of additional cohort data. The

*Mujeres* were not surprised to the aggregate salient themes found through their shared transfer experiences. However, the important component of the “member-check” process was the opportunity for the *Mujeres* to learn and understand how, as the researcher, I was interpreting their experiences that would lead to this manuscript.

## Chapter 5 Findings Chapter

This particular study grounds its premise from Critical Race Theory and Chicana Feminist Epistemology to create Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis, a lens where the researcher accounts for the *Mujeres*' multiple forms of knowing through their experiences as Chicana transfer students in each segment of postsecondary education. As discussed in Chapter 3, these theoretical and epistemological frameworks help us identify methods such as *Testimonios*, to acknowledge the historicity and sociopolitical reflections of these *Mujeres* as valid forms of data to understand and document their educational trajectories. *Testimonios* as *platicas* serve as the platform for the *Mujeres* to speak about their experiences, as they choose to recall them, state their critique and analyses of their entire educational journey from the community college and into the doctorate. Thus, in order to understand the Chicana transfer student experience, their *Testimonios*—their voices—sharpens this body of work. This study is guided by the following research questions:

Overarching Question:

*What is the Chicana transfer experience from community college and into the doctorate?*

Purposeful Questions:

- What are the experiences of Chicana community college transfer students at four-year institutions?
- What are the experiences of Chicana transfer students as they prepare for graduate school?
- What were the institutional factors that supported or interfered with the *Mujeres*' educational trajectories at four-year institutions and graduate school preparation process?

- What were the navigational tools these *Mujeres* employed through their educational journey?

The findings discussions are structured to align to the aforementioned guiding questions. This chapter is, thus, divided into the following four sections with corresponding sub-sections:

1. *Chicana Transfer Experiences at Four-Year Institutions*. This section includes findings and analyses of: (a) transfer-obstructive institutional barriers, (b) transfer-supportive institutional factors, (c) Chicana transfer navigational tools while at the four-year institution, and (d) summary of this section.
2. *Chicana Transfer Experiences through the Graduate School Preparation Process*. Similarly, this section includes findings and analyses of: (a) transfer-obstructive institutional barriers, (b) transfer-supportive institutional factors, (c) Chicana transfer navigational tools through the graduate school preparation process, and (d) summary of this section.
3. *Chicana Transfer Students in Doctoral Programs*. This section summarizes the multiple pathways of the eight *Mujeres* noting where and when they ultimately start their doctoral training.
4. *Summary of Findings* concludes the chapter.

### **Operationalizing and Conceptualizing “Soulfully”**

As a preface to the discussion of findings, I need to carefully operationalize and conceptualize the use of the term *soulfully* within this body of work. As the researcher, I hold the responsibility to find an appropriate defining term, beyond a simple adjective, to describe

how the *Mujeres* maintained their focus, motivation, and resistance through their postsecondary education as transfer students. So I sought...

I sought a term  
to encapsulate  
their dedication  
to their family,  
especially their parents;  
their community,  
especially future generations  
of students;  
Students of Color  
*Mujeres de Color*;  
to themselves.

I sought a term  
to condense  
*las energias*<sup>12</sup>  
they transferred  
in our *platicas*<sup>13</sup>  
through *testimonios*  
and as they, I'm sure,  
transmitted  
to those who crossed their path,  
fought their presence,  
questioned their ability,  
faced their perspective,  
witnessed their resistance,  
and eventually  
embraced their aspirations.

Through this...  
...all of this  
the *Mujeres* felt  
they navigated against the current,  
*siempre contra la corriente*.  
barrier after barrier  
after barrier after  
one another.  
solely for being  
systematically  
pushed,

---

<sup>12</sup> the energies

<sup>13</sup> talks



stigmatized,  
affiliated  
to the community college system.

I sought a term  
that could summarize  
their resistance,  
determination,  
perseverance,  
*fortaleza*<sup>14</sup>,  
*y fuerza*<sup>15</sup>

I sought a term  
that has not been used  
to describe  
community college transfer students  
particularly  
Transfer Students of Color,  
especially  
*Transfer Mujeres de Color*.  
A term that has not been used  
mainly  
because there hasn't been  
enough...  
enough research  
to document  
the racism  
classism  
and  
multiple isms  
community college transfer  
students  
*y*  
*Mujeres*  
experience.

I sought a term...  
then felt the need  
and pressure to  
define,  
describe and  
own the term,  
according  
to my advising faculty

---

<sup>14</sup> fortitude

<sup>15</sup> strength

*y mi facultad*<sup>16</sup>.

I sought a term  
soon realizing  
the term,  
the concept,  
the energy,  
was there  
all along -  
in  
within  
through  
their  
*testimonios*.

You,  
*las ocho Mujeres*  
humbly  
allowed me to  
experience  
and witness,  
restrospectively,  
intimate details about  
your experience,  
your transfer experience.  
Experiences too often silenced  
too often marginalized  
or omitted altogether.

I sought a term  
and it is  
soulfully  
right I thank  
*las ocho Mujeres*  
for reminding me  
and the readers  
how profound  
their commitment,  
willingness,  
and vision  
lies within.

---

<sup>16</sup> Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1987) describes *la facultad*, as “the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant ‘sensing,’ a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is behind which feelings reside/hide” (p.60).

Within.

Soulfully  
Resistant,  
committed  
to themselves  
for themselves  
because, often,  
the belief in themselves  
is all they had  
to get them through  
and make it through.

I ultimately refer to the *Mujeres*, in this case Frances, to rightfully illuminate why and how *soulfully* is the appropriate term to encapsulate the transfer commitment in this study:

*I seriously did not give much thought about pursuing higher education as wanting to obtain a certain degree; I didn't know any of that. To me, pursuing an education was a means to survival. Survival out of poverty, out of trauma and most importantly, freedom and survival for my spirit and soul!*

Let us now turn to the *Mujeres' Testimonios*, shared in this manuscript, as they permit us to comprehend their resistance and why they continue to push through their educational trajectories as transfer students.

### **Soulfully Committed: Chicana Transfer Experiences at Four-Year Institutions**

Studies on the experiences of community college transfer students at four-year institutions continue to be minimal. Research specifically addressing the experiences of Latina/o or Chicana/o transfer students is virtually nonexistent. To disrupt this void, the first section of this chapter initiates a discussion on the Chicana community college transfer experiences at four-year institutions.

## **Transfer-Obstructive Institutional Barriers**

To understand the Chicana community college transfer experience while at the four-year institution, this section documents some of the major challenges the *Mujeres* faced as they transitioned and persisted in their pursuit of the baccalaureate degree.

### *Academic “Transfer-Shock”*

As discussed in Chapter 2, studies available to understand the community college transfer experience at the four-year institution document transfer students often experiencing an academic “transfer shock” (Cejda, 1994, 1997; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Laanan, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2001; Pascarella, 1999). The academic transfer shock is defined as a sharp decline in grades, or overall grade point average, within the first quarter or semester, upon transferring to the four-year institution. Often, this academic transfer-shock is explained by noting transfer students adjustment to rigorous standards than those while at the community college. In fact, all eight *Mujeres* in this study agreed their academic standing declined within the first quarter or semester while at the four-year institution. However, adjustment to different academic calendar and its correlation to the decline in grades were far more pronounced by the type of four-year institution the *Mujeres* transferred in to. As discussed in Chapter 4, four *Mujeres* in this study were admitted and enrolled into the same UC campus. Two *Mujeres* transferred into California State Universities, while two others attended private schools. For the four *Mujeres* who attended private and CSU campuses, they transferred from a semester to another semester calendar system. Here the academic calendar transition was not necessarily a great barrier as they spoke about their transition to the four-year institution. Whereas the four *Mujeres* who transferred to the UC campus, repeatedly shared the frustration and the overwhelming process they

experienced to adjust from a semester to quarter system. For these *Mujeres*, it was the academic calendar that was an initial shock in their transition to the four-year. As Vanessa shares,

It was a challenge going from a semester calendar to a quarter system. At the community college, it felt as though I had twice as much time to study and prepare for classes. Here, the quarter system was dramatically different. I don't think anyone could have advised me how, or how fast, I should mentally, physically and emotionally prepare for that difference.

Similarly, Frances notes,

Everything was fast. One day I was petitioning for my application to be reevaluated to be admitted, then the next thing I was already in class preparing for midterms, and three weeks later reviewing for finals. It was nuts! I felt I was barely processing the first couple of week's readings when finals were right around the corner, it was nuts...and it took a toll on my learning. I felt I wasn't learning, I was just trying to stay afloat.

Although the four *Mujeres* who transferred to the UC shared the hardship transitioning to a quarter system, all eight women experienced a decline in grades during their first term or first year at the four-year institution. By simply looking at the *Mujeres*' academic transcripts, one could generalize they experienced an academic transfer-shock, similar to many transfer students (Cejda, 1994, 1997; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Laanan, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2001; Pascarella, 1999). Though it is noted community college transfer students eventually reach a comparable grade point average and obtain a baccalaureate degree at the same rate as non-transfer students (Cohen 2003; UCLA, 2006), contextualizing why or how, exactly, Chicanas experience the academic transfer-shock is important than making a generalizable statement about their grades suffering due to a change of academic calendar and rigorous standards. It is not until we understand the additional and intersectional elements of the Chicana transfer four-year experience that we learn why their grades suffered and, indeed, understand their experience is well beyond the academic "transfer-shock" phenomena.

### *Beyond the “Transfer-Shock” Phenomena: Experiencing Multiple isms*

Most empirical studies documenting the community college transfer experience sum the transfer trajectory as students facing the “transfer-shock” decline in grades during the first term while at the four-year institution. As noted in Chapter 2, very little attention has been given to understand what external contributing social, cultural, psychological and physiological factors may impact this phenomena, especially for Students of Color and in particular for Chicana students. In fact, there has been minimal attention to study the intersectionalities of the campus racial climate, and elements that may heighten the decline in grades and overall transfer experience. The following subsections expand beyond the academic “transfer-shock” phenomena to document the various forms of discrimination and neglect experienced, witnessed, lived, and embodied by the eight Chicana transfer students while at the four-year institution.

#### *Transferism*

Despite the high number of Latina/o community college students who aspire to transfer to a four-year institution, their consistently low transfer rates reveal that these students experience *transferism* as they navigate the postsecondary pipeline. Transferism are the various forms of institutional neglect and disrespect against students that are community college transfer students. This institutional neglect refers not only to the failure of community colleges to ensure transfer readiness but also to the failure of four-year institutions to provide outreach, recruitment, enrollment, and retention once transfer students reach a four-year institution (Rivas, Perez, Alvarez, and Solorzano, 2007). This study attempts to understand how transferism impacts the educational trajectories of Chicana transfer students throughout the four-year experience and as they prepare for graduate school.

Specific examples of transferism experienced while at the four-year campuses are narrated in the subsequent sections as the face of racism, classism, ageism, and languageism. We begin to understand transferism with broader discussions of institutional neglect of transfer students as the *Mujeres* transitioned into the four-year institution. As Natalia shares,

I don't remember seeing any counselors. I don't think there were any programs to support transfer students either. As a CSU, there were many transfer students on campus but the institution took us for granted. They didn't care to think or seek to know how we needed support. There were no special support programs or outreach to ensure we were okay. I was really fending for myself.

Luna also states,

Truthfully I don't even think I thought about my experience as a transfer student once at the four-year. I mean, I knew I worked my ass off to get there. But once at the four-year, there were no support programs or guidance for transfer students. It got to the point where, I was there, did my work, and jetted-off campus as soon as I could. I didn't care to engage – why would I, the institution didn't.

Both Natalia and Luna, as the *Mujeres* who transferred to the CSU and private schools, note the lack of transfer-specific support efforts on their campus. Whereas the *Mujeres* that transferred into the UC campus experienced the contrary – transfer-specific support programs will be discussed in its corresponding section. However, Natalia and Luna's *testimonios* note an obvious form of institutional neglect by simply not supporting students as they transferred into the four-year institution. Indeed, these *Mujeres* were left to “fend” for themselves in their transition.

Citlali also shares,

It was an obvious void – there was no support for students who transferred from the community college. I, especially, because I transferred from an out of state community college, I would simply just forget about knowing what to ask. But it was a very similar feeling – the feeling I felt at the community college. I had no one to ask for help; no one to seek for support. So like the community college, I clinged onto the catalog and figured it out all by myself.

In spite of knowing there were no formal forms of support for transfer students, these *Mujeres* found alternative ways to learn and navigate the four-year institution. Additionally, the *Mujeres* voiced the feeling marginalized and lost through the process. Here, Frances comments,

As a transfer student my first two years I was lost. I still had a couple of general classes to take, like astronomy, so they were mandatory that really didn't interest me. I felt lost and disconnected my first two years. It was lonely; it wasn't a very inviting space either. The first two years I felt I was just going through the motions, going through the process.

The notion of feeling marginalized in uninviting spaces were further pronounced as the *Mujeres* experienced overt forms of discrimination based on their race, gender and class. As Vanessa reminds us,

What else would you call it? It's racism, what else...when you walk into a class, and you're the oldest-brown-woman there. You are judged that very second. Everyone stares at you, looking at you like you're definitely in the wrong class and probably the wrong campus. I know what to call it now, back then I just felt rushed to find a seat and just let it be. I was just trying to understand what the hell to do as a transfer student.

Vanessa captures the overt racism and additional discriminatory intersectionalities she felt as she walked onto the four-year campus as a transfer student. Similarly, all of the *Mujeres*, repeatedly, shared similar experiences while also noting their frustrations of not being able to immediately name or respond to racism, until they reflected on what contributed to their overall transfer experience at four-year institutions. As such, specific tenets of Transferism are identified in the following section as the *Mujeres* testify how they confronted racism, classism, ageism, and languageism.

### *Racism*

Critical race theory allows this study to center an analysis on race and racism while taking into account additional forms of discrimination. Identifying the intersectionalities and various forms of oppression *because* of their transfer status will allow us to understand the Chicana



transfer experience while at the four-year institution. All of the *Mujeres* note the experience of confronting racism as the greatest barrier in their educational trajectory. Frances shares,

As a transfer student I really didn't see a lot of people like me in classes. It was a very isolating, alienating and uncomfortable experience. There's something missing in the experience to automatically connect with other people so that you can navigate through the system. I didn't find that in the first year as a transfer student. I think if I had found that from the beginning, the academic ladder would have been easier. But it also had to do with the professors I had; I couldn't connect with any of them. They were all predominately white men, had one white woman but I also disliked her. I couldn't connect with the people and the material. There wasn't anything that brought me in or drew me in. It felt like a big white system that you're trying to navigate through.

Frances speaks to the experience of being a transfer Student of Color in a predominately and historically white institution (Villalpando, 2003). This experience was pronounced by six of the eight *Mujeres*—those who transferred to the UC and private systems. The *Mujeres* that did not elaborate or highlighted experiencing racism while at the four-year institutions were the two students who transferred into the CSU system. The fact that many CSU campuses enroll a high number of Students of Color and most are classified as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI), may help us deduce this being the reason why the *Mujeres* at CSU did not highlight racist experiences in their *testimonios*. However, as Maria Trinidad states,

I transferred to a local CSU campus. Everyone was local, older, and working-class folks. It felt like the same community and demographics of my community college were there. I'm not saying it was the same experience, because it wasn't. I was lost as a transfer student...and racism exists everywhere, but what I am saying is that I didn't have a big culture shock there. Everyone looked like me, to some extent.

Though both *Mujeres* who transferred into CSU campuses did not detail racist encounters during their four-year experience, this does not imply they did not encounter racism. As Natalia also notes,

I knew what CSU campus I would transfer to. It was local and affordable. Because it was a CSU campus, there were a lot of Students of Color so I didn't feel racially like a minority. I think age played a bigger factor in my experience than race did.

These *testimonios* help us understand the campus racial climate have a direct impact on how students experience their education (Allen, 2003; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solorzano, 2009). For the *Mujeres* enrolled at the UC and private school sectors, attending predominately and historically white institutions negatively impacted their navigation towards a baccalaureate degree. The following experiences help us understand how the six *Mujeres* encountered and confronted racist practices at four-year institutions. Here Frances shares,

I took a course with a white faculty, it was a predominately white upper-middle class sorority environment. It was very cliquish to the point I remember always having to sit at the very last table in the room. The professor would talk about issues regarding working class women and brought up issues that were happening around campus. I remember sitting there feeling the hostility and anger, feeling isolated in that type of place because the comments were only derogatory against predominately Mexican and Latina women. But the professor didn't say or do anything to stop it either. The few Women of Color in that class, we were scattered all over the place but it was predominately white women that led the discussion and silenced any comments that did not support theirs.

The verbal and physical marginalization of Frances, as she sat at the last table in the room, speak to the unwelcoming environment she and the *Mujeres* experienced as transfer students. Vanessa, Andrea, Monica, Frances, Luna and Citlali expressed detailed narrative of similar instances where, often, white faculty, would allow other students to speak in a derogatory way about Students and Communities of Color. These faculties would allow overt racist comments be made in the classroom and silenced opposing views. Frances always thought, “how could faculty allow this type of bullshit?!” This type of overt racist discourse often caused the *Mujeres* to question their position and presence at the four-year institution. This, however, happened at the beginning of their transfer transition, within the first quarter or semester of their first year. As Vanessa explains,

I often didn't know what the hell was being said. I would hear comments and thought, ‘what the hell? did they just say that about brown and black folk?’ Soon as I processed what was said, another racist comment would be made and everything just blurred passed me. I knew exactly what they were saying – they were talking shit – that’s what they

were saying. But everything was surreal and it would blow me away these kids felt they had the authority to make foolish and racist claims in a matter-of-fact tone. But I didn't say much, *initially*. I think it was just the initial phase of me trying to figure out what the hell was going on, what my role was and figuring out when was the time I should say something.

Coupled with the academic calendar transition, Vanessa and her peers encountered a campus culture shock, primarily rooted on the overtly racist campus climate. Unlike their community college demographics, at the four-year institution most of the courses were taught by white faculty and attended by middle- and upper-class white students. However, slowly in their transition, the *Mujeres* found solidarity with other Students and Transfer Students of Color that would protect and support each other in these racialized and racist spaces. As Frances shares,

I remember it was mid-quarter, it took me a really long time to get the strength to say something, and the class was discussing racism among the fraternities for having racially derogatory parties. I remember raising my hand and calling out a few of the white sororities, I challenged what they were saying; told them it was overt racism, discrimination and stereotyping People of Color...and I got it good. I got verbally attacked [by white students]! The professor didn't do anything, she couldn't do anything, pretended she didn't know what to do, or chose not to do anything. The professor let these white girls go off on me in class. But it was this exact time that another Woman of Color in that class raised her hand and spoke up, to support me. It was one of the first verbal disputes with the white girls, but it was the first time that there was this sense of solidarity among the few Women of Color in that class. Solidarity like saying, 'so there's only three or four of us here, but we have got to have each other's backs!' The white girls were pissed. But I finally felt at place, like I had a support group without really knowing these other Women of Color.

Similar to Vanessa, it took Frances a few months to process and understand the racist practices in her classes. While it took her some time to challenge deficit and racist claims about People of Color, it was the solidarity amongst the few Women of Color in the classroom that helped her feel validated and supported. Frances' voice and presence was acknowledged, heard and supported by her Colleagues of Color. Although these experiences align to similar experience of first-generation Students of Color at predominately white institutions (Hurtado, 2004; Villalpando, 2008; Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solorzano, 2009), the difference between the

experiences shared in this study are acknowledged by the forms of discrimination these *Mujeres* experienced *because* they were transfer students. However, it is equally important to note, similar to Frances' experience of voicing her opinions and challenging racist discourses in class, Vanessa also experienced this by verbally challenging faculty. She shares,

I was welcomed to the four-year with a racist white faculty in a Transfer Summer Program<sup>17</sup>. I simply didn't like my English teacher – it was some white woman trying to teach me about racism. I was pissed! Who and how the fuck is this lady trying to teach me about racism?! I remember she accused an African American male student for cheating on an essay and I knew she was falsely accusing him. She was a piece of work! But I remember the first day of class she wanted a writing sample and everyone submitted something, despite running out of time. Nonetheless she told us just to write something at home and bring it in. Well, we did and by the third day she walked in and said, "Well, okay. I know ya'll transfer students and it's obvious that ya'll can't write, and you don't know how to write, so I have a lot of work to do!" I knew I had a lot to say but I didn't have the terminology to express myself at the beginning of the class. But at the same time, I was so infuriated I didn't care so I slowly began to verbally fight with her in the classroom. I quickly learned not to give a shit and speak out.

Though faculty transfer-deficit ideologies will be discussed in a later section, the aforementioned *testimonios* allow us to understand the complexity of racism and racist practices the *Mujeres* experienced while at the four-year institution.

In addition to centralizing issues of race and racism, the purpose of this entire section is to understand the intersectionalities of the multiple forms of discrimination. As such, the following section will discuss how the *Mujeres* confronted institutionalized classism as they pursued their baccalaureate degree.

### *Classism*

All of the eight *Mujeres* are first-generation college students. As the first in their family to attend college, the *Mujeres* felt the emotional support from their families but could not,

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<sup>17</sup> The UC Academic Center's Transfer Summer Program referenced is a summer bridge program for newly admitted community college transfer students. This program is especially design to invite historically underrepresented and underserved Transfer Students of Color in their support for academic and social transition to the four-year institution.

literally, afford to seek financial support from their parents. As a result, all the *Mujeres* worked minimum wage jobs at an early age. Most of the *Mujeres* held more than one job while attending the community college to pay for their tuition. Their financial realities were not any different when they transferred to four-year institutions. In fact, all of the *Mujeres* continued to work a minimum of one or two part-time jobs as transfer students. Thus, all of the *Mujeres* in this study faced difficult financial demands, which impacted their academic grades, academic standing, and overall educational trajectories. As Frances shares,

My academic standing suffered during my first year at [the UC]. There was no balance with academic, student activism, work, and family financial obligations - that's why I was on academic probation. I had to figure out a way to pay for school so because I love teaching, I worked as a teaching assistant. Teaching paid for my tuition and I also worked as a coordinator for MEChA<sup>18</sup>, it didn't pay very well but it was at least something. I didn't have balance between my financial needs and academic pressures, and as a result, my grades suffered.

We learn Frances not only held part-times jobs to pay for schooling, but she also supported her family's financial needs. All of the *Mujeres* experienced similar familial financial obligations. The *Mujeres* explained their multiple roles of carrying financial obligations to support their own education and the pressure to also help their parents and younger siblings. Maria Trinidad expands on this,

I don't think people understood how hard my hustle was and continues to be. I did whatever I could to help my family financially, on top of staying on track with school. That's another reason why I was always absent during high school – because I was too young to work, I would stay home to take care of my younger siblings. I mean, I worked two jobs while at the community college to help pay for rent and food for my family. I purposely transferred to a local CSU campus for the same reason – so that I could live at home to continue to help paying for rent, bills, food or whatever my family needed. So the pressure was definitely heavy, and it still is.

Maria Trinidad highlights her financial realities experienced at every segment of her educational trajectory. The additional pressure to financially support her family, ultimately, further impacted

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<sup>18</sup> Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlan – student organization.

her academic standing while at the four-year institution. Coupled with confronting an academically rigorous calendar transition and overt racist spaces while at four-year institutions, experiencing high financial need are factors that help us understand the challenges these *Mujeres* confronted. However, systemic and institutionalized classism was further pronounced as the *Mujeres* furthered their education.

As working-class, low-income students, the *Mujeres* felt institutional classist practices marginalized them, especially because they were transfer students. Seven of the eight *Mujeres* critiqued their four-year institutions, as Vanessa calls it, “systems created for middle- to upper class people.” The *Mujeres* received little to no institutional support to navigate through financial hardships. Unfortunately, four of the eight *Mujeres* were not provided appropriate financial student aid information before or while at the community college. In fact, it was not until much later in their four-year trajectory when they learned about opportunities for federal and private financial support and assistance. Citlali explains,

It wasn't until towards the end I got the Hispanic Scholarship Fund. But again, no one ever told me about those things. No one told me, 'fill this out, this is how you can fund your schooling.' I never knew any of that. Nobody ever told me about that stuff. I found out by other people a bit too late, really! I wish someone would have sat me down when I started college to explain everything, in detail. So although I received the Hispanic Scholarship, I was saddened that I could have received this much earlier.

The majority of the *Mujeres* experienced the lack of or misinformation on financial support throughout their educational trajectories. Natalia was told by a community college counselor that she may “use up [her] financial aid eligibility” if she would solicit loans while at the community college. Vanessa received similar advice and did not understand what the “eligibility” requirement meant. Half of the *Mujeres* in this study were counseled to understand financial aid as the equivalent to requesting educational loans. However, financial aid includes federal grants,

work-study opportunities, public and private loans. As the U.S. Department of Education and the Federal Student Aid protocol prescribes, a student is eligible for financial aid a total of eighteen terms of full-time enrollment or the equivalent of part-time enrollment to receive financial aid (UCOP, 2010). This regulation especially impacts the educational trajectories of transfer students because their financial aid is contingent on the number of designated funding terms they have after they transfer (Rivas, Perez, Alvarez, & Solorzano, 2007). The miscommunication and misinformation on financial aid led many of the *Mujeres* to postpone soliciting federal or private loans for the fear of not understanding how, as a transfer student, their eligibility would be compromised.

Institutionalized classism experienced through the misinformation was not the only overt form of classism the *Mujeres* encountered. As transfer students at the four-year institution, their peers often covertly ridiculed the *Mujeres* for not having as much in material artifacts. As Vanessa elaborates,

It was difficult to be among peers that came from middle- upper class backgrounds. That was a culture and classed shock I felt. For example, my summer roommates came with fancy-ass dorm comforters, blankets, decorations or whatever...and here I am thankful the school provided a blanket and a pillow. They looked at me like ‘what’s wrong with you?’ It was weird for me. We were all People of Color but had a different class status. I would also hear folks say that their parents were paying for their schooling and here I was...I knew I had no money to come here. I came to [the UC] summer program with \$50 for the *entire* summer.

Unlike the community college experience where the majority of students are often low-income and working-class (Hagedorn, 1999, 2002, 2004; Nora, 1999; Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas and Solorzano, 2003; Townsend, 2000), the differentiation between class statuses amongst their transfer peers was an overt and daily reminder the *Mujeres* were from a working-class background. Natalia shares,

I remember I had to take a science class and it noted the lab hours required an additional fee. As soon as I read that, I knew I had to choose another class. I could not afford to pay additional anything for anything.

Institutional practices, such as additional fees for lab work in Natalia's case, are the type of practices that undermine working-class students. In cases where financial aid is available, students would be able to enroll and navigate these opportunities. As we note, the majority of the *Mujeres* were ill-advised about financial aid. The ripple effect of these types of mistreatment reinforces marginalization of students based on their class status. As such, Vanessa shares,

So my ass transfers to a tier I research institution and I finally have the opportunity to present at a conference. That meant the world to me because many transfer students learn about research and conferences too late in the game. So here I am, ready to present. But guess what? Somebody forgot to tell us we had to pay out of pocket for our travel and lodging. How the hell was I suppose to pay for that? I couldn't ask mommy or daddy, like a spoiled kid. So the other transfer *Mujeres* and I who were accepted to present at this conference had to hustle. We hustled like we always did; we made jewelry to fundraise our way to the conference. But we made it there and presented. That's the type of hustle too many rich kids have no clue about. And as transfer students, we always found ways to hustle - even if it was late in the game, we made it happen.

The experience Vanessa notes is coupled with both institutional and peer classism. She notes affluent students would not understand "the hustle" she experienced trying to attend this conference. Simultaneously, she notes time-sensitive opportunities many transfer students encounter. Where too often they do not learn or access opportunities because of the shortened time spent at the four-year institution. Though this quote highlights the resistance and navigational tools to overcome financial barriers, these are resistant strategies to confront institutional classism. Many UC campuses have Undergraduate Research Programs where students who are accepted to present at scholarly conferences are able to apply for financial support to cover travel and lodging costs. Yet, all of the *Mujeres* in this study who were accepted or invited to present at conferences, did not know about these funding opportunities. This highlights the need for accurate



and timely information be provided to all undergraduate students, especially community college transfer students.

Despite the challenge to transition to a rigorous academic calendar, confront covert and overt forms of racism and classism while at the four-year institution, an additional tenet of transferism is found in the form of ageism.

### *Ageism*

Literature on community college transfer students note these individuals are often older in age, have children, and may be financially head of households (Cedja, 2002; Hagedorn, 1999; Townsend, 2002). Though the *Mujeres* supported their families, financially, they were not necessarily the head of household. Further, none of the *Mujeres* had children upon transferring to the four-year institution. Thus, for the *Mujeres* in the study, being older than their non-transfer peers is an accurate description of their experiences. As noted in the sections beforehand, racism and classism are two forms of discrimination these *Mujeres* overtly confronted while at the four-year campus. An additional forms of prejudice and marginalization was due to the presumed older-than-traditional age - which adds to the complexity of understanding the Chicana transfer experience. As Citlali explains,

As a transfer student, I think the major impact was the age difference. I know I was much older, more mature, more life experience than the incoming freshmen - that was the big difference. They [non-transfer students] wouldn't say anything, but the way they looked at me was obvious. Sort of like, 'oh, she's way too old to be here. She's not like us.'

The marginalization of transfer students for *not being as young as freshmen* was a covert way of imposing traditional practices and views of who and what a supposed-traditional student is and looks like. Non-transfer students practiced these forms of exclusion by not inviting the *Mujeres* to join student organizations or omitted sharing information regarding on-campus student support services. Maria Trinidad explains this process further,

Because I was new to [the CSU] campus, I didn't know anything like we had access to free Xerox copies per semester; I didn't know we had access to that. Information like, 'what can we get, where can we go, who do we speak to?' it was like a secret language and advice the freshmen had because they had been here longer, and that little stuff made a difference. In terms of being involved in [student] organizations, they were really clickish. You could tell that they were mostly people who had been there since their freshmen year and they stuck to each other, not welcoming transfer students. I never really ever saw them go out of their way to try to bring other people into their orgs, especially older transfer students. When I transferred I was already 25; my age was an obvious distinction.

Ageism was not solely practiced by comparing transfer student to freshmen on the basis of academic preparation. Ageist practices were evident by the disregard of transfer students altogether, and the exclusion to access activities and information on the basis that they were older. However, the age distinction was not only made between freshmen and transfer students. There were incidents where an age difference were also evident amongst transfer students. As Vanessa notes,

I remember moving into the dorms for the transfer summer program. I was concerned about living in the dorms because I felt I was a little bit too old to live there. At that point I had already gotten an apartment but I wanted to take advantage of living in the dorms for that summer, just to have that experience. But I hated it. I hated living in the dorms so much. Although my roommates were transfer students, they were really young and really inconsiderate. Somehow, I don't know if they [younger transfer students] felt like they could cover up that they were transfer students and blend in with the freshmen. But I could tell and sometimes wanted to point them out and say, 'they're transfer students too!'

Similarly, Maria Trinidad comments,

When I transferred I was already 25 and lot of other transfer students were 20, 21 and we were all at different levels. I didn't understand how they were so young and transferred, but we were all here and felt the different treatment amongst us because I was older. I don't know if I'm right but I have a feeling the younger transfer students had a better experience than I did. I just have that feeling.

The fact many of the *Mujeres* felt marginalized on the basis of their age by other transfer students speak to the heterogeneity of the transfer experience. As other transfer students were much younger than the *Mujeres* in this study, this may imply younger transfer students were

counseled, mentored, and supported in effective ways to ensure they transferred within a two to three year window (Ornelas, 2002). Due to lack of access to accurate information, counseling, and timely access to transferable courses, delayed their stay and prolonged their transfer opportunity. As noted in Chapter 4, most of the *Mujeres* attended a community college for an average of five years and transferred at the average age of 26. Additionally, given that the *Mujeres* in this study felt overtly marginalized on the basis of their age by non-transfer, this may be interpreted as being a younger student would be more acceptable at a four-year institution. This only reinforces a majoritarian paradigm – defining and enforcing what constitutes a traditional student. As Vanessa critiques,

What else would you call it but overt racism, classism, and ageism. No one took to time to know us before judging us! All they knew was we were not ‘traditional’ students. We were transfer students and some reason these freshmen and faculty treated us like we entered [this institution] through the back door and did not merit being here.

These *testimonios* note the social barrier of transferring as older students. As older students they too often felt the institution, faculty and peers discredited their merit to attend the four-year institution.

As a navigational strategy to confront ageism, which will be discussed further in a following sub-section, many of the *Mujeres* purposefully sought friendships and support from graduate students. Many of the *Mujeres*, reached out to their teaching assistants and graduate students for academic and moral support. Here Vanessa shares,

I had friends, don’t get me wrong. They were also transfer students but I felt I related more to my teaching assistants because they were older or at least I was closer to their age. However, in some cases, we were the same age. They were often Chicanas as well so the fact we connected on age, race and gender made a world of a difference. They also didn’t care to ask if I was a transfer student, or if they thought it I was never made to feel pushed away because of it. They genuinely cared to push me to become a critically engaged student, with critical thinking and writing skills.

Andrea also relates,

When I got [to the UC], I was alone. I had no friends there, I was lost. I didn't relate to the freshmen. I made friends with some of the students from the Transfer Summer Program, but only those that were older. If anything, my [teaching assistants] and young [professional] counselors [on campus] became my support system.

Despite experiencing covert and overt ageism, the *Mujeres* were successful navigating those barriers throughout their four-year experience. As we learn in the following section, the *Mujeres* articulate they also confronted discrimination and marginalization based on the language tools they employed as recent transfer students.

### *Languageism*

Part of the Chicana transfer culture shock was finding a coping mechanism to quickly learn and adapt to a four-year campus culture, which also included learning an entirely new vocabulary and new language. While learning this language, however, the *Mujeres* were stigmatized and discriminated for the language tools they employed as recent transfer students.

As Monica shares,

I don't think I heard comments but it was the way I felt it. For example, in classes I would hear freshmen that had been here for a while and they would talk and think aloud, they would theorize about things and I thought, 'What the hell are they saying?' I wasn't used to hearing students speak or think aloud that way. I now realize that I hadn't read all the material they had read because everything they had was accessed two-three years prior to me transferring. They were socialized in the four-year culture, whereas I was thrown into it. I remember the first time I experienced that I did think, 'Shit it's because I'm community college student, fuck I'm behind!' So it took me about a year to realize that—and catch up. I eventually caught up and began talking in that way. I knew it was all a matter of transitioning. That's precisely why we are transfer students because we need to transition and transfer into a whole new culture.

Monica identifies the linguistic culture required to transition into a top tier research institution. Most importantly, however, she notes that as a transfer student she did not have access to subject materials and literature as her non-transfer peers. The notion of time-sensitive accessibility to resources and academic training will be further discussed when we understand how the *Mujeres*

navigate the graduate school preparation process. However, the language distinction between non-transfer and transfer students became very apparent as the *Mujeres* spoke about their transition to the four-year campus culture. Here, Vanessa also explains,

I couldn't connect with a lot of the freshmen in classes; I didn't know what the hell were saying or why they were saying it the way they were. At my community college we were straight-forward. [At the UC] it was a different language, simply a different way of being. But when I would speak up, the [freshmen] looked at me different, as if I didn't know what I was saying...or they didn't know what the hell I was saying. While I was saying the same damn thing they were, but in basic terms. Apparently that wasn't the 'norm.' So I thought, 'shit, if they just thought I didn't belong because I'm brown and older, now they don't think I belong here because I don't speak their language.'

Luna also notes,

It was everything – to the way students spoke, to the way they read and cited scholars when they spoke. I didn't know any of that. I just read an article and didn't think twice about critiquing or analyzing what was wrong with the article. So here I am in class listening to students theorize and I sat there thinking, 'what the fuck? Did I miss something somewhere?!' I seriously thought I read the wrong material. At that time I didn't know it, but it really was that I had not received the same type of academic training to know how to critically analyze texts. Now I'm able to call it what it was, but then I was just overwhelmed and felt sorry for my teachers that didn't care to teach me.

Consistently, the *Mujeres* referenced their need to learn how to speak like the “norm.” Especially for the four *Mujeres* whom transferred into the same UC campus, attending a top tier research institution required a new academic language. Though overwhelmed and often stressed, they sought the opportunity to learn, quickly, and speak in a way to be heard. As Monica shares, “I was now at that place, so I really pushed myself to be up to speed.” Despite the cultural-linguistic barrier, all of the *Mujeres* sought ways to quickly learn, and figured how to acclimate to the four-year institution. Most importantly, as Luna captures, instead of internalizing the obstacle - they self-reflected and acknowledged the a-critical formal education they received prior to transferring, contributed to their culture shock. Additionally, the *Mujeres* acknowledged

the four-year institutionalized practices embraced and catered to “traditional” non-transfer students and often disregarded the transfer perspective, such as they way they spoke.

Faculty perception of transfer students, especially judging them on the basis on how the language tools they employed, will be further discussed as institutional barriers the *Mujeres* confronted at four-year institutions.

### *Faculty Transfer-Deficit Perspectives*

In addition to the multiple isms documents in the former sections, the following discussion delineates specific examples of faculty deficit perspectives and practices against the *Mujeres* rooted on the fact they were community college transfer students. All of the eight *Mujeres* felt many faculty held deficit perspectives of transfer students. Maria Trinidad felt,

“Confused because most students on my [CSU] campus were transfer students, yet the faculty treated us like second class.”

In addition to not offering transfer-specific support programs, Maria Trinidad and Natalia felt their CSU campuses simply did not care to support nor monitor transfer progress. Natalia often felt “embarrassed” to go to office hours because “I didn’t know what they would say or think of me.” She felt non-transfer students had been at the four-year longer than transfer students, which supported stronger rapport with faculty and counselors.

Encountering faculty and teaching assistants who judged them on the basis of being older, transfer students was an element the *Mujeres* did not anticipate to confront while at the four-year institution. As Frances shares,

It took me off guard. I seriously thought everyone would be mindful and, at least, thoughtful about what they said to students, especially to transfer students. But when all their deficit shit comes out, because they question your ability to excel as a transfer

student – it shakes you. It wakes you up to think, ‘holy shit. The hustle continues here, but now twice as hard.’

Frances makes reference to similar struggles experienced while at the community college. All of the eight *Mujeres* shared instances were many community college faculty would make reference to them as Vanessa remembers faculty stating, “you’re mediocre students at the bottom of the totem pole.” In other instances, for example, in Monica’s community college classes, faculty would state, “I’m not going to teach you like a real college student because this is just a community college, not a real college.” Given their community college experiences with faculty, transfer-deficit perspectives held by faculty at the four-year institutions were not new, but unexpected. All of the *Mujeres* expected four-year faculty to be versed in the array and diversity of student needs. Contrary to their expectation, four-year faculty help deep transfer-deficit perspectives. Here Vanessa elaborates,

I had a male teaching assistant for the summer program and I didn’t feel challenged enough. At times when I would contribute to a discussion and I didn’t like the reaction he would give me. I felt he and many folks thought I was an empty vessel and that, all of a sudden, I would be given this new consciousness and knowledge by transferring here. Whereas I already knew I was here because I was politicized and conscientious. I was here because this was part of my strategy - this isn’t an end all for me.

The fact graduate students and faculty would treat Vanessa and many of the *Mujeres* as “empty vessels” undermined the experience and wealth of knowledge these students brought to the four-year institution. Additionally, teaching the students as “empty vessels” contradicted the outreach and recruitment strategies employed by the UC campus. The four *Mujeres* who transferred to the UC campus did so because during the outreach and recruitment process, the institution prioritized the commitment and support of transfer students. Contradictorily, upon transferring, the *Mujeres* felt challenged and questioned on the basis of their presence as transfer students. Here Vanessa adds,

I also had a professor who always talked about transfer students as ‘less than’ able to complete class tasks. Where it came from, who knows. But I would purposely participate in class. He knew what I was saying and I was always on point. But the way he looked at me, made me feel like a dumbass. Yet a freshmen would say the exact damn thing and the professor gave them kudos and was completely in love with them. Made no sense other than his presumptions of me being a transfer student.

Andrea also shares,

I thought maybe the messaging was only from the UC Academic Center<sup>19</sup> that did the outreach. The rest of the campus didn’t care or share [UCAC] support of transfer students. For example, when I would visit faculty office hours - the few times I did – they looked at me like they had no clue what I was saying. Truthfully I didn’t know what they were saying, but it was the way they made you feel, as if I was wasting their time.

These subtle ways of making Vanessa, Andrea and other *Mujeres* “feel” differently because of their status of transfer students are clear examples of transfer-microaggressions. As discussed in Chapter 2, according to Solorzano (1998a, 1998b), microaggressions are covert, subtle ways of further marginalizing Students and People of Color based on their race, gender, class, and other forms of discrimination. In this case these microaggressions are the covert, subtle ways the *Mujeres* were marginalized based on their transfer status and the intersectionality with the additional forms of marginalization already discussed.

Though Andrea’s comment on UCAC transfer-supportive programs and student-identified safe spaces will be discussed in a later section, her experiences help us understand the various types of supportive and non-supportive spaces within an institution. Some of these institutional spaces were perceived to perpetuate the “traditional” non-transfer student experience. As Vanessa explains,

I would get upset because many teaching assistants and professors always assume that all students are first-time freshmen. They would want to start a lecture or discussion with, ‘Remember when you came here right after high school?’ Shit like that reinforces a

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<sup>19</sup> The UC Academic Center (UCAC) is a pseudonym. UCAC is an academic support program for historically underrepresented, underserved, low-income students on the campus. Its purpose is to offer an array of academic support programs through tutoring, lab hours, peer counseling, professional counseling, and graduate school mentorship for freshmen and community college transfer students.



certain type of experience. So I always made a conscious effort to call them out and acknowledge this is also a space for transfer students. So the few times it is actually asked, ‘How many of you are transfer students?’ I raise my hand because this is our space as well. I think there are people who consciously make an effort at this [UC] campus to do that for transfer students but I don’t think it’s enough, yet. There’s always a level of assumptions about who is a student at [this UC campus].

These institutional practices and discourse on sustaining a certain student experiences as the normative are clearly transfer-microaggressions used to further marginalize the *Mujeres*.

Especially as 40% of the 2012 entering class at this UC campus are community college transfer students, the additional burden of students “calling faculty out” on transfer-microaggressions need to be revisited through policy and pedagogical recommendations.

As a consequence to the minimal attention to document external contributing factors impacting the transfer phenomena, this first findings section documents the various forms of discrimination and neglect experienced/witnessed/lived/embodied by the eight Chicana transfer students while at the four-year institution. This section highlight the various forms of Transferism while at the four-year institution. Transferism are the various forms of institutional neglect and disrespect against students that are community college transfer students. This first discussion illuminates specific examples of transferism as the face of overt racism, classism, ageism, and languageism. The last sub-section, on faculty transfer-deficit perspective align to the aforementioned multiple forms of discrimination, but highlight the covert way of making the *Mujeres* feel less valuable than their non-transfer counterparts. The faculty transfer-deficit section was purposely carved as a separate discussion to clearly identify the pivotal and possible detrimental role faculty play in the transfer student experience. However, to holistically understand the Chicana transfer experience, we must dutifully consider supportive institutional factors that helped the *Mujeres* meet their educational goals as transfer students.

## Transfer-Supportive Institutional Factors

Though the first section of the findings chapter began with the institutional barriers and multiple forms of marginalization the *Mujeres* encountered, the rationale for this structure is pretty simple: the institutional barriers were, unapologetically, prominent in their *Testimonios*. When reflecting on their overall transfer experience, the *Mujeres* began as Frances states, “the shit [they] went through” before identifying the support mechanisms they accessed. Reasonably, we must also understand what institutional factors, indeed, supported their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree and beyond. As Monica reminds us,

How else will we ensure future transfer students reach their educational aspirations and goals? We, as transfer students moving along the pipeline, have to share our experiences and voice what worked and what didn't. *Por que si no, nos quedamos en la misma*<sup>20</sup>.

The two subsections within this discussion will highlight (1) transfer-specific supportive programs as a critical way to create a sense of community for transfer students; and (2) the important role Faculty of Color<sup>21</sup>, and especially Female Faculty of Color, play in the *Mujeres*' trajectories as transfer students.

### *“Transfer-Receptive” Programs: Creating Transfer Communities*

According to Jain, Herrera, Bernal and Solorzano (2011), a “transfer-receptive culture” is defined as the four-year institutional commitment to support transfer students navigate successfully throughout their pursuit of the baccalaureate degree in a timely manner. As discussed in Chapter 2, the “transfer-receptive culture” comprise of five tenets to establish a supportive environment for transfer students at the four-year institution. This section, however,

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<sup>20</sup> Because if we don't, the [transfer condition] will remain the same.

<sup>21</sup> Faculty of Color and Female Faculty of Color are capitalized to reject the standard grammatical norm. Capitalization is used as a means to defy the marginalization of this group; it is a grammatical move toward social and racial justice.

will specifically highlight the *Mujeres*' perspectives on "transfer-receptive" programs that enabled them to create a community of transfer success. As noted in earlier sections, the two *Mujeres* at the CSU and two other *Mujeres* at private campuses did not have access to transfer-specific support programs once they transferred. As such, it is especially critical to note, the following discussion on transfer-specific support programs stem from the four *Mujeres* who transferred to a UC campus in Southern California.

When the *Mujeres* shared their experiences about their undergraduate success while at the four-year institution, the four UC students were clear about specific institutional programs encouraging them forward. Frances, Andrea, Monica and Vanessa, all spoke about the transfer-specific outreach efforts the UC Academic Center provided prior to deciding where to transfer. In fact, Vanessa attended the UCAC summer transfer-training program while she was a community college student. This transfer-training program allowed her to reside at the UC campus for a week as she received information about the importance to transfer and technicalities of how to apply. For her, it was during this transfer-training program that ignited her desire to transfer to this UC campus. As she shares,

As a community college student, I attended the transfer-training summer program and I remember a UCAC counselor, Christina, who asked me for my name the first few days. A few days later when she didn't see me in a workshop, she remembered me, approached me about it and addressed me by my name. That touched me – that someone remembered me and knew my name...I felt there was a sense of community. I knew I wanted to apply to transfer here, and if admitted, attend for sure.

The sense of community and validation on a personal level and of their transfer trajectories were clear reasons why Vanessa and her UC transfer peers decided to enroll in this four-year institution. However, it was the transfer-specific recruitment efforts provided by this UC campus that really stood out to them. As Monica shares,

[This UC campus] was the only school that invited me and my parents to visit the campus before making my decision to transfer. When I was here for the transfer recruitment seminar, it blew my mind that the UCAC had an actual program specific for transfer students and our parents. That was the first time, ever, my parents were on an actual college campus - other than just dropping me off [at the community college]...(tears). The fact that UCAC invited me as a prospective transfer student and my parents, to remind us that we earned every right to be here, spoke to me. It spoke to me in ways I will never be able to articulate. But the fact [this UC] was the only campus to reach out to us that way, my decision was clear. I knew this campus had the programs and individuals to support me as a transfer student.

Similarly, Andrea shares her visit to the transfer recruitment seminar.

I had already made up my mind – I thought I would attend [a UC in Northern California]. However, I received an invitation from UCAC about a transfer recruitment seminar – which was the first I ever heard about. I took my younger brother just for kicks, figured we would at least get a free lunch. So we were in the auditorium, not expecting much. But then Dr. Antonio walks in, the director at the time, and speaks about the transfer experience. He talked about UCAC’s commitment to transfer students and their determination to see us through the bachelor’s and onto graduate school. This was the first time anyone, in that position, spoke about their belief in our success. Dr. Antonio simply went on about how he, personally as a transfer student himself, understood our struggles as transfer students and how no one should ever doubt or question our presence on this campus. It blew me away. Totally, totally unexpected. So the next thing you know, instead of grabbing lunch, I went directly to sign my letter of intent to attend [this campus].

Monica and Vanessa also shared similar experiences hearing the UCAC Director speak about the institution’s commitment to support transfer students. Monica recalls,

...feeling emotional about seeing so many People of Color. Then, the way Dr. Antonio spoke. The fact this man spoke my Parents’ language. I mean, you don’t see Latinos in high administrative positions, or Latinos with his authority - or at least not from where I was coming from. But there he was and was saying things like, ‘Don’t let anyone give you shit because you’re a transfer student! You, like anyone else, including your parents, worked your ass off to get here!’ I thought, ‘are you kidding me?’... that was it for me – I was in! I *had* to be here. I just remember looking over at my parents, with tears in my eyes...(tears) ...to tell them this was my school, our school (tears).

The fact UCAC was the only program at a four-year institution to employ transfer-specific outreach and recruitment programs translated to this institution possessing the ability to support transfer students in a way not found at other campuses. Additionally, after the transfer

recruitment seminar, three of the *Mujeres* attended the UCAC academic summer residential program for newly admitted transfer students. Beyond the programmatic structure of monitoring transfer student progress through rigorous academic summer courses, it was the messaging and ideology of success that motivated the *Mujeres* to excel. Monica states,

It was the message I received in the transfer summer program; they were brutally honest of understanding that I had that much more to catch up because as a transfer student, I wasn't given enough of the opportunities that I should have been given as a community college student. It was the first time anyone was real about the systemic bullshit we have to go through. UCAC was honest about what should have happened and what needed to happen to bring me up to speed and academically compete with other students. UCAC instills the belief that you are coming in as a transfer student and therefore you have all the capabilities to excel and succeed at [this UC campus] or else you wouldn't have been accepted. That helped me.

The expectation of transfer student success supported the *Mujeres* motivation to remain engaged and committed to their educational goals. Once the academic year began, the *Mujeres* knew they could visit the UCAC office and find support. However, it took some time for some of the *Mujeres* to seek their support. Monica wanted to learn and navigate on her own but when confronting a decline in grades, she had to get over her ego and ask for tutoring services at the UCAC office. Frances, on the other hand, was aware of UCAC programs but because she was unable to financially afford the transfer summer residential program, did not feel a strong connection to the program or the students. Whereas Vanessa, Monica and Andrea credit the transfer summer program as the reason they felt connected to the institution. Aside from academic support, UCAC programs created a sense of community and familial support. As Vanessa states,

Truthfully, I was really home sick being almost three hours away. But the other women in the summer program understood me – we shared similar experiences and their support got me through being home sick and questioning my decision to be away from home.

Socially, the *Mujeres* met other transfer students whom quickly became their support system to navigate the four-year experience. The *Mujeres* purposely coordinated their courses with fellow transfer summer students, as a way to support each other academically and socially, which will be further discussed in the section on Chicana Transfer Navigational Tools.

Access to transfer-specific programs provided safe spaces for the *Mujeres* to support one another and speak about various challenges they confronted as transfer students on the four-year campus. These safe spaces were facilitated through UCAC and supported by UCAC staff and transfer students' activism and commitment to their success. As Frances notes,

There were a lot of students who had transferred in from surrounding community colleges. I think that having a familiar space was really important or else one can easily get lost in the system at [this UC campus].

Supporting fellow transfer students within UCAC programming was especially important for the *Mujeres* who were eventually hired as staff for transfer-specific programs. UCAC offers mentorship and counseling programs for current community college students. Vanessa was hired to be a peer mentor while Monica and Andrea were hired to be academic tutors for UCAC programs. These *Mujeres* were able to access mentorship for their own trajectory while, simultaneously, mentor other transfer students. The most significant component of these opportunities was the ability to relate on various levels with their peers. These relationships cultivated a sense of community, of belonging, and a sense of purpose in their pursuit of the baccalaureate degree and graduate school goals. As Vanessa shares,

It was important to stay connected with the individuals and programs that supported me to get me here, and remain here. I met many [transfer] students who had gone through the same exact experiences I had - simply trying to get back into school, adjust to school, everything. So I thought, 'fuck, this shit isn't just random, this happens to all of us - it's systemic!' (tears)...

Confronting systemic transferism at the four-year institution motivated Vanessa and the other *Mujeres* to advocate and fend for themselves. Through the mentorship and advocacy of UCAC programs and courses with conscientious Faculty of Color, the *Mujeres* accessed additional terminology to name their experiences and strengthen their sociopolitical critique of higher education as transfer students. All of the eight *Mujeres* held solid critiques of their educational trajectories prior to transferring, but the four *Mujeres* at the UC campus cultivated strength in numbers by having the opportunity to meet and work with fellow transfer students who, often, experienced the same forms of marginalization as Transfer Students of Color.

Though the *Mujeres* at the UC system accessed transfer-specific programmatic support, a critical component of transfer-supportive institutional support for all eight women were building rapport and mentoring relationships with Faculty of Color, and especially Female Faculty of Color. We discuss these critical pedagogical practices and relationships to support the *Mujeres*' transfer experiences in the following section.

#### *Faculty of Color, Female Faculty of Color Support*

Despite confronting various faculties who held transfer-deficit perspectives, the *Mujeres* also share the cultivation of positive experiences with Faculty of Color, especially with Female Faculty of Color. Had it not been for the advocacy, support and critical learning these faculties provided, some of the *Mujeres* almost withdrew from higher education. In some instances, it was these faculties' support and mentoring relationships, which helped strengthen the *Mujeres*' graduate school goals, especially to solidify their aspirations to pursue the doctorate.

All of the *Mujeres* testify the way they connected to Faculty of Color and Female Faculty of Color was, unapologetically, because these faculties looked, spoke, and understood

their background. The pedagogical practices these Faculty of Color employed in the classroom were culturally, racially, and transfer-sensitive. As Monica shares,

Dr. Ronaldo was teaching a class related to minorities in higher education... I didn't want to be a teacher so I thought, 'why take this class?' But I eventually enroll in the class and was blown away. From the very first day I was blown away by his lecture because he didn't lecture - I thought, 'Who is this guy?' He presented a lot of U.S. Census data and it made a lot of sense to me. He gave us a '*barrio*<sup>22</sup> quiz' the first fifteen minutes of class and as a student, you listen and do as the professor tells you. The quiz was to define certain terms like, *ranfla, barrio, familia, cholo, y curandera*<sup>23</sup> - terms that are very common and from the *barrio*. I was like, 'what the hell?' but I started filling it in like there's no tomorrow. I owned this! But I noticed that students around me were having the hardest time completing the quiz. We traded the assignment and discussed how this was an example of what some first-generation college students feel when they are required to take the SAT or exams that expect them to define terms that are not a normal thing in their day-to-day realities. So I sat there and he just blew my mind in one lecture, the very first day!

Coincidentally, all four *Mujeres* at the UC campus eventually took Dr. Ronaldo's course and highlight his pedagogical ability to engage with students in a dialogue, versus a lecture, and employ tools to validate the "day-to-day realities" of first-generation Students of Color. The way he taught were clear examples of culturally-relevant and conscientious practices. However, all eight *Mujeres* noted these types of pedagogical practices were especially indicative of Faculty whom care for student learning. In fact, earlier we noted instances when the *Mujeres* were silenced by white faculty and white peers, these students found the exact opposite in spaces with caring Faculty of Color. These faculties cultivated safe spaces for discussion and at times set-up dialogical dynamics to include everyone's perspective in the conversation. Here Frances explains,

So I'm in Dr. Ronaldo's class and it was mostly MEChistas<sup>24</sup> and maybe two or three white students. Whenever this real *cabron*<sup>25</sup> would speak up about issues of equity or racism, he really thought he knew his shit but was really just perpetuating obnoxious

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<sup>22</sup> neighborhood

<sup>23</sup> car, neighborhood, family, gang member, and female healer

<sup>24</sup> Members of the student organization, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA).

<sup>25</sup> asshole



stereotypes. So every time this *cabron* would speak up, Dr. Ronaldo would moderate and set up the dynamics so that this guy would get slammed. I don't think, to this day, Dr. Ronaldo would admit to it, but I knew what he was doing. But it was sad because here you have this Latino Republican really believing this deficit bullshit. I remember being really amused how Dr. Ronaldo would set up the dynamics to have a really great dialogue. I didn't know it was Paulo Freire or critical pedagogy, but it was the only time I was really excited to debate about issues of racism and social injustice in that particular forum where it wasn't reactionary, where I wasn't dooking it out with white faculty or white women. It was very different.

All eight *Mujeres* shared instances where critical and conscientious Faculty of Color welcomed and sought their perspectives in the classroom. This was new to many of the *Mujeres* because, as Vanessa states, "it meant they actually wanted to know what I thought. They wanted my voice to be heard." Most importantly, as Maria Trinidad notes, "these faculties looked like me, so I was excited and wanted to participate." The connection and support by faculty of a Chicana/o backgrounds, or other Faculty of Color, speak to the importance nuance of unapologetically connecting on racial similarities. However, it is equally important to note that not all Faculty of Color provided a welcoming environment, nor were supportive of the *Mujeres'* educational goals. As we will learn in the Faculty of Color Transfer-Deficit Perspective section, some Faculty of Color discouraged the *Mujeres* from engaging in class, disregarded their input, and did not support their aspirations to apply to graduate school. What is important to learn from this particular section, however, is the pedagogical practices and supportive environment few Faculty of Color and Female Faculty of Color provided, made a pivotal difference in how the *Mujeres* transitioned and excelled to reach their baccalaureate degree.

As transfer students, the *Mujeres* often just went through the motion, when enrolled in culturally-irrelevant courses. Whereas classes taught by politically conscientious Faculty of Color, they felt as Monica describes, "owned the opportunity" to fully engage and be a critical component of the learning process. Thus, the *Mujeres* gained a sense of ownership by wanting to

participate, which also speak to the *Mujeres* excitement and commitment to fully engage in the courses offered by these conscientious Faculty of Color. The sense of educational ownership was clearly evident by how well the *Mujeres* performed academically in courses taught by supportive Faculty of Color. As Frances shares,

Right before I took Dr. Sandoval I was actually on academic probation - I had just received the letter to inform me if I didn't get my shit together, I'd be thrown out. Nowhere in that process would I be allowed to talk about the bullshit I had gone through with the white racist faculty and the white students always attacking me. How could or would an institution ever take that into consideration? - whatever. But as a result of meeting Dr. Sandoval, I finally felt engaged. I felt proud of being a student and finally felt like I was learning something. Immediately after taking Dr. Sandoval's class, I was off academic probation within a quarter. Just having that one person made a huge difference (tears)... I wish the institution can understand that.

The impact of strengthening their academic standing as transfer students was pivotal to their entire trajectory. All of the *Mujeres* contribute this change to Faculty of Color and the messaging and support they received from them. As Monica also states,

You see that it's evident in my transcripts...from Dr. Ronaldo's class and on it was all A's, A's, A's, A's. From that point on in all my transcripts for Women's Studies, Chicana/o Studies and then, of course, I didn't want to be a teacher but decided to add a specialization in education (laughter). But that's the thing, taking courses with Faculty that care, make an enormous difference in the entire experience, especially for transfer students who don't have a lot of time to foster these relationships. I wish we would have more and earlier access to Faculty like Dr. Ronaldo.

Monica's experience and critique of the importance for transfer students to access supportive Faculties, early in the career, is especially critical. As we will learn in the graduate school preparation process, time-sensitive processes and access to these faculties proved to be essential when developing their aspirations for graduate school. Further, as a result of these positive experiences with Faculty of Color, all of the *Mujeres* continued to enroll in courses and sought mentoring opportunities with these faculties. However, the majority of the *Mujeres* spoke,

particularly, about the instrumental support and friendships they built with Female Faculty of Color. Here, Vanessa shares,

I took a class with a new *profesora*<sup>26</sup> in Chicana/o Studies and the group presentation I was a part of really impressed [Dr. Mayo]. She thought it was bad-ass so she invited us to present this project at a conference with her. But the fact she actually reached out to us – that was weird. Especially because we were a group of older transfer students, we weren't sure why she wanted us to present. But with her mentorship, we hustled to learn how to put together a conference proposal and made jewelry to fundraise our way to the conference.

As noted in the discussion of facing classism, Vanessa and her peers did not know they would need to pay out of pocket to attend this conference. Despite these barriers, she and her peers found alternative ways to fund their way and present at this conference. It is especially critical to note, it was through Dr. Mayo's invitation to present that encouraged this group of transfer students to learn the required processes to attend a scholarly conference. Maria Trinidad shares similar experiences with a new, young *profesora* on her CSU campus. She notes,

Can you believe I went through almost all my undergraduate experience with mostly male faculty. I'm sure you believe it. But right before I graduated, the CSU hired a new, young faculty, Dr. Valientina - she was the first Chicana faculty I had!...and the fact that she was young, probably like 35 *and* a Mujer - that made a huge difference.

She continues to explain the obvious dedication Dr. Valientina has for student and their learning,

There was a clear division as to where and who the students went to for support when [Dr. Valientina] came in. She wasn't extra supportive just with me; she was like that with everyone that sought her mentorship. If you would go to the Chicana/o department, you see where all the students are at, meaning at whose office. It was very clear as to who's doing more to mentor and beyond just proofreading.

The quality of commitment and support the *Mujeres* obtained from Female Faculty of Color was also evident in graduate teaching assistants. Vanessa was very vocal about her rapport with a particular Chicana teaching assistant in her education and Chicana/Chicano Studies courses,

I didn't get much out of a Chicano [teaching assistant], I felt he didn't care about my learning. I would purposely sneak out of my section and go to [the Chicana teaching

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<sup>26</sup> Female Faculty

assistant] because she would challenge us; she would intellectually challenge us. At first I thought she was a crazy-brown-woman asking us 101 questions, but I quickly realized she kept pushing us – she pushed us to think critically about how we would respond to a counter-argument. She always validated what we contributed to the discussion. Even if our comments were off the wall, she would connect it to the discussion. She made sure everyone felt part of that space. We knew she would facilitate our learning in a different way and despite us being transfer students, she didn't see us as empty vessels. That's what we wanted and she provided that for us. I wish some faculty in Chicana/Chicano Studies would learn from her and do just that.

The relationship and learning experience the *Mujeres* gained, alongside Female Faculty of Color, speak to the gendered, raced, classed, and in some cases, generational connections they held which solidified the *Mujeres*' trust and rapport with these *profesoras*. These raced, gendered, and classed nuances as pivotal elements to support the *Mujeres* educational trajectories and graduate school aspirations will be discussed further in the Graduate School Preparation Process section (Ceja and Rivas, 2010). However, the *Mujeres* credit their relationship and as Frances calls, “the cheerleading” from Female Faculty of Color as one of the significant reasons they were able to complete and obtain their baccalaureate degree.

### **Chicana Transfer Navigational Tools through the Four-Year Experience**

The transfer-specific programming and Faculty, Female Faculty of Color support discussed in the former section are components of the systemic navigational tools the *Mujeres* employed to succeed through the four-year institution. However, it is important to highlight one of the most important navigational tools the *Mujeres* employed through the four-year experience was their multiple forms of knowing how to navigate postsecondary education because of their initiation at the community college. This sub-section will highlight two components of their navigational strength while at the four-year institution: Chicana Transfer Epistemology and Familial Epistemic *Consejos*.

### *Chicana Transfer Epistemology*

The *Mujeres*' Chicana transfer epistemology are the wealth of knowledge and experiences they possess as a result of starting their postsecondary education at the community college. Their transfer epistemology strengthens their learning, resistance and skills identified through the experience of being transfer students. Thus, transfer epistemology was a pivotal and grounding factor to utilize strategies and skills to strengthen their navigational tool kit. Their epistemology was invoked as the *Mujeres* reflected on situations they encountered at the community college to circumvent barriers confronted at the four-year institution. Natalia refers to this as the "give-me-a-minute-and-let-me-think-about-what-I-did-at-the-community-college-to-get-pass-this!" moments. Similarly, Vanessa posits,

Community college was the training ground for me. If I would have started at the four-year...well, first off, my high school did not prepare me for that option. But if I had started at the four-year, I know I would have been completely lost. The four-year system is an entirely different monster. Though community college was not easy, at least it gave me the tools to know how a 'system' is structured.

Community college as the training ground notes the important lessons and experiences the *Mujeres* brought and transferred with them to the four-year institutions. As Vanessa further notes,

I would purposely select courses that spoke to my passions like, 'The politics of social movements' etc. I was able to make the connections of what I read to what I had experienced prior to [this UC campus]. That personal connection kept me grounded. But I learned to enroll and write about what I wanted to learn, the hard way – after fighting for this right, while at the community college. I knew, soon as I started at [the UC] how to prevent these fights and get straight to what I wanted. I wanted to gain the tools to find that connection and document what was going on in my community. I used classes to facilitate that connection. Sometimes I would negotiate a final paper or a project with the professor so that I would be able to bring other literatures and interests to the topic. I made it my own, I guess you can say.

Vanessa and other *Mujeres* took ownership of their learning, by seeking opportunities to read and present on literatures or projects that spoke to their interests. However, in situations where the *Mujeres* were not supported nor accessed transfer-specific programming, they eventually sought their own ways to as Frances describes, “make it happen!” Here Natalia elaborates,

I didn't have a counselor to go to once at the four-year. But having to select classes, when to select them, to figure out what requirements to meet to get the B.A., to selecting appropriate times with the faculty I wanted to take – everything was *déjàvu*. I already knew how to this on my own. I knew how to maneuver - it was like being at the community college, sorting my classes and reading the catalog like my bible. I felt [at the four-year] like I have been here before and I was eventually not intimidated. It took me a minute to realize this was not new. I knew I had done it all by myself at the community college, so I knew I would figure it out all over again, at the four-year.

Often the *déjàvu* sensation was not only to remember what skill or action the *Mujeres* enacted to navigate certain circumstances. Their transfer epistemology was also used as a way to remember how the *Mujeres* felt about certain situations. As such through their transfer epistemology they invoked certain emotions as protective mechanisms. For example, when the *Mujeres* encountered faculty and teaching assistants that would treat them as “empty vessels,” they remembered the anger and frustration they felt during similar community college experiences. From these former instances, the *Mujeres* expressed their frustration within certain spaces or quickly dropped the course to find alternative spaces that would support to their learning. Once at the four-year, whether it was Vanessa “sneaking out” of her discussion session to attend an intellectually welcoming environment or Frances eventually verbally defend herself against white faculty – the *Mujeres* drew from their memory to summon emotional strength to successfully navigated similar situations as transfer students.

Whether their epistemology recalled emotions or specific skills to navigate the four-year institution, reflecting on the experiences also reenergized and gave them strength to remain committed to their educational goals. As Frances shares,

In all honesty, I have always handled every part of the education, even starting at the community college, I handled everything in little pieces because so many people told me that I couldn't do it. So I made myself remember these negative voices; these individuals that questioned and challenged me. That reminder was also a way to tell me I could only handle [these processes] in little pieces: starting the community college, finishing, transferring, getting in, and surviving through the four-year. I had to reflect and remember, 'little by little, I can do this!' It was like this subconscious voice I created while at the community college, and it follows me everywhere I go.

The strategic plans to navigate through their entire postsecondary education stemmed from visualizing and solidifying their educational aspirations, while at the community college. It was important, for all the *Mujeres*, to remember they, indeed, started at the community college to acknowledge the path they successfully maneuvered and the lessons obtained along the way. Here, Vanessa shares the strength and resistance obtained at the community college which facilitated her responses to faculty with transfer-deficit perspectives that often did not welcome her perspective in class. She states,

I could let these whack-ass people get to me. But I'd been here before, and would not allow them to get in my head. I knew why I was [at the four-year]. I was here because this was part of my strategy - this isn't an end all for me. Whether they could see that or not, I have a strategy.

Part of her strategy was to remind herself of this strategy while also surround herself with positive energies, such as those of fellow transfer students and transfer Women of Color. Reaching out to familiar faces or at least with individuals that held similar experiences were invaluable to the *Mujeres*. We will see how critical these peer relationships impact their graduate aspirations and graduate preparation process in a later section. However, for most of the *Mujeres*, their support system while at the four-year consisted of other transfer Women of Color – a lesson and practice acquired while at the community college. As Maria Trinidad reflects,

Well had it not been for other *Mujeres* that supported me at the community college, I don't know I would have been able to figure out how to transfer. But once at the four-year, I knew I had to find my support system with other *Mujeres*. It's like a cycle, when you know what works, why change it.

Similarly, Frances shares,

After a class [at the UC] I connected with three *Mujeres* and we became really good friends. Thereafter we sat together and every derogatory comment stated in that racist classroom, we would always raise our hands together and say something.... That's where I met part of my support. I felt very connected and comfortable around them. Some of those women also took Dr. Sandoval's class and that's how I ended up feeling a sense of community. I now knew other women who were also experiencing multiple forms of discrimination, exclusion, segregation, and could learn how to verbalize and call people out on their shit. Finally, I didn't feel isolated, alienated, or excluded.

The *Mujeres*' transfer epistemology allows them to recall necessary skills and emotions to successfully address situations, or confrontations, while at the four-year institution. The power of memory and multiple forms of knowing, allowed the *Mujeres* to successfully navigate the four-year institution. This was especially important given that as transfer students, they felt restricted on their time to obtain their baccalaureate degree. The transfer epistemology allowed them to determine when to take their time with certain needs and when to rush and, what Luna calls, "get over" other matters. While their lived experiences was a source of navigational strength, an additional element of the *Mujeres*' focus, accountability, and commitment to reach their educational goal was their parents unconditional support.

### *Familial Epistemic Consejos*

All of the *Mujeres* credit their parents for being the source of motivation and inspiration to overcome challenges and keep focus on their educational goals. As discussed in Chapter 4, despite the U.S. birth generational differences among the eight *Mujeres*, all are first-generation college students. The *Mujeres* recall their parents' consistent advice on the importance to become *educadas*<sup>27</sup>. In fact, because their parents did not have the opportunity to pursue a formal

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<sup>27</sup> formally educated women



education, the *Mujeres* felt they held the responsibility to obtain a college degree to honor their parents' dreams and sacrifices. Additionally, raised in working-class families, the *Mujeres* felt a greater responsibility to remember the economic hardships and adversity their parents overcame to provide a better future for them and their siblings. As such, their Familial Epistemic *Consejos* stem from their families' knowledge acquired through the experience of immigrant, working-class background and confrontation with various forms of adversities. The *consejos* are the voices and advice the *Mujeres* acquired through their parents and families' lifetime experience, serving as the strength and armor as the *Mujeres* navigated through educational systems to obtain their goals. As Monica notes,

Growing up, many Brown people in my community were service providers. As children of Brown folk, we were perceived as future service providers and were not given any opportunity, otherwise. I knew, as a very young child, there was something fundamentally wrong with that. It haunted me (tears). So I listened to my parents' *consejos*, '*con una educacion, tu puedes hacer lo que sueñas!*'<sup>28</sup> I knew I HAD to pursue a formal education. I may not have known what it all meant, but I knew nothing or no one would get in my way. My parents have sacrificed so much for me and my siblings (tears), pursuing a college education was the least I could do to honor my parents.

Similarly, Frances shares,

My entire college experience, from community college to [the UC], for me, it was about survival...it was just trying to figure out how to escape poverty. Hustling thru and pushing so many damn obstacles. It was tough as hell and I don't know if folks will ever understand the shit we go through just trying to transfer and then having to adjust to make it to the next phase. But I know somewhere in that complicated process, I really started to enjoy learning. Getting to the next phase would be hard – but I couldn't think about that, I had to remember how hard my dad worked his entire life as a *bracero*<sup>29</sup>. Thinking of my dad, I had to continue.

The *Mujeres' testimonios* support current literature on first-generation Latina/o college students noting the important role parents play in their aspirations and retention in college (Cuadraz, 2000; Ceja, 2001; Gandara, 1998, 2001, 2004; Perez, 2006; Talavera-Bustillos, 1998;

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<sup>28</sup> advise, "with a formal education, you can do anything you dream of!"

<sup>29</sup> labor worker

Villalpando, 2003; Yosso, 2004). In fact, all of the *Mujeres* in this study frequently thought of their parents and the adversity they overcame as a reminder to stay focused to reach their educational degree. Their parents' unconditional support and sacrifices served as the impetus to overcome obstacles along the way, to eventually obtain their baccalaureate and graduate degrees. Often when the *Mujeres* felt like giving up, they would take time to meditate and think about their parents and the *consejos* they provided. Remembering their parents' voices, literally, invoked courage to continue moving forward. As Maria Trinidad shares,

I would think about and remember my mom's voice, '*quiero que tengas un buen futuro. Quiero que seas una ejecutiva*<sup>30</sup>.' Though I didn't know what type of executive position I would pursue or how, but the fact was that her voice stayed with me. I carried her with me.

Many of the *Mujeres* mentioned "carrying" their parents' voices, *consejos* and dreams with them throughout their educational journey. This was especially important when their parents rejoiced in the *Mujeres*' success through their education. Though most of the parents did not understand the structure of postsecondary institutions nor the requirements to transfer and reach the next milestone, they were aware of how hard their daughters worked. Their parents always cheered them on and often expressed their emotions about the pride they held. Here Vanessa shares how her father was overwhelmingly proud of her acceptance to transfer to a UC campus,

My dad started crying because they know that I worked so hard. I would stay in my room for hours trying to figure out what college was and then trying and excelling in my classes. I was either locked up in my room doing all that work or out organizing and volunteering in the community. So all that work, they were really proud when I was accepted to transfer and knowing I'd be doing equally as hard work at [the UC]. My dad cried...and it just blew me away because I had never seen my dad cry. I know it meant so much to them because they always wanted to go to college – and I carried that with me throughout my hustles at [the four-year].

As transfer students, the *Mujeres* felt their commitment to their parents' dreams and aspirations were a source of motivation. Related to the adversity their parents faced, the *Mujeres*

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<sup>30</sup> I want you to have a good future. I want you to become an executive.

held sociopolitical critiques of racial, class, and linguistic oppression within their communities. Thus, the *Mujeres* were also committed to use their educational successes as a way to support and strengthen their communities. Monica recalls attending a Latino leadership summer camp while at the community college, where she gained a stronger commitment to her community. During this conference she learned about major historical Peoples in her community and exchanged stories about her own trajectory with many Latina/o students from Southern California. It was at this conference where she felt reenergized and committed to transferring and obtaining a graduate degree because, she thought,

“Cesar Chavez needs me! He and my community need me to be a lawyer. I have the responsibility to make a difference in and for my community!”

Similarly, Vanessa shares her experience of gaining this awareness while at the community college and solidifying her commitment to transfer and pursue a graduate degree,

As a Chicana whose family had been hustling all their lives, I was tired of what I witnessed in my community – youth was often shot and killed, kids pushed out of school, too many folks struggled to make ends meet. I met too many people who were marginalized and silenced. The simple fact that I could speak and read English shook me – I couldn’t take these privileges for granted so I knew I had to be committed and do something with it. I didn’t know what the difference was between a master’s to a JD or to an MD, but I knew folks in some power had a degree. Like I mentioned, I was not given a choice but attend a community college. The community college was my only entry to higher education. I didn’t know what college would be like, but I was damned if it didn’t give it a try and stick it through until I held a graduate degree. All of this is for the sake my family, my community, and myself - I have to do this and remember all of this when I feel like giving up.

As transfer students, the *Mujeres* often felt questioned, marginalized, stigmatized for not been given the opportunity to start the four-year institution immediately after high school. Despite these challenges, the navigational tools they employed at the four-year institution stemmed from their lived experiences and historicity as transfer students. Their transfer epistemology allowed the *Mujeres* to invoke emotions, skills, and strategies to successfully

navigate the four-year institution. Especially when confronting negative situations, they invoked the strength through their parents' *consejos* and experiences as reminders of their communities' needs, to forge ahead.

### **Summary of Chicana Transfer Experiences at Four-Year Institutions**

This discussion section documents the institutional barriers, supportive factors, and the *Mujeres*' navigational strategies employed in their pursuit of the baccalaureate degree. It is not until we understand the various intersectional elements of the Chicana transfer four-year experience that we learn why, for example, their grades suffered to experience the transfer academic "transfer-shock" phenomena. The following summarizes the salient and critical elements of the Chicana transfer experience while at the four-year institution, aligned according to the former discussions: (a) Transfer-Obstructive Institutions Barriers; (b) Transfer-Supportive Institutional Factors; and (c) Chicana Navigational Tools through the Four-Year Experience.

### **Transfer-Obstructive Institutional Barriers at Four-Year Institutions**

Although the *Mujeres* experienced a sharp decline in grades, known as the academic "transfer-shock" phenomena (Cejda, 1994, 1997; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Laanan, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2001; Pascarella, 1999), their voices testify to the additional social, political, emotional, cultural, and linguistic transitions they encountered as they transferred to four-year institutions. As Students of Color, the *Mujeres* encountered overt forms of racism, classism, ageism, and languageism while at the four-year institution, but these forms of discrimination are exacerbated because of their transfer status. These, identified as *Transferism*, are the various forms of institutional neglect and disrespect against individuals that are community college transfer students. Documenting how four-year institutions often neglect to acknowledge the

transfer experience within faculty discourse and overall campus culture, meant confronting covert forms of oppression were that much more daunting. In addition to institutional transferism, the *Mujeres* note the following forms of discrimination as prominent barriers faced as transfer students:

*Racism* – forms of discrimination based on one’s race. *Mujeres* felt prejudged by the color of their skin. As Chicana women, the *Mujeres* felt perceived as inferior to the, as Frances names it, “the white system.” White faculty and white peers made overt derogatory comments about Communities and Students of Color, with no regard to how the *Mujeres* felt or thought about the discourse. Same faculties and students, too often, silenced the *Mujeres*’ opinions and counter-arguments.

*Classism* – forms of discrimination based on one’s socioeconomic class status. These were heightened by the institutional neglect of not providing critical, time-sensitive information on financial aid. Classism reinforced by the institutional neglect disregarding low-income, working-class needs; such as instituting mandatory lab fees to systematically push students out of these courses or the hidden travel fees to attend scholarly conferences. While on one hand the institution praises students whom obtain access to present research, for working-class students the additional costs associated with travel and lodging, exclude their participation in these scholarly endeavors. For working-class, transfer students this meant accessing timely information on what research opportunities are available and subsequently finding access to financially afford the opportunity to present.

*Ageism* - forms of discrimination based on one's age, or assumed age. Given the *Mujeres* average age upon transferring was 26, they were perceived as "too old" to be "traditional students" at the four-year institution. The *Mujeres* felt both non-transfer and young-transfer students prejudged them because of their age. Despite all *Mujeres* holding post-baccalaureate aspirations, faculty assumed because they were older students, the baccalaureate degree was the end all for these *Mujeres*.

*Languageism* – discrimination based on language tools employed in and out of classroom spaces. The *Mujeres* note the marginalization experienced based on the language tools they employed as recent transfer students. The freshmen experience allowed freshmen to adapt, learn, and practice theoretically sophisticated terminology used in conversation. While the *Mujeres* understood and could analyze equally theoretically dense terminology, their exposure to the linguistic culture was abrupt and took time to acclimate. During the linguistic transition, the *Mujeres* were ignored, silenced, and made to feel inferior for not employing "normalized" ways of speaking at the four-year institution.

An equally prominent form of discrimination the *Mujeres* confronted were faculty transfer-deficit perspectives. These examples noted in this manuscript, exemplify the intersectionalities with racism, classism, ageism and languageism.

#### *Faculty transfer-deficit perspectives*

A specific discussion to the address Faculty transfer-deficit perspectives was purposely drafted to identify the pivotal and possible detrimental role faculty play in the transfer student

experience. The *Mujeres* highlight several instances when faculty, often white faculty, created, sustained and allowed racist practices to occur in the classroom. Although these examples solidify how institutional systems normalize racist practices, these assaults were exacerbated because the *Mujeres* were transfer students. For example, the first faculty Vanessa encountered once she transferred to the UC campus was a white female faculty. However, it was the faculty's initial statements about students as she stated, "I know ya'll transfer students and clearly you can't write!" that perpetuate her deficit perspective on a cohort of transfer students. Additional examples of these transfer-deficit perspectives include the following: (1) faculty not calling on the *Mujeres* to participate in class; (2) ignoring, disregarding or rushing the *Mujeres* out of office hours when they sought academic assistance; (3) assuming the *Mujeres* did not aspire or held the potential to pursue graduate school; (4) ignoring the *Mujeres*' contributions in class and assuming they were "empty vessels"; and (5) perpetuating the "traditional" college experience as those entering the four-year institution right after high school. These type of comments and practices exacerbate the faculty transfer-deficit perspectives the *Mujeres* confronted as they transitioned and navigated towards their baccalaureate degree.

### **Transfer-Supportive Institutional Factors at Four-Year Institutions**

The two salient findings to help us understand the supportive factor contributing to the Chicana transfer experience are: (1) "Transfer-Receptive" Programs: Creating Transfer Communities; and (2) Faculty of Color, Female Faculty of Color Support. As such, it is equally important to highlight the institutional factors that, indeed, support the transfer student transition while at the four-year institution. Brief summaries discussing these two topics are found below.

### *“Transfer-receptive” programs: Creating Transfer Communities*

Jain et.al (2011) note “transfer-receptive culture” at a four-year institution is one that commits its resources and time to support transfer students navigate successfully in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree. Borrowing from this work, the “transfer-receptive” programs are those strategically purposeful programs that not only support transfer students through the four-year experience but also create a sense of community amongst students. As the *Mujeres* at the UC campus explain, having access to transfer-receptive programs allowed them to connect to other Transfer Students of Color, often Transfer Women of Color, which allowed them to create a sense of community and solidarity amongst those with similar experiences. Most importantly, these transfer-receptive programs not only supported transfer students once at the four-year, these sought, recruited and outreached to the *Mujeres* prior to their decision to attend this campus. The transfer-specific practices illustrate the four-year institution’s commitment to welcome the *Mujeres* and support them through their academic, social, and cultural transition to the four-year campus. These transfer-receptive programs were found only at one academic center at the UC campus, but reflect effective models that could be replicated by other four-year institutions. If replicated, other four-year campuses will demonstrate their willingness and commitment to support transfer students’ trajectories towards the baccalaureate degree and beyond.

### *Faculty of Color, Female Faculty of Color Support*

Despite confronting faculty with transfer-deficit perspectives, the *Mujeres* were able to meet and seek mentoring relationships with Faculty of Color. In fact, it was the rapport with Faculty of Color, and especially Female Faculty of Color, which provided the *Mujeres* the



opportunity to feel empowered as undergraduate students at the four-year institution. As the *Mujeres* note, Faculty and Female Faculty of Color were conscientious and respectful of the fact they were transfer students. These faculties did not belittle them or silence them in the classroom. In fact, these faculties employed culturally relevant and critical pedagogical practices that allowed the *Mujeres* to participate and engage to their full potential.

Unapologetically, the *Mujeres* note the raced, gendered, and classed similarities with these Faculties of Color were the critical nuances that strengthen their rapport. In fact, the *Mujeres* often said they could not connect or felt welcome with white faculty on their campus. Additionally, the *Mujeres* credit Faculty of Color at the four-year institution for acknowledging the transfer experience in their discourse and supporting their educational aspirations. The *Mujeres* note they wish the institution would acknowledge how these Faculties value students and enhance their learning opportunities. Additionally, the only regret the *Mujeres* had was not being able to access such supportive Faculty of Color, earlier in their educational journey. Had they accessed faculty like Dr. Ronaldo, Monica shares, “Imagine what my life and education as a transfer student would have been like?!”

### **Chicana Transfer Navigational Tools through the Four-Year Experience**

One of the most important navigational tools the *Mujeres* employed through the four-year was their multiple forms of knowing how to navigate postsecondary systems *because* they were transfer students. Two salient navigational tools employed through their four-year experience are summarized as: (1) Chicana Transfer Epistemology; and (2) Familial Epistemic *Consejos*.

### *Chicana Transfer Epistemology*

As transfer students, the *Mujeres* often felt questioned, marginalized, stigmatized for not been given the opportunity to start the four-year institution immediately after high school. Despite these challenges, the navigational tools they employed at the four-year institution stemmed from their lived experiences and historicity as transfer students. The *Mujeres*' Chicana transfer epistemology are the wealth of knowledge and experiences they possess as a result of starting their postsecondary education at the community college. Their transfer epistemology strengthens their learning, resiliency and skills identified through the experience of being transfer students. Additionally, the *Mujeres*' transfer epistemology allowed them to invoke emotions, feelings, and strategic memories to successfully navigate the four-year institution. Their epistemology was invoked as the *Mujeres* reflected on situations they encountered at the community college to circumvent barriers confronted at the four-year institution. Thus, transfer epistemology was a pivotal and grounding factor to utilize strategies and skills to strengthen their navigational tool kit.

### *Familial Epistemic Consejos*

When the *Mujeres* confronted negative situations through their educational journey and especially at the four-year institution, they invoked strength through their parents' epistemic *consejos* as the reminder to forge ahead. Their Familial Epistemic *Consejos* stem from their families' knowledge acquired through the experience of immigrant, working-class background and confrontation with various forms of adversities. The *consejos* are the voices and advice the *Mujeres* acquired through their parents and families' lifetime experience, serving as the strength and armor as the *Mujeres* navigated through educational systems to obtain their goals.

This study is the first attempt to specifically understand the Chicana transfer experience while at the four-year institution. By merging critical race theory and Chicana Feminist Epistemology (Chicana FE), the proposed Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis validate the Chicana lived transfer experience as valid forms of data. Additionally, the *Mujeres' testimonios*—their voices—ground and sharpen this body of work. By acknowledging the various forms of discrimination they encountered, the forms of support, and their own navigational strategies rooted on the fact they are Transfer *Mujeres* de Color, allows this study to forge a new research agenda on transfer students at the four-year institution and beyond. This is precisely what we will discuss in the next findings section – the Chicana transfer experience through graduate school preparation process.

### **Resiliency Continues: Chicana Transfer Experiences through the Graduate School Preparation Process**

U.S. doctoral production rates between 1990-2000 indicate Chicana recipients continue to be less than one percent in the nation (Solorzano, et.al, 2005; Watford, et. al, 2006). However, during this time frame, one out of four Chicana/o doctoral recipients began their postsecondary pathway at the community college. Thus Chicana/os are more likely than any other racial group to obtain a doctoral degree through the community college entry point (Solorzano, et.al, 2005; Rivas, et.al, 2007). As discussed in Chapter 1, within the last three years of analyses (1998-2000) for community college doctoral recipients, Chicana transfer students obtained doctoral degrees at higher rates than their male counterparts. Though many educational scholars have documented the various ways Chicana students are able to maneuver and succeed through their doctoral training (Achor & Morales, 1990; Alva, 1995; Blea, 1992; Cantú, 2001; Cuádriz, 1996; Cuádriz & Pierce, 1994; Gándara, 1982, 1995; Sandoval, 1999; Segura, 2003; Solórzano, 1993, 1998a;

Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Watford, et.al, 2006), only few studies have focused, specifically, on the Chicana experience through the graduate and doctoral application and selection process (Ceja & Rivas, 2003, 2010).

This study is the first attempt to not only understand the Chicana transfer experience while at the four-year institution, but also as they prepare to enter graduate school. In order to strengthen the educational pipeline for Chicana/o doctoral recipients, and especially Chicana transfer students, we centralize our attention on the *Mujeres'* trajectories to uncover what supported, what interfered, and how they were able to prepare for graduate school while at the four-year institution. While this findings section expands on the *Mujeres'* *testimonios* of their transfer trajectories at the four-year institution, we pay particular attention on their experiences through the graduate school preparation process.

### **Transfer-Obstructive Institutional Barriers**

The first discussion section of this findings chapter note the multiple forms of institutional barriers the *Mujeres* experienced as they transferred and transitioned into four-year institutions. These multiple forms of marginalization are further pronounced as the *Mujeres* prepare and navigate through the graduate school preparation process. The salient transfer-obstructive institutional barriers in their pursuit of a graduate education are highlighted in the following two sub-sections: (1) Time-sensitive gatekeepers: Challenging “normative” processes, and (2) Faculty and Faculty of Color Transfer-Deficit Perspectives. By understanding how these institutionalized practices prohibit, or attempt to prohibit, the *Mujeres* from pursuing a graduate education, we can learn how to reevaluate, dismantle and strengthen the educational pipeline and

increase the potential and possibility for Chicana transfer students to pursue and obtain graduate and doctoral degrees.

*Time-Sensitive Gatekeepers: Challenging Normative Processes*

All of the *Mujeres* held aspirations to pursue graduate school early in their educational trajectory. However, as first-generation college students, they often felt confused as to what graduate school meant or how one prepares to navigate the latter segment of education. As discussed in Chapter 4, four of the *Mujeres* held strong graduate school aspirations as community college students and were confident about what type of graduate degrees they would pursue. The other four *Mujeres* thought about as Frances describes, “what could be possible after the bachelor’s” and knew they would pursue “something” after their baccalaureate degree. These *Mujeres* did not solidify their graduate goals until after they received mentorship from Faculty of Color at the four-year institution. These will be further discussed in the Transfer-Supportive Institutional Factors towards graduate school. As such, all eight *Mujeres* held post-baccalaureate degree aspirations. However, as the *Mujeres* transferred to the four-year institution, they were overwhelmed with how soon they felt the need to apply to graduate school. Thus, time-sensitive gatekeepers discussed in this sub-section refer to the various types of information or resources the *Mujeres* felt they were at a disadvantage of accessing because of their transfer status.

Because they were not given the opportunity to spend four to five years at their baccalaureate granting institution, the *Mujeres* felt they were at a severe disadvantage in their attempt to prepare for graduate school. There are certain steps of the graduate school preparation process where, for example, establishing strong rapport with faculty would aid their request for graduate school letters of support. Unfortunately, as transfer students, the *Mujeres* felt non-

transfer students had this opportunity, while they did not hold a certain credibility to request these letters from faculty. As Monica shares,

I've said I wish we could have more and earlier access to Faculty like Dr. Ronaldo to truly learn critical pedagogy but also to gain that mentorship and motivation to pursue graduate school. I was fortunate to have this rapport with Dr. Ronaldo but I know too many other transfer students did not. They did not and when they were thinking of applying to graduate school, they were discouraged because they didn't know which faculty they would approach to ask for letters of support. If only we had more time, and known how proactive we should have been to seek these letters – that would have helped tremendously.

Though access to faculty mentoring relationships to request strong letters of support for graduate school are essential, Monica allows us to understand how time-sensitive establishing these relationships are for transfer students. Further, given most transfer students are at the four-year institution for two to three years, they are often rushed the very last year to weigh how important faculty letters are for graduate admission. All of the *Mujeres* note how “overwhelmingly rushed” their transfer experience and, in particular, graduate school preparation process was for them. Here Vanessa shares her experience of feeling overwhelmed with how rushed transfer students feel the need to learn and apply to graduate school. She states,

When people ask me to describe the transfer experience, I often say what I've heard other transfer students say, because it's so true: 'it's like you walk into a movie and it is half way thru, and you have to buckle down and figure out what the hell just happened during the first half to make it to the end!' But when they ask about how I prepared and applied to graduate school, I use the same analogy but say, 'it's like you walk into a movie for the last ten minutes and you're lucky to figure out what the hell happened throughout the entire f'ing movie to make the last ten minutes really count and get to the end!"

This sense of urgency to learn the graduate application process was heightened by the *Mujeres'* plan to pursue graduate school immediately after their baccalaureate degree. Because most of the *Mujeres* transferred at the average age of 25, they felt an urgency to apply to graduate school immediately. As Andrea shares,

As an older transfer student I felt that my time was running out. I couldn't afford to put graduate school off any longer and I was freaking out. I wanted to apply to grad school but I never sought counseling about what to do. Or rather, I wasn't sure where I could go to ask about what to do or how to do it.

As Andrea notes, coupled with the sense of urgency to learn and apply to graduate school, the *Mujeres* felt they were at an additional disadvantage for not knowing where to go or who to ask about the graduate school process. Frances shares similar experiences as she states,

In the process of applying [to graduate school] I wasn't sure if I was doing it right, it was an uncontrollable process of being confused, there was no direction. It was like, 'I'll just figure it out in the process!' It was not organized. I talked to Dr. Silvia about it and she said that I should apply...she didn't tell me which [program] to apply to, but encouraged me to stay motivated and focused to give myself that opportunity. I owe it to myself.

Only three of the *Mujeres* accessed student support programs and research opportunities, which helped navigate their graduate school preparation process. These will be further discussed in the Transfer-Supportive Institutional Factors. However, the other five *Mujeres* felt completely lost, rushed and overwhelmed about graduate school. Regardless of these feelings, they remained committed to learn quickly and apply to graduate school. In fact, the *Mujeres*' transfer epistemology strengthened their ability to navigate the graduate preparation process. As Natalia highlights,

It was the same thing like I did when I learned what transfer meant, how to prepare and apply to transfer [to the CSU]. This time around for graduate school, it was no different. I did it on my own, looking on line, asking friends and just making sure I kept on track. I never talked to a counselor about it. I read things online, I just remember it was a lot of reading involved. I didn't want to make a mistake and jeopardize my opportunity to move forward. But I can honestly say I did this on my own.

In addition to the overwhelming feeling of not having enough time to learn about the graduate school nor given the opportunity to establish faculty rapport to seek letters of support and research opportunities, the *Mujeres* also felt graduate school preparation was a "normalized process" for non-transfer students. Similar to Vanessa's earlier comments about faculty starting a

lecture or discussion by perpetuating the “traditional student experience as that of freshmen,” she also felt the advice and discourse on graduate school preparation perpetuated these experiences.

Here she explains,

It’s the same ‘ol shit. Students are invited to ‘Graduate School Informational Workshops’ or whatever they want to call them. The first time I attended a session, I walked in with a group of Transfer *Mujeres*. We walked in, waited for the presenter and the first thing she discussed were graduate school entrance exam requirements. So we’re sitting in this session thinking, ‘holy shit, but okay we gotta study for more tests!’ But then she states, ‘just remember your experience in high school, taking the SATs right before you applied to college.’ I swear I lit up. I raised my hand and asked her, ‘so what if we never took the SAT?’ [The presenter] looked at me confused and I swear she wanted to ask, ‘what do you mean you didn’t take the SAT?’ And I really wish she’d asked so that I’d put her in her place. Not everyone in that room took an SAT and applied to [this UC] right after high school. It’s the same shit, thinking and acting as though these spaces and processes are for a certain type of student - a certain type of student that doesn’t have my experience as a transfer student.

Vanessa’s experience, indeed, make us reflect on the type of discourse, training, and preparation the four-year institutions render to undergraduate students as they prepare for graduate school. A “transfer-receptive” institution would ensure the message and preparation for graduate school would include and support transfer students, and their experiences, through the process.

However, as the *Mujeres* note, being a transfer student places them at a disadvantage by not having enough time to learn and navigate the graduate school preparation process. As transfer students they did not have the opportunity to establish strong rapport with faculty nor seek the possibility to engage in research opportunities. The *Mujeres* learned, once at the four-year institution, research opportunities would make them strong and competitive graduate school applicants. However, as transfer students, Citlali often felt they “ran out of time to adequately prepare” and fully engage with faculty or research. Additionally, facing institutional agents who reinforce a “traditional” freshmen experience entry into college as the metaphor to apply to graduate school, further marginalize transfer students in their pursuit of a graduate degree. These



forms of marginalization and exclusion were further unmasked by the lack of support Faculty of Color disclosed as the *Mujeres* sought their support through the graduate school preparation process.

### *Faculty of Color Transfer-Deficit Perspectives*

Despite meeting few Faculty of Color who critically engaged students, especially transfer students, to support their graduate aspirations, not all Faculty of Color provided this type of support to the *Mujeres*. In fact, when the *Mujeres* thought about which faculty they would approach to request letters of support for graduate school, they immediately thought of the Faculty of Color whom they took courses with. As Vanessa shares,

Because I did have enough time to get to know professors as other students did, I just thought I'll ask the three faculties I've taken more course with. Given that I was a Chicana/o Studies major I figured, well these faculties would support me, why wouldn't they. I seriously thought they were committed to helping students get to the next step. But damn was I wrong.

Vanessa, as many of the *Mujeres*, assumed because Chicana/o Faculty of Color taught courses on the experiences of Communities of Color facing systemic, institutionalized and historical oppression, they would hold the dignity to teach and support students' pursuit of higher education. Contrary to this belief, the *Mujeres* quickly learned not all Faculty of Color were supportive, and some of them held deficit perspectives about the academic potential of transfer students going onto graduate school. Here, Vanessa shares additional details about a particular Chicana/o Studies faculty, Dr. Endejo,

I finally decide to have the courage to meet with Dr. Endejo, whom I took for two Chicana/o studies courses. I scheduled a one-on-one meeting to ask for a letter of support for graduate school. I remember I walked in and he looked at me like he had no idea who I was or what I was doing there. That stung me. But I walked in, sat and reminded him I made an appointment to talk about graduate school. You should have seen his face – he rolled his eyes and said, 'ah, yes. I guess I remember!' He had the m'fing nerve to say

that. I seriously told myself, ‘I took this guy for two courses and if I got a letter of recommendation from him, that should look good on my graduate application.’ Of course without even asking him for an actual letter of support, he immediately interrupted and said, ‘well, I’m going on sabbatical out of the country, so I don’t know how much help I can be.’ ...Apparently not much help at all. So there goes that thought. Now I just wish I could write about his lack of support in my graduate application as the type of faculty I don’t want to become.

Similarly, Andrea discovered there was a graduate mentorship program offered through the UC Academic Center. Given that she was familiar with many UCAC transfer-specific programs, she felt comfortable approaching the graduate office. Especially because many staff were People of Color, she assumed she would receive the same respect and encouragement she received in other UCAC programs. She shares,

Finally I find a graduate mentoring program, so I went to visit the director who happened to be a Female Director of Color. I walked in and she just asked me what year I was and as soon as said I was a transfer student, her demeanor changed completely. She told me, ‘It’s a little too late to apply to graduate school now, but you could do it for the following year and this is what you should do...’ She tried to get me to apply to a master’s program, she didn’t think that I could get into a traditional department, like sociology or anthropology. She didn’t bother looking at my transcripts and [curriculum vitae] to know I was well experienced with research and competitive for a doctoral program. She didn’t see nor seem interested to know any of that. She didn’t even ask me what I wanted to do. All she knew was I was a transfer student wanting to go to grad school. She recommended I apply to social welfare or Chicana/o Studies programs. But I had never *ever* taken Chicana/o studies so I didn’t know how or why I would do that. She said, ‘What you would need to do is...well, who is the faculty you have worked with?’ ‘[History professor].’ ‘Well maybe you should apply to the Latin American master’s program [at this UC campus]?’ ‘I heard bad things about [this UC] program.’ ‘Well then, just apply so that it can just buy you some time.’ ‘Well I don’t want to buy time!’ ‘What you need to do is get faculty to write you letters of recommendation. You need to start building rapport with them. What do you want to do anyways?’ By then, I was through with her. I didn’t want to continue talking to her. Then I find out she was giving the same type of advise to other transfer students. Just my luck that was the only graduate mentor program I knew about.

Despite feeling welcomed and supported in the UCAC offices, Andrea’s experience with this Female Director of Color, point to the contradictions of unsafe spaces within safe spaces.

Though she and the *Mujeres* at the UC felt acknowledged and supported by UCAC's Director and program staff, there were some individuals that held preconceived notions of the potential of transfer students. In fact, for the *Mujeres* at the CSU and private campuses, aside from facing total institutional neglect of support for transfer student, they also encountered one-on-one experiences with Faculty that highlight this transfer neglect and ignorance. Natalia explains,

Some faculty see you- older transfers students - and quickly make assumptions about what you want to accomplish during your four-year experience or assume the bachelor's degree is it for you. Whereas I knew I wanted to obtain my teaching credentials and master's degree immediately after my bachelor's. Somehow, faculty did not resonate as supportive individuals and proved not to be. It's sad to admit but there were Faculty of Color that assumed I just wanted the bachelor's and that was the end of my education.

The *Mujeres* were cognizant of these deficit-perspectives and assumptions, rooted on the fact they were transfer students and its intersectionality with racism, classism and ageism.

Nonetheless, the *Mujeres* persevered to deflect these individuals from their path onto graduate school. As Vanessa reminds us,

I don't care if [the faculty] can't see pass this but my baccalaureate degree is not the end all for me. This is just part of my strategy.

Indeed, with strategies on how to obtain graduate and doctoral degrees, the *Mujeres* sought productive and supportive Faculty and peers to support them through the graduate school preparation process. In fact, invoking their transfer epistemology, in order to navigate a system successfully, they surrounded themselves with positive individuals that understood, or at least, not judge them on the basis of being transfer students. As we learn in the following section, transfer-supportive institutional factors took forms in transfer-specific programming and continued support from conscientious Faculty Color.

## **Transfer-Supportive Institutional Factors**

The first discussion on transfer-supportive institutional factors note the multiple forms of support the *Mujeres* experienced as they transferred and transitioned into four-year institutions. These multiple forms of support are further pronounced, and critically pivotal, as the *Mujeres* prepare and navigate through the graduate school preparation process. The salient transfer-supportive institutional factors evident in their pursuit of a graduate education are highlighted in the following two sub-sections: (1) Making it Possible: Understanding the Important Role of Transfer-Specific Programs and Transfer Peer Support, and (2) Research Opportunities: Understanding the Importance of Faculty of Color support. By understanding how these institutionalized practices encourage and support the *Mujeres* to pursue a graduate education, we can learn how to replicate some of these mechanisms to increase the potential and possibility for Chicana transfer students to pursue and obtain graduate degrees.

### *Making it Possible: Understanding the Importance of Transfer-Specific Programs and Transfer Peer Support*

As noted in the Transfer-Supportive Institutional Factors section, the *Mujeres* who transferred to the UC campus had access to transfer-specific support systems. Discussed as “transfer-receptive” programming, the *Mujeres* felt there was a sense of institutional commitment and dedication to ensure they be supported through their undergraduate education and, in this discussion, onto graduate school. As such, it is equally important to note, the following discussion on the access to transfer-specific support and mentoring programs derive from the *Mujeres* at the UC campus.

As established, the *Mujeres* at the UC campus were compelled to attend this campus due to the prominent transfer-specific support of community college students. These *Mujeres*, on

several occasions spoke about the instrumental role UCAC's transfer programs emphasized the importance of pursuing graduate school. Here Monica shares,

I think [UCAC's transfer summer program] put my spirit in a different place and I started focusing on my grades and my goal was to be a lawyer [when I transferred]. I never thought about pursuing a master's or PhD until I got to [the UC] and UCAC's transfer summer program threw all this graduate school information at you. I wanted to know what my options were. Right away I started going to tutoring and wanted to learn more about the idea of what research was. I didn't know what research was and [UCAC kept telling us] that we had to do that. Then I really focused in on reading; I really hadn't read as much as I was reading when I transferred here. UCAC transfer summer program taught me that if I don't read, there's no way that I'm going to get where I want to go. No one had ever told me that. I think if someone would have told me that at the community college I think I would have read a lot more because I was really good in following advice from mentors and advisors. But UCAC was different – they were strategic and purposeful on how they counseled and mentored transfer students, especially setting the expectation we would excel and held the potential to pursue graduate school.

Vanessa expresses similar experiences with UCAC programming,

I knew the bachelor's was not the end of my educational learning. I wasn't sure on whether I would pursue a master's or a doctorate when I transferred, but I had a strategy. I purposely chose to attend [this UC] because as part of the UC system I knew it had many resources other campuses did not have. But specifically participating in [UCAC's] community college training programs and witnessing their transfer recruitment efforts, I knew someone or somehow the programs would support my goal of going to graduate school. I knew I could ask counselors or peer mentors about the process of applying – I just didn't realize how rushed everything would be.

All of the UC *Mujeres* spoke about the important role UCAC transfer programs played in their trajectory to the baccalaureate and towards graduate school. In addition to staff and Faculty of Color mentoring students through these programs, peer transfer support proved to be that much more critical. Though UCAC provided critical information about the process and importance of pursuing post-baccalaureate degrees, it was the space and opportunity to engage with other transfer students that proved to be essential. As Vanessa explains,

I don't think it was just that we had access to these transfer programs – they helped tremendously, but it was the other transfer students and *Mujeres* that helped me through the graduate school application process. We started holding our own sessions, at each other's apartments or somewhere on campus, to talk and vent, really, about the stress and

pressure we felt getting ready to apply. We held fears and doubts about the process, especially because we all felt rushed, but the fact we were there to listen and support each other is what made it bearable.

Additionally, Frances shares,

I wasn't alone. I was confused, no doubt, but I knew I wasn't alone. There were many of us feeling excluded and marginalized, but despite these barriers we made it happen. We kept each other motivated to keep pushing through all the bullshit [the institution] would throw at us.

The importance of having access to transfer peer support was also clear for the *Mujeres* who transferred to the CSU and private schools. Especially because they did not see or access any type of institutional support of transfer students, they sought their own. Maria Trinidad shares,

I really did feel the CSU took us for granted. Maybe because there were so many of us as transfer students they figured we would support each other anyway, but I don't want to give them credit for our own hustle – they simply didn't provide any programs for us. But because I knew how important the *Mujeres* at my community college were to get me to transfer, I sought other transfer *Mujeres* [at the four-year] to keep each other accountable to actually finish and go on to graduate school.

Natalia, also at the CSU, did not have a support group but established support with one of her friends who was also applying to graduate school. She notes,

I did everything by myself. I looked online and just made sure I kept on track. But because I was so shy - I've always been shy – I didn't have like a community of support or anyone to go to. But I knew one girl in my class who had mentioned, in passing, she was thinking about graduate school. I remember that – so I asked her where she was applying and how she was doing with the application. She said she didn't know anyone else applying to a master's program. So with that conversation, we started checking-in with each other to see how we could help one another. But if you think about it, it shouldn't have to be that way – it just shouldn't. Then we see the statistics about Latinas/Chicanas in graduate school, and it all makes sense.

The *Mujeres*' transfer epistemology ignited their quest for support with other transfer women. Had it not been for transfer peer support, some of the *Mujeres* would have navigated the entire graduate school preparation and application on their own. For example, Vanessa and a group of transfer *Mujeres* took the initiative to start a *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio*

*Social*<sup>31</sup> (MALCS) chapter on their campus, to ensure acceptance to graduate school be their commitment while seeking support from Female Faculty of Color outside of the UC institution. As part of their navigation through the graduate school preparation process, this will be further explained in the Chicana Navigational Tool section.

As transfer students, the *Mujeres* felt their only way to succeed through the graduate school preparation and application process was to seek transfer peer support. Although the *Mujeres* at the UC campus accessed transfer-specific programming, all of the *Mujeres* felt far more supported through their circle of peer support, often other Chicana transfer students. This is precisely why many of the *Mujeres* feel the graduate preparation process may be easier for freshmen, because they have more time to not only access graduate school information, build faculty rapport, obtain letters of recommendation and build *stronger* support amongst their peers. Ceja and Rivas (2003, 2010) in their study of the Chicana graduate school choice process, confirm transfer students interviewed note they felt restricted in their efforts to establish rapport with faculty and accessing graduate information in a timely manner to strengthen their application. Nonetheless, in their same study, for transfer and non-transfer students alike, being first-generation college students was the shared factor, which made the graduate process completely overwhelming and stressful. Thus, first-generation college students often experience similar restrictions in accessing necessary support and information to apply to graduate school. However, as the *Mujeres* in this study clearly articulate, the Chicana experience through the graduate school process is not homogenous.

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<sup>31</sup> MALCS is a national organization of Chicanas/Latinas and Native American women working in academia and in community settings with a common goal: to work toward the support, education and dissemination of Chicana/Latina and Native American women's issues. Through networking, meetings and an annual Summer Institute, MALCS members share information, offer support, and continue our struggle for social justice via presences in academe.

As transfer students their processes are often complicated by the fact they are challenged with: (a) the need to transition to the four-year institution; (b) stay abreast of their academic standing; (c) confront multiple forms of transferism; (d) simultaneously learn; and (e) apply to graduate school in an abbreviated time span. Thus, access to transfer-specific support programs and transfer peer support proved to be instrumental forms of encouragement to succeed through the graduate preparation process. Additionally, attaining research opportunities and mentoring relationships with Faculty of Color, kept the *Mujeres* motivated and focused on their intent to pursue graduate school, as discussed in the following section.

#### *Research Opportunities: Understanding the Importance of Faculty of Color Support*

In order to strengthen their application and opportunity to gain acceptance into graduate school, the *Mujeres* were aware of the importance to obtain undergraduate research experience. This was especially communicated to the four *Mujeres* at the tier 1 research UC institution. All four of the *Mujeres* at the UC and Maria Trinidad at the CSU, engaged in undergraduate research projects. In fact, the four *Mujeres* at the UC were, personally, invited to join research projects by Faculty of Color. Maria Trinidad, because there were no transfer-specific programs on her campus, sought the research opportunity through the Sally Casanova Pre-Doctoral research training program<sup>32</sup> offered at the CSU system. As Maria Trinidad expands,

I applied to the Sally Casanova program because I missed the deadline to apply to the McNair program<sup>33</sup>. I attended the McNair recruitment seminar and it wasn't until then that things were explained. I didn't know you could go straight into a PhD without a

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<sup>32</sup> Sally Casanova Pre-Doctoral Research Program - is designed to increase the pool of university faculty by supporting the doctoral aspirations of individuals who are: current upper division or graduate students in the CSU, economically and educationally disadvantaged, interested in a university faculty career ([http://www.calstate.edu/predoc/cpdp\\_program.shtml](http://www.calstate.edu/predoc/cpdp_program.shtml)).

<sup>33</sup> Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Research Program's goal is to encourage and prepare students who are traditionally underrepresented in college to pursue graduate studies – specifically, the Ph.D. The program provides a variety of academic support and services (<http://mcnairscholars.com>).



master's in some programs, and that's a misconception. Folks think you need a master's and then a PhD, so Students of Color need more information, especially transfer students because we're thrown into the four-year and then rushed out of there. But because I missed the deadline I did my homework – had to find out if there were other programs similar to that one because I was committed to go on to grad school.

Maria Trinidad's commitment to pursue graduate school allowed her to seek research opportunities while simultaneously obtain information about the graduate application process. As she elaborates,

Had it not been for the Sally Casanova program, I don't think I would have known what research meant. I, for sure, wouldn't have had the opportunity to do a summer research program with Dr. Ronaldo at [the UC campus]. Are you kidding me? I was able to do research with a leading scholar in education. How many transfer students get to learn how to conduct research and then get mentored by faculty like Dr. Ronaldo.

Similar to Maria Trinidad's experience, all of the *Mujeres* knew the importance to engage in research projects, but did not understand the process of conducting research. As Vanessa also explains,

I seriously though research consisted of a lab coat or really intensive stuff like dissecting animals. I thought research was more for the life and hard/physical sciences. So I didn't realize you could do research through texts. I quickly realized I had already done it on my own at the community college, which made me that much more interested in it. But when I took Dr. Ronaldo's class – the way he broke down statistics, all based on his research projects with other Chicana students – that spoke to me. All this time I had questions too. Questions, that now, learned could be answered through social science research and empirical evidence. Are you kidding me? I wanted to know how to do that ... I've had so many questions that need to be answered.

Upon understanding the research process, all of the *Mujeres* at the UC campus sought ways to engage. In fact, all of the UC *Mujeres* note the defining moment they understood “research” and simultaneously help solidify their graduate school aspirations were through the advice and mentorship received by conscientious Faculty of Color. In fact, all of the UC *Mujeres* credit Dr. Ronaldo for, as Monica states, “lighting the fire of inquiry” and reminding them to “stay focused on the goal” of obtaining their doctoral degree. But in addition to the motivation Dr. Ronaldo

provided to the *Mujeres* at the UC campus, Monica explains his purposeful and conscientious way of mentoring towards graduate school, as she states,

So here's Dr. Ronaldo offering me a research position, doesn't say how much he'd pay an hour although if he would have said to do it for free I would probably still say yes, right? So he tells me to go to the education department. If he would have told me then that I would end up here 10 years later I would have said, 'yeah right!'

He told me, 'You're going to meet other *Mujeres*.'

'Okay!'

'They're all graduate students.'

'Okay!'

I truthfully had no idea what that meant, so I showed up and remember I was so nervous. All I knew was that I would meet some Chicana/Latina *Mujeres* and so I technically met his first cohort of doctoral students. One of the things I also remember Dr. Ronaldo saying in front of me to these *Mujeres* was, 'Your job is not only to request literature from Monica, your job is also to mentor her.' I sat there thinking, 'okay this is weird. Why are you saying things about me in front of me.' He basically laid it out on the table for them. That was a really solidifying experience in regards to the importance of my academic goals. Dr. Ronaldo was really intentional about involving me in those projects. He wanted me to hear about the graduate process; that's how I learned about qualifying exams, that's how I learned that there's five chapters in a dissertation; that's how I learned that you have to have a question for a research study. I didn't know any of that but because they all advised me, he advised me and mentored me in such an informal way that I quickly picked up. So when I began looking for graduate programs and eventually applied to the PhD, I felt like I already knew what I needed to do, the process wasn't totally foreign.

The purposeful forms of mentoring the *Mujeres* made Vanessa feel,

...like he knew we were transfer students and we were here for a short time. Dr. Ronaldo would get straight to the point to ensure that, as transfer students, we sped up and kept going.

Dr. Ronaldo and other Faculty of Color provided the *Mujeres* opportunities to engage in research while simultaneously offer critical information and motivation to pursue a graduate education.

Faculty of Color were a critical form of support and encouragement for the *Mujeres*' graduate aspirations. The fact these Faculties were of Color and respected them as students, irrespective of their transfer status, made these Faculties vital agents in their educational trajectories towards graduate school, and eventually the doctorate. As Frances explains,

Having access to faculty like Dr. Silvia, probably saved me because she was one of the only individuals who went out of her way to talk to me. I remember I walked late into her class because I was working two jobs and, before I got to know her, she kept an eye on me and noticed I was walking in late. After class she pulled me to the side and had a really good talk about what was I doing here, what did I want to do, why was I walking in late to her class, so she really called me out. I explained that I was working two jobs and was trying to get off earlier to make it to class. But that conversation really saved me because as a result of that one meeting, my grades dramatically changed as a result of having her as a mentor. I took all of her classes. I became one of her undergraduate researchers; she did much more than what I had ever received from anybody else. There's something about her that was very different from white faculty - she really truly cared about her students. I think to this day, I think I really pursued the doctorate because of Dr. Silvia and all of the stories she would share about her own experiences and everything she went through. That gave me hope. Another thing is that she was working-class and I was working-class, so hearing her stories gave me hope. Dr. Silvia was the very first person who made me feel like I could do it. She was the first person who encouraged me that I could do it. It was because of Dr. Silvia that I continued. She was the one who said, 'I want you to think about this!' That made me realize that she had faith in me and no matter what, she was always grounded.

Faculty of Color played a pivotal role in the *Mujeres'* aspirations and, eventually, pursuit of the doctorate. These Faculties, as the *Mujeres'* testify, are often the individuals that give them hope and encouragement to pursue a graduate education. In fact, for Natalia, Dr. Avina not only gave her hope but he was the first person to ever "plant the seed" of her ability to pursue a doctorate degree. Here she shares,

I know I was working twice as hard as other students. I was a transfer student, I wasn't put on that college academic track like many people. You see students that go straight into the UC after high school but that was never in my thought or reality. I had no intention of going to a PhD until Dr. Avina told me, 'You belong in a PhD program!' When Dr. Avina told me, 'You belong in a PhD!' I had no intention of applying but he planted that seed and I remember him saying, 'When you're in your PhD program... He didn't say, 'If you get to the PhD program...' He said WHEN you are in a PhD program. I also remember he reinforced this when I asked him to return my final paper. I turned it in but attached a self-addressed envelope because I requested to get it back because I wanted his feedback. I really wanted it back because I worked really-really hard on the paper knowing he would be grading it. He returned it and on the front page wrote...I still have the paper by the way...on the front page it said, 'You belong in a PhD program and I suggest you pursue it!' I read it twice and I seriously started crying. No one, ever, had so much faith in me pursuing a doctorate. Do you know what that meant to someone who's always been questioned and stigmatized for being a transfer student?

The fact these Faculty took the time to get to know the *Mujeres* and understand their experiences, made these faculty a rare commodity at the four-year institutions. Unfortunately, the *Mujeres* note there are very few conscientious Faculty of Color available to support them and as Maria Trinidad explains, “it was obvious they were burnt out!” As Vanessa further elaborates,

If you walk into the Chicana/o Studies or education department, you know whose office has a long line of students waiting to make an appointment or just to catch a glimpse of their mentors. I know it sounds cheezy, ‘trying to catch a glimpse of these people,’ but too often these are the only Faculty that acknowledge our experience and validate our presence at these damn institutions. Not that we solely rely on them, but they are important. I just wish the actual institution would acknowledge this, too.

Conscientious Faculty of Color play an important role in the *Mujeres*’ experience through the graduate school preparation process. Not only did these Faculties invite and engage the students to participate in research projects to strengthen their overall educational experience, research practicum would also increase the possibility of gaining graduate acceptance. However, in addition to these vital opportunities, it was the conscientious way these Faculties mentored and advised the *Mujeres*, which proved instrumental to solidify their aspirations and motivation to persevere towards graduate school.

### **Chicana Transfer Navigational Tools through the Graduate School Preparation Process**

The previous discussion addressed the critical role transfer-peer support, research opportunities and Faculties of Color played as the *Mujeres* prepared and navigated through the graduate school preparation process. However, it is equally important to note the *Mujeres*’ own navigational tools through the graduate preparation process which supported their trajectory, eventually, into graduate school. By understanding how and why these navigational tools were employed, scholars, educators and policy makers can learn how to support these efforts to increase the possibilities for more Chicana transfer students to pursue and obtain graduate

degrees. The navigational tools employed through the graduate school preparation process discussed in this section are: (1) Chicana Transfer *Lengua y Resistencia*; and (2) *Transferistas*: Soulfully Committed Chicana Transfer Students.

### *Chicana Transfer Lengua<sup>34</sup> y Resistencia<sup>35</sup>*

As noted in the *Transferism* discussion, the *Mujeres* confronted various forms of marginalization based on the color of their skin, class, age, and language tools they employed in academic spaces. These forms of *Transferism* were often perpetuated through institutionalized practices while others were employed through peer nonverbal gestures or covert verbal attacks on Communities of Color. The *Mujeres* note, all of these forms of discrimination against them were further pronounced on the basis that they were transfer students. Through the Chicana navigational tools discussed within the overall transfer experience and establishing a community of *Transferistas*, these discussion now lead us to highlight the *Mujeres*' successful trajectory through the graduate school preparation process: Chicana Transfer *Lengua y Resistencia*.

In the earlier discussion on how the *Mujeres* confronted languageism, their *testimonios* note specific examples of being ignored, silenced, and discriminated based on the language tools and terminology used as recent transfer students. Their transition to a new four-year culture involved learning a new academic language to articulate their critiques and, often, defense in covertly aggressive discussions. However, this did not mean their native language and tools as transfer students would be forgotten. In fact, all of the *Mujeres* note they learned the language and soon realized, as Luna notes, "what spaces to use them in." Here Vanessa shares,

It was obvious some faculty prefer a certain type of academic language. Though it was new to me because at my community college we were simply straight-forward about

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<sup>34</sup> tongue

<sup>35</sup> resistance

what we wanted to say and how to said it, here [at the four-year] it was all a way to systematically make us feel inferior. Here, this academic jargon was just that – jargon. At the end of the day it was pretty clear to me that I knew my shit. I knew what I was talking about and how these forms of discrimination we were so busy trying to theorize about, was impacting my community back home. So I learned to play their game. If they wanted me to cite scholars, I would. Knowing, very damn well, I learned about racism and xenophobia out in the streets. Seems like these [freshmen and faculty] don't know shit about that, or they choose not to acknowledge how they learned it.

In the process of transitioning into the four-year institution, the *Mujeres* negotiated how to acculturate to this new culture. Acculturation meant they would learn new terminology, academic calendar, rigorous requirements and confronting transfer-deficit perspectives all while retaining and strengthening their transfer epistemology and resistance through the process. As Frances highlights,

It got to the point where your heart, soul, and spirit could only take so much. Finding your support system is only one way to protect yourself. When confronted with overt racism and classism, they eventually take a toll on your mind and body. In the midst of reflection, I realized I had to send them all to hell. If I spoke in class and was the only one speaking against derogatory comments, so be it. I had to speak up, as hurtful as it may have been at the time, it would only hurt me that much more if I didn't speak up. So I did...and if people thought of me as the angry-brown-woman, I didn't care anymore.

As transfer students, the *Mujeres* soon realized their time at the four-year was a short-lived opportunity and found the strength to voice their perspective, offer their critique and solidify their aspirations, regardless of having institutional agents or systematic forms of discrimination question their presence. In using their voice as a defense mechanism, their *lengua* was an embodiment of their *resistencia*. Here, Vanessa narrates,

I got tired. I reached a stage in my life where I didn't care what they thought about me as a transfer student anymore. I quickly got tired of people assuming [this UC] campus was not for transfer students. I got tired of faculty talking about freshmen, or to freshmen. I got tired of little freshmen taking their presence here for granted, knowing so many of us worked our ass off to get here and so many other community college students and Youth of Color are doing everything they can to get here. I got tired. I was exhausted. I was so exhausted that I eventually had the courage to look at students and faculty and say, 'Well, fuck you too, then!' especially to the faculty that didn't want to support me

going onto graduate school. Fuck them! Now I can visit their pretty little office and show them my letter of acceptance to a doctoral program. So yeah, fuck them all!

The *Mujeres' lengua y resistencia* allowed them to keep moving forward, to persevere and meet their educational and personal aspirations. In fact, the sense of educational ownership by sharing their voice, also allowed the *Mujeres* to solidify their graduate school and doctoral aspirations. They, too, figured pursuing a doctorate would not only open doors for additional opportunities, but it would give them the platform to document and share their experiences in a way they were never allowed to through their educational trajectories. As Luna explains,

I wanted to pursue a PhD because I wanted to write! I wanted to write to talk about racism, sexism, trauma, political, systemic bullshit and social issues to revolt! (laughter). I wanted to be a writer to talk about experiences to have some validity. I figured that the only way that I would really say what I want to say and be heard is to get a PhD. So having a PhD after my name would have worth and somehow validated. I was damned if anyone would take that away from me.

Despite the various forms of neglect, disrespect and marginalization throughout entire educational journey, the *Mujeres* found courage and support in some Faculty of Color, transfer peers, their parents' *consejos*, and their own transfer epistemology. Invoking their transfer epistemology allowed for their navigational tools to accept and embrace the next educational phase in the pipeline. Their resiliency as transfer students, through multiple barriers, are highlighted as the *Mujeres* continue to confront various barriers as they pursue a graduate and doctoral education. The following section details the importance of *Trasferistas* and specific navigational tools employed to exude their resistance.

### *Transferistas: Soulfully Committed Chicana Transfer Students*

*Transferistas* refer to self-initiated and sustained community of Chicana transfer students committed to support one another to reach their educational goals. The following delineate critical elements of *Transferistas*:

- **The Concept.** Taking the concept of the college transfer function<sup>36</sup> and highly politicized students, *Transferistas* are identified and defined as a group of politicized Chicana students soulfully resistant and committed to their own movement from a community college to four-year institutions and beyond.
- **The Objective.** *Transferistas* seek institutional support to ensure the process by which their academic credits and aspirations are accepted by receiving institutions, not only for the transfer process but their entire transitional and navigational journey as they reach and obtain graduate and doctoral degrees.
- **The Process.** When receiving institutions do not provide any support, or not sufficient support, of transfer students, *Transferistas* form their own systems of support amongst a group of Chicana transfer students.
- **The Support Mechanism.** *Transferistas*' allies comprise of family, friends, significant others, community members, and highly motivated and racially/socially responsible educational agents willing to support, strengthen, and encourage the *Mujeres*' movement through the entire educational pipeline.

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<sup>36</sup> *College transfer* is the movement of students from one higher education institution to another and the process by which academic credits are accepted by a receiving institution (Hagedorn, 2005; Laanan, 2000, 2002; Townsend, 2000).



The following delineate some of the navigational tools employed by *Transferistas*, as noted in this study:

- **Creating Community.** *Transferistas* gain support and strength in numbers. Often their support groups consisted of two, five, or ten transfer Chicanas. Regardless of the quantity, it was the quality of support they receive and provide to one another which strengthens their sense of community, especially while at historically white four-year institutions.
- **Strategic Planning.** Upon creating their support group, the *Mujeres* would strategically plan what courses to enroll in, to support one another through study groups or voicing their perspectives in class. Other instances, the *Mujeres* would strategically attend workshops, lectures, or presentations as a cohort to make their presence physically obvious and verbally heard.
- **Lengua y Resistencia.** As noted in the former discussion – the *Mujeres* strategically enrolled in the same classes to speak against racist faculty or peers. Together, the *Mujeres* “protected” each other by speaking in support of each others’ perspectives.
- **Nonverbal Support.** The *Mujeres* created, often unconsciously, nonverbal gestures to acknowledge each other’s presence on campus, especially when they were the only Chicana/Brown *Mujeres* in the crowd or classrooms.
- **Off Campus Counter-spaces.** When the *Mujeres* did not have a space on campus to safely discuss their concerns or needs, they would meet on off-campus spaces such as their own apartments, parks, or restaurants to simply vent or seek advise.

- **On Campus Counter-spaces.** *Mujeres*, like Vanessa, and her transfer peers initiate strategic groups, such as MALCS, to carve spaces to call their own while at the four-year institution.
- **Tackling Financial Hustles.** The *Mujeres* would strategically plan alternative ways of raising funds to support their educational endeavors, such as creating and selling jewelry to fundraise their way to a scholarly conference. Other instances, for example, two cohorts of *Mujeres* would strategically plan which courses to enroll and purchase required course books. The following academic term, the cohorts would switch course enrollment and simply lend each other the required books.
- **Graduate School Navigation.** *Transferistas* would share information and support each other through the graduate school preparation process. Especially as transfer students, when one accessed time-sensitive information, they would immediately share the information with their peers in the attempt to expedite the process to strengthen their graduate preparation and application.

Employing their Chicana transfer epistemology, the *Mujeres* knew the important role other transfer Women of Color could provide as a source of information, motivation and accountability to reach their academic and personal goals. The *Mujeres* acquired this awareness as many community college peers supported their trajectory to transfer onto four-year institutions. Repeatedly the *Mujeres* made reference to the invaluable support they sought and obtained from other Chicana transfer students through their four-year experience, and especially the graduate school preparation process. As Vanessa explains,

Coming onto [the UC campus] as transfer students we experienced a prominent disconnect between scholarship and activism. The demand of the school makes it that much more difficult to bridge the two. However, founding the MALCS chapter on this

campus was very strategic. The support from these *Mujeres* meant not only accountability to keep the chapter strong, but we were able to hold each other accountable to bridge the two worlds while supporting each other meet our educational goals. That was so powerful being amongst so many supportive Brown, older, veteran scholars while supporting each other and us, especially as young scholar-activists wanting to pursue graduate school and eventually enter academia.

Vanessa and her peers' rationale for instituting a MALCS chapter was to purposefully carve a space within the institution to their own support and advocacy, on campus. Because Vanessa always felt she was fighting faculty and students' assumption the UC campus fostered and catered to the freshmen experience, she and her colleagues wanted to use the campus as a place of their own. Reserving rooms and utilizing space within the campus was a way to prove, they, as transfer students, had every right to maximize their time and use campus resources. Though Vanessa and the peer support of fellow Chicana transfer students formally create a space, this case an actual student organization at the UC campus, other *Mujeres* in this study established informal forms of support. As Frances states,

It was the few Women of Color in those racist classes that kept me grounded and accountable to speak up every time those white sorority girls would attack *Mujeres de Color*. It was like this secret club, only those of us Chicana/Latina-shades-of-Brown *Mujeres* know about. We had like a secret nonverbal language where we would simply look at each other, nod or whatever, and we knew we were on the same wavelength. That was the first time I didn't feel alone. They were essentially a form of protection against white racist faculty and students in classes. If it wasn't for these *Mujeres*, I don't know if I would be here now, as a doctoral student – you know what I mean?

Additional forms of *Transferista* support were found especially on and off campus environments. Both Natalia and Andrea commented that as transfer commuter students, they often could not attend tutorial sessions or join student organization because of their shortened amount of physical time on campus. However, their *Transferista* support came in the form of quick check-ins and email exchanges with other transfer students. Natalia explains,

It was hard for me to reach out to other students because, like I said, I was really shy. I don't think anyone will understand how shy I've been. But because I was so shy and I

was also a commuting student, I didn't get involved or have a lot of friends at [the CSU]. But when I reached out to the other *Mujer* who was also applying to graduate school, we started supporting each other by checking-in with each other on how we were moving forward. It was also the time when we started using email. Geesh, now I've dated myself. But email became my saving grace because she and I would then use email as a form of venting and counseling, if you will. That helped me so much.

Andrea also shares,

I think being a commuter student made a bigger impact on my experience as a transfer student. But because I was a commuter student I had to take full advantage of the time I was on campus. This is precisely why once hired as a UCAC tutor played a critical role in my experience at [the UC campus]. When I would sit at tutorial labs and didn't get any students, I would proactively meet with other, older, transfer students and just hear what they were doing. Especially when I was applying to doctoral programs, I would check-in with them like my soundboard. Because the director of the graduate mentor program was not helpful and discouraged me from applying to doctoral programs, other transfer students were really my source of information and confirmation I wasn't going crazy through the process of applying [to graduate school].

Informal ways of receiving *Transferista* support were also found by creating safe spaces outside of the classrooms and off campus. Vanessa and her peers often held study sessions and graduate school application dates, at her apartment. Similarly, Maria Trinidad and Luna would try to schedule dinners or other social outings with their peers as a way to “talk about what really mattered” off campus (Luna).

By creating their own spaces—on and off campus—and finding multiple ways to communicate—aloud, nonverbal, or email—these *testimonios* help us understand that as *Transferistas*, these *Mujeres* are soulfully resistant and committed to their own movement from a community college to four-year institutions and through their entire educational journey to reach and obtain graduate and doctoral degrees.

## **Summary of Chicana Transfer Experiences through the Graduate School Preparation Process**

This discussion section documents the institutional barriers, supportive factors, and the *Mujeres*' navigational strategies employed through the graduate school preparation process while at the four-year institution. It is not until we understand the various intersectional elements of the Chicana transfer graduate school preparation process that we learn why, for example, some of the *Mujeres* felt systematically excluded from applying to graduate school. The following summarizes the salient and critical elements of the Chicana transfer trajectories preparing for graduate school, aligned according to the former discussions: (a) Transfer-Obstructive Institutions Barriers; (b) Transfer-Supportive Institutional Factors; and (c) Chicana Navigational Tools through the Graduate School Preparation Process.

### **Transfer-Obstructive Institutional Barriers through the Graduate School Preparation Process**

By understanding how institutionalized practices prohibit, or attempt to prohibit, the *Mujeres* from pursuing a graduate education, we can learn how to reevaluate, dismantle and strengthen the educational pipeline and increase the potential and possibility for Chicana transfer students to pursue and obtain a graduate and doctoral degree. The two salient factors posed as barriers for the *Mujeres* were the following: Time-sensitive gatekeepers: challenging “normative” processes; and (2) Faculty of Color transfer-deficit perspectives.

#### *Time-sensitive gatekeepers: Challenging 'normative' processes*

All eight *Mujeres* held post-baccalaureate aspirations. However, as transfer students they often felt constraint by the limited time at the four-year institution to sufficiently prepare for graduate school. In fact, because of their transfer status, the *Mujeres* felt rushed to acclimate to

the four-year culture while simultaneously learn, prepare, and apply to graduate school. For these reasons, they often felt the process of applying to graduate school immediately after their baccalaureate was a process “normative” for those non-transfer students. In fact, when the *Mujeres* attended graduate school orientation and information sessions, presenters often advised students to “remember your experience of taking the SAT at the high school when you applied to college.” These types of advice reinforced a certain experience, which marginalized the *Mujeres* as transfer students.

These time-sensitive protocols include the following: (a) accessing pertinent information on what graduate school meant; (b) learning graduate school requirements, such as preparing for graduate entrance exams; (c) acknowledging the importance of acquiring research opportunities; (d) acquiring research opportunities; (e) establishing rapport with faculty to seek letters of recommendations; and (f) allocating financial resources for cost of applications. Accordingly, the *Mujeres* felt had not been transfer students, they would have a longer period of time to establish rapport with faculties and acquire appropriate support to strengthen their graduate application. Nonetheless, seven of the eight *Mujeres* persevered and applied to graduate school, despite these time-sensitive gatekeepers. However, only five of the seven were admitted to a graduate program. The two that did not gain acceptance and the one *Mujer* who chose not to apply altogether, all note that had they had additional time to prepare and strengthen their application, they trajectories could have taken a different route.

#### *Faculty of Color transfer-deficit perspectives*

Despite accessing conscientious Faculty of Color who expressed support of their transfer presence and graduate aspirations, these were very few faculties. In fact, some Faculty of Color

held transfer-deficit perspectives, which questioned and challenged the *Mujeres*' potential as graduate students. Assuming Faculty of Color would be supportive of their graduate goals, the *Mujeres* sought these faculties for letters of recommendation or general advice. Some of the Faculty of Color or Staff of Color, provided misleading information about how the *Mujeres* should or could pursue graduate school. At other times, Faculty of Color, overtly denied their support of the *Mujeres*' pursuit of graduate school, by simply not making themselves available to mentor them. These examples reinforce transfer-deficit perspectives on the assumption transfer students would not be academically prepared to enter graduate school or simply need to find alternative routes "to buy them time" to better prepare.

### **Transfer-Supportive Institutional Factors through the Graduate School Preparation Process**

The two salient findings to help us understand the supportive factors contributing to the Chicana transfer experience through the graduate school preparation process are: (1) Making it Possible: Understanding the Importance of Transfer-Specific Programs and Transfer Peer Support; and (2) Research Opportunities: Understanding the Importance of Faculty of Color Support. As such, it is equally important to highlight the institutional factors that, indeed, support the transfer student preparation process towards graduate school. Brief summaries discussing these two topics are found below.

#### *Making it Possible: Understanding the Important Role of Transfer-Specific Programs and Transfer Peer Support*

Despite encountering institutional barriers attempting to prohibit their pursuit of graduate school, most of the *Mujeres* found graduate support amongst transfer peers. In fact, the transfer-specific programs offered at the UC campus, enabled the *Mujeres* to meet other transfer students

also experiencing and confronting similar barriers towards graduate school. Though the UCAC offered transfer-support programming to support the transfer transition and success towards the baccalaureate degree, the students utilized these spaces to create their graduate support systems. In fact, for students like Vanessa, she and Chicana transfer peers, established a chapter of the MALCS organization to strategically support each other through the graduate application process and into graduate school.

Had it not been for transfer-specific programs and spaces, some of the UC *Mujeres* would have navigated the graduate process alone. In fact, for the *Mujeres* at the CSU and private schools, who did not access transfer-specific programs, indeed, navigated the graduate preparation process alone. As Natalia notes, “I had to fend for myself, again!” Though these *Mujeres* did not access programs or spaces to support them towards graduate school, self-initiated informal forms of support with other *Mujeres* sought them through these processes. Nonetheless, the importance of accessing transfer-specific programs while at the four-year institution reinforce the importance of the institution committing itself to support transfer students to not only reach the baccalaureate but also have support mechanisms to reach graduate and doctoral programs.

#### *Research Opportunities: Understanding the Importance of Faculty of Color Support*

All four *Mujeres* at the UC campus and Maria Trinidad, at the CSU, gained research opportunities during their undergraduate careers while at the four-year institution. Upon understanding the important role research could play in their graduate application, the *Mujeres* sought opportunities to engage. Fortunately, most of the Faculty of Color and Female Faculty of Color whom expressed genuine care for the *Mujeres*’ educational trajectories, invited them to join research projects. Through these research opportunities, Faculty of Color were able to



mentor the *Mujeres* through the graduate school preparation process. In fact, Faculty, like Dr. Ronaldo, enacted critical pedagogical mentoring skills to ensure students like Monica, Vanessa, and Frances could “see themselves as graduate students” often because, as Monica shares, “the expectation was clearly stated at the very beginning. Dr. Ronaldo purposely invited me to allow me to see graduate school was not only an option, but a realistic option.”

These mentoring relationships were fruitful and beneficial to the *Mujeres*’ trajectories towards graduate school. As Ceja and Rivas (2010) note, same-race and same-gender faculty relationships prove to be more meaningful for Chicanas with aspirations towards graduate and doctoral programs. The fact the *Mujeres* felt a connection to the research these faculties invited them to practice, but on the individual level – connected to these individuals on the bases of their racial, cultural, linguistic, and class-sensitivity and pedagogical mentoring, strengthen the *Mujeres*’ aspirations to make it into and through graduate school.

### **Chicana Transfer Navigational Tools through the Graduate School Preparation Process**

Some of the most important navigational tools the *Mujeres* employed through their graduate school preparation process are ways they found to voice their needs and critiques of the four-year institutions and building strong relationships with other Chicana transfer students to ensure they reached their educational goals. As such, the two salient navigational tools en route to graduate school are: (1) Chicana Transfer *Lengua y Resistencia*; and (2) *Transferistas: Soulfully Resistant Chicana Transfer Students*.

#### *Chicana Transfer Lengua y Resistencia*

Despite abruptly encountering an entirely new four-year institutional culture, the *Mujeres* quickly learned and acculturated to the new environment. Acknowledging when racist, classist,

or ageist comments would be voiced against them as transfer students or as *Mujeres de Color*, the *Mujeres* remembered their ability to “call them out,” as Frances shares. Using their voice as a defense mechanism, their *lengua* was an embodiment of their *resistencia*. To resist oppressive mechanisms, the *Mujeres* would simply name the assault and expressed their opinion about the matter. As transfer students, the *Mujeres* acknowledged their short-lived opportunity to engage at the four-year campus. As abruptly as they were faced to learn a new culture, they abruptly learned to use their voice and critique to resist various forms of transferism to ensure they reach their educational goals.

#### *Transferistas: Soulfully Resistant Chicana Transfer Students*

While their voice became a salient weapon through their trajectories, the creation of transfer communities with other Chicana transfer students solidified their “strength in numbers.” Though the UC *Mujeres* had accessed to transfer-specific programs, they also encountered the reality of having access to limited spaces which supported transfer students. Though these transfer-specific programs were offered through the UCAC, not all staff or students were supportive of transfer students, especially in their pursuit of graduate school. For the *Mujeres* at the CSU and private schools, who did not access transfer-specific programs, they navigated the graduate preparation process alone. As Natalia notes, “I had to fend for myself, again!” Though these *Mujeres* did not access programs or spaces to support them towards graduate school, self-initiated informal forms of support with other *Mujeres* sought them through these processes.

These self-initiated informal communities of support with other Chicana transfer students are what ignited the concept of *Transferistas*. Taking the concept of the college transfer function and highly politicized students, *Transferistas* are identified and defined as a group of politicized

Chicana students soulfully resistant and committed to their own movement from a community college to four-year institutions and beyond. *Transferistas* seek institutional support to ensure the process by which their academic credits and aspirations are accepted by receiving institutions, not only for the transfer process but their entire transitional and navigational journey as they reach and obtain graduate and doctoral degrees. Some of *Transferistas* navigational tools include the following: (a) Creating a sense of Chicana Transfer Communities; (b) Strategic planning course taking patterns; (c) Speaking out and for each other, discussed as *Lengua y Resistencia*; (d) Practicing nonverbal support, such as a nod or a wave to acknowledge each other's presence at the institution; (e) Creating on and off campus spaces; (f) Tackling Financial Hustles through innovative ways to financially support one another; and (g) Support each other as counselors, mentors, and resources through the graduate school preparation process.

This study is the first attempt to not only specifically understand the Chicana transfer experience while at the four-year institution but also understand their experience through the graduate preparation process. The *Mujeres' testimonios*—their voices—ground and sharpen this body of work. By acknowledging the various forms of discrimination they encountered, the forms of support, and their own navigational strategies towards their graduate school preparation process, forges a new research agenda. If, indeed, we are committed to strengthen the entire educational pipeline for transfer students, we must delineate research and policy to support them through each phase of the process until they successfully reach and obtain their desired graduate degree.

### **Soulfully Committed and Resilient *Transferistas* in Doctoral Programs**

This study is the first attempt to not only understand the Chicana transfer experience while at the four-year institution, but also as they prepare to enter graduate school. In order to

strengthen the educational pipeline for Chicana/o doctoral recipients, and especially Chicana transfer students, the previous discussion centralized on the *Mujeres*' trajectories to uncover what supported, what interfered, and how they were able to apply to graduate school. The following section summarizes the post-baccalaureate pathways of the eight *Mujeres*. These pathways ultimately note where and when they ultimately start their graduate and doctoral training. An abbreviated narrative for each of the *Mujeres* concludes this section.

Despite encountering various transfer-obstructive institutional barriers through the transfer experience and while applying to graduate school, the concept of *Transferistas* is reinforced in this section as the *Mujeres* continue to refer to their transfer peer support and key Faculty of Color as critical sources of motivation and encouragement into graduate school. In fact, seven of the eight *Mujeres* applied to graduate school while they simultaneously completed their baccalaureate degree (see Appendix E). Citlatli was the only *Mujer* who chose not to pursue graduate school immediately. As she shares,

I was burnt out. I knew it was time for me to work and get real-life experiences prior to applying to graduate school. At the same time, however, I didn't know what the heck I was suppose to do anyways. It had been such a long journey to transfer and get my B.A., that I was okay with not going to graduate school immediately.

Though many of the *Mujeres* felt "burnt out," their determination to obtain a graduate degree pushed them to move forward and apply to graduate school, despite being so tired. It is equally important to note, however, despite their determination, Monica and Frances did not get accepted to any of the graduate school programs they applied to. Here, Frances shares,

In all fairness, despite how tired I felt, I pushed myself to the limit. I applied to over 15 schools, even out of state schools. Although I didn't want to leave home, I still applied to see what was out there. But despite the hardships of applying to so many programs, I didn't get into any of them. I didn't get into any of them!

Similarly, Monica states,

I don't know if it was a blessing in disguise but I didn't get into any graduate program. At that time I was convinced I would be a lawyer, relate it somehow to education but I applied to law school. But I didn't get it. I figured I would use this opportunity to work and see what life would bring me. Luckily, this opportunity allowed me to work with college students.

For both Monica and Frances, despite going through the stress and hardships to submit graduate applications and not receive admittance to any one program, their resiliency proved to see matters in the positive light. Both *Mujeres* took the opportunity to work within educational settings to strengthen their interests and portfolio to reapply to graduate school.

The other five *Mujeres* applied to graduate programs and gained admission to the school and program of their choice. In fact, despite encountering faculty and graduate mentors whom discouraged her to apply to doctoral programs, Andrea was the only one who applied directly and was admitted into a doctoral program (see Appendix E). All the other *Mujeres* gained admission to Master's programs, while Natalia pursued a Master's and teaching credential joint program. Though admitted to a Master's program, Vanessa also applied to a couple of doctoral programs. The fact she was not admitted to any doctoral program immediately, she notes,

As a transfer student, I just don't think I had enough time to fully engage and make myself competitive for a doctoral program. I also feel that if somewhere along the advice of preparing for the application someone would have mentioned I could have asked community college faculty or counselors for a letter of recommendation, that may have helped me.

Given that transfer students are often present at the four-year institution for an average of two-three years, many of the *Mujeres* felt their rapport with community college faculty and counselors were stronger and could capture their readiness for graduate school in a way four-year faculty could not attest to. In their study of the Chicana graduate school choice process, Ceja and Rivas (2003, 2010) confirm transfer students interviewed note they felt restricted in their efforts to establish rapport with faculty and accessing graduate information in a timely manner to

strengthen their application. In fact, as discussed in the former section on Transfer-Obstructive Institutional Barriers in the Graduate School Preparation Process, all of the *Mujeres* in this study confirm this disadvantage as transfer students.

Despite these challenges, the *Mujeres* whom did not pursue a doctorate degree immediately, continued their pursuit towards this goal. As the latter part of Appendix E note, the *Mujeres*' resiliency and commitment to their educational aspirations allowed them to encounter various pathways towards the doctorate. For Monica and Frances, it took several attempts applying to graduate school before gaining acceptance to a master's program, which ultimately motivated them to apply to a doctoral program.

### *Las Ocho Mujeres*

Below is an abbreviated narrative for each of the *Mujeres* trajectories through work experience, graduate programs, eventually leading them to the doctorate. Another summary of their educational trajectories and where they are in the process of receiving their doctoral degree will be discussed in Chapter 6.

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#### *Andrea*

Immediately after her undergraduate career, she was admitted directly into a doctoral program in sociology at a UC campus. As she shares,

I had to be vigilant and deflect all those people who discouraged me to apply to the Ph.D. I knew it was possible but was distracted with people's comments about transfer students not being able to go straight through. So I met with professors who gave me A+'s and they all referred me to a Latina in the sociology department, Dr. Victoria. I met her and she said, 'Oh I heard about you!' Someone had mentioned me to her. We met and got along really well and she helped me through the graduate application. She looked over my personal statement and gave me all the pointers. I submitted my application and I got in... The application wasn't hard as my peers experienced, especially because Dr. Victoria was over looking the whole thing. I then found out I got accepted and received a

full ride. Can you believe that?! The only challenge was the GRE but that obviously didn't get in the way of my acceptance with a full ride.

Andrea continued to be engaged with the UCAC's transfer programming, to ensure other transfer students be prepared and apply to graduate and doctoral programs as well. The advantage she feels helped her gain acceptance was Dr. Victoria's mentorship and her "stubbornness" to get there (Andrea). Ultimately, her perseverance and commitment to her educational goals proved to be critical in her transition to a doctoral program as a transfer student.

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### *Citlali*

Completed her undergraduate work out of state. As discussed earlier, she decided to work before pursuing a graduate degree. After working in the arts for four years, she unexpectedly applied to a doctoral program in World Arts and Culture at a University of California campus. She applied to the program thinking it was a master's program and ultimately accepted her admission into the doctoral program. She shares,

I thought, 'I'm going to apply to this one program, I didn't feel ready to go to graduate school but if I get into this program, then it's destiny!' So that's what I thought. Again, I like to live my life by signs or guiding lights, or whatever. I applied to a doctoral program without even knowing it was a Ph.D., and I got in.

She further explains,

That's what I mean, I was never told anything specific about graduate programs from counselors or anyone at school. I learned about graduate school possibilities through my friends, and at the time I applied it was my significant other who was already in a graduate program. Watching him go through the technicalities of being a graduate student, allowed me to see and think, 'I can do that!' and then researched topics that may interest me. That's what I did – I followed signs that I thought of as destiny...and all of a sudden, I'm not in California pursuing a doctorate.

Though Citlali applied when she was ready, ultimately her help us understand, further, the importance of providing graduate school information to all students, especially transfer

students to ensure they have the opportunity to be well informed and apply to graduate programs in a timely manner.

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### *Frances*

Through the mentorship and encouragement she received from Dr. Silvia and Dr. Ronaldo, Frances was eager and committed to pursue a graduate degree. As discussed earlier, she went through the rigorous experience of applying to 15 programs, while completing her undergraduate degree. Despite her commitment through the process, she did not gain acceptance to any one program.

Despite Frances experiencing discouragement and disappointment through this process, she was committed to reapply and eventually obtain her doctorate. She decided to take advantage of the time between reapplying to graduate programs, as the possibility to strengthen her epistemology by gaining experience in community programs. Frances was committed to pursue graduate school as she shares,

It was 2 years out, but with these experiences helped me focused a bit more and I knew I had to return to graduate school. I applied only to a master's program in urban planning [at a UC campus]. I figured, 'I'm prepared so they better take me!' And they did!

Soon after, Frances pursued a second master's program at the same UC campus before applying to a doctoral program in Women's Studies.

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### *Luna*

After attending private schools to obtain a master's degree and teaching credential, Luna worked as an instructor for U.S. citizenship classes. She notes, "I wanted to help others while trying to figure out how to go after the Ph.D." She continued teaching while researching



programs that would support her becoming an author to write on critical social topics, such as racism, classism and other issues to empower disenfranchised communities. She ultimately applied to a [UC campus] as a “fluke,” she shares,

Well in 1998 I applied to sociology program at [a UC campus] and [a private school in Northern California], that’s what I wanted to do and figured sociology would get me to where I want to get. But I didn’t get in anywhere. I literally just said, ‘Fuck!! I’ll just try [another UC campus!’] I just figured, ‘Screw it, I’m just going to try if I don’t get in to [this UC] then I just won’t do it at all!’ It was really painful, I was really crushed that I didn’t get in anywhere so this was my last chance. (laughter) I didn’t even know the gravity of this program, I didn’t know [this UC campus] was ranked like the top school in the country, I didn’t know any of that! I didn’t know anything about research institutions. The only thing I knew was that it was close and I’ve been to [this UC’s sporting events] when I was a kid, this has to be a good school.’ I had no idea, no idea what the hell... even when I got there I still had no idea what I was getting myself into at all.

Despite not knowing what she got herself into, she successfully maneuvered additional barriers through her doctoral training to eventually become Dr. Luna. This will be further noted in Chapter 6.

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*Maria Trinidad*

After her undergraduate research and mentoring experience as a Sally Casanova scholar, Maria Trinidad decided to pursue a doctoral degree under the mentorship of Dr. Ronaldo. She immediately applied and was admitted to a master’s program at a UC campus. She credits her early access to research and rapport with Dr. Ronaldo for the opportunity to pursue a master’s degree. During her transition into the master’s program, she quickly realized she had the opportunity to apply to the doctoral program within the same department. Her transfer epistemology, once again, supported her through the process of adapting, transitioning, and quickly preparing to apply to the doctoral program. Balancing her personal, educational, and

familial responsibilities, she was determined to pursue a doctoral degree at [this UC campus].

She shares,

Although [the UC campus] wasn't giving me any funding, that's where I want to get my PhD and it's home. I still get to be at home and help my mom out, financially or however she may need my support with the younger [siblings]. We had just gotten a house and I had to help her out with that. She understood and that was a major factor—my family again. My family is always my heart and the fact that I didn't like [the out of state schools I visited] reinforced that I should do whatever I could to stay [at this UC campus].

Though Maria Trinidad did not receive graduate funding for her master's program, she successfully obtained information on how to access graduate funding. She proactively sought mentorship from advanced graduate Chicana students to know how to “hustle” for funding, especially as she was close to home and wanted to continue supporting them financially.

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*Monica*

Monica was devastated when she was not immediately admitted to any graduate programs the first time she applied. She was determined and motivated to pursue her graduate career immediately after her baccalaureate degree. Especially with the consistent support from UCAC programming, Dr. Ronaldo, and the mentorship she received through the research group of Chicana doctoral students, she was truly disappointed to not be given the opportunity to pursue her graduate training. She immediately decided she would take the opportunity to work with college students, to see, if indeed, she would pursue a degree and career in education.

Monica eventually reapplied a total of three times to graduate school, with no success. Here she shares,

I spent so much money on applications every cycle I applied, \$500, \$500-600, ridiculous amounts of money. I sent six to ten applications the first time around. The second time

around I chose four-five schools but didn't get into any of the programs. *Anywhere!* I was devastated! The first time I was okay with it because I was burnt out. The second time was when my husband called me out about law school so I was actually relieved. The third time around I was really excited about graduate school so when I didn't get in I was really devastated. I fell into a depression for about a year and a half.

Monica's resistance and commitment to obtain a graduate degree can not be overstated. She went through the process of applying and reapplying three times before, eventually, gaining acceptance to a master's program in a Private School in Northern California. While completing her master's program, she pulled courage to apply to a doctoral program in education and was successfully admitted to a UC campus to work with Dr. Ronaldo.

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### *Natalia*

Natalia is committed to teaching. In her mind, she wanted to pursue a master's and teaching credential. Indeed, after receiving her graduate degree and credentials, she taught for six years. After teaching for this time, she decided it was time to pursue a second master's degree in Chicana/o Studies at a CSU campus. She did not have any intention of pursuing a doctorate degree, this is precisely why she obtained a second master's. However, while completing her second master's degree, it was a Faculty of Color who advised and encouraged her to apply to a doctoral program. She immediately researched online to figure out the doctoral application process all over again. To her determination, she successfully gained admission into a doctoral education program at a UC campus.

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*Vanessa*

From her community college and through her experience at the four-year institution, she was committed to eventually reach a doctoral degree. As she repeatedly shared throughout her *testimonios*, despite institutional agents and students “questioning [her] ability, I have a strategic plan.” She, along with the *Mujeres* of MALCS, successfully submitted graduate school applications while simultaneously completed her baccalaureate degree. Though she applied to doctoral programs, she was not admitted to any of them. She was, however, admitted into a master’s program in education to work directly with Dr. Ronaldo. She was thrilled to know she would be working alongside one of the faculty members that consistently encouraged her to go on to graduate school. While in her master’s program, she applied and was admitted to stay at the same institution to continue her pursuits of a doctoral degree. Vanessa’s commitment and resistance through so many obstacles proved, she, indeed, had a strategy.

## Chapter 6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I begin with a brief summary of my findings, as aligned to my guiding research questions. I then highlight the significance and contributions to the field of education. Third, I outline research, programmatic, and policy recommendations. Fourth, I present future directions for this body of work. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of where the *Mujeres are ahora*<sup>37</sup> in their educational journey.

### Summary of Findings

This particular study grounds its premise from Critical Race Theory and Chicana Feminist Epistemology to create Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis, a lens where the researcher accounts for the *Mujeres*' multiple forms of knowing through their experiences as Chicana transfer students in each segment of postsecondary education. In order to understand the Chicana transfer student experience, their *Testimonios*—their voices—sharpens and strengthens this body of work. This study is guided by the following research questions:

Overarching Question:

*What is the Chicana transfer experience from community college and into the doctorate?*

Purposeful Questions:

- What are the experiences of Chicana community college transfer students at four-year institutions?
- What are the experiences of Chicana transfer students as they prepare for graduate school?

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- What were the institutional factors that supported or interfered with the *Mujeres*' educational trajectories at four-year institutions and graduate school preparation process?
- What were the navigational tools these *Mujeres* employed through their educational journey?

Throughout Chapter 5, the *Mujeres*' *testimonios* allow us to consider and answer each of the research questions. For purposes of this summative discussion, the following is structured to the following thematic pattern, led by a research question: (a) Transfer-Obstructive Institutional Barriers; (b) Transfer-Supportive Institutional Factors; and (c) *Transferistas*: Chicana Navigational Resistance. Distinctions between the *Mujeres*' overall four-year transfer experience or specific instances to their graduate school preparation process, will be noted where appropriate.

### **Transfer-Obstructive Institutional Barriers**

*What were the institutional factors that interfered with the Mujeres' educational trajectories at four-year institutions and graduate school preparation process?*

Although the *Mujeres* experienced a sharp decline in grades, known as the academic “transfer-shock” phenomena (Cejda, 1994, 1997; Glass & Harrington, 2002; Laanan, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2001; Pascarella, 1999), their voices testify to the additional social, political, emotional, cultural, and linguistic transitions they encountered as they transferred to four-year institutions. As Students of Color, the *Mujeres* encountered overt forms of racism, classism, ageism, and languageism while at the four-year institution, but these forms of discrimination are exacerbated because of their transfer status. These, identified as *Transferism*, are the various

forms of institutional neglect and disrespect against individuals that are community college transfer students. Documenting how four-year institutions often neglect to acknowledge the transfer experience within faculty discourse and overall campus culture, meant confronting covert forms of oppression were that much more daunting. An equally prominent form of discrimination the *Mujeres* confronted were faculty transfer-deficit perspectives. These examples noted in this manuscript, exemplify the intersectionalities with racism, classism, ageism and languageism.

The *Mujeres* highlight several instances when faculty, often white faculty, created, sustained and allowed racist practices to occur in the classroom. Although these examples solidify how institutional systems normalize racist practices, these assaults were exacerbated because the *Mujeres* were transfer students. For example, the first faculty Vanessa encountered once she transferred to the UC campus was a white female faculty. However, it was the faculty's initial statements about students as she stated, "I know ya'll transfer students and clearly you can't write!" that perpetuate her deficit perspective on a cohort of transfer students. Additional examples of these transfer-deficit perspectives include the following: (1) faculty not calling on the *Mujeres* to participate in class; (2) ignoring, disregarding or rushing the *Mujeres* out of office hours when they sought academic assistance; (3) assuming the *Mujeres* did not aspire or held the potential to pursue graduate school; (4) ignoring the *Mujeres*' contributions in class and assuming they were "empty vessels"; and (5) perpetuating the "traditional" college experience as those entering the four-year institution right after high school. These type of comments and practices exacerbate the faculty transfer-deficit perspectives the *Mujeres* confronted as they transitioned and navigated towards their baccalaureate degree.

All eight *Mujeres* held post-baccalaureate aspirations. However, as transfer students they often felt constraint by the limited time at the four-year institution to sufficiently prepare for graduate school. In fact, because of their transfer status, the *Mujeres* felt rushed to acclimate to the four-year culture while simultaneously learn, prepare, and apply to graduate school. For these reasons, they often felt the process of applying to graduate school immediately after their baccalaureate was a process “normative” for those non-transfer students. These time-sensitive protocols include the following: (a) accessing pertinent information on what graduate school meant; (b) learning graduate school requirements, such as preparing for graduate entrance exams; (c) acknowledging the importance of acquiring research opportunities; (d) acquiring research opportunities; (e) establishing rapport with faculty to seek letters of recommendations; and (f) allocating financial resources for cost of applications. Accordingly, the *Mujeres* felt had not been transfer students, they would have a longer period of time to establish rapport with faculties and acquire appropriate support to strengthen their graduate application.

Despite accessing conscientious Faculty of Color who expressed support of their transfer presence and graduate aspirations, these were very few faculties. In fact, some Faculty of Color held transfer-deficit perspectives, which questioned and challenged the *Mujeres*’ potential as graduate students. Assuming Faculty of Color would be supportive of their graduate goals, the *Mujeres* sought these faculties for letters of recommendation or general advise. Some of the Faculty of Color or Staff of Color, provided misleading information about how the *Mujeres* should or could pursue graduate school. At other times, Faculty of Color, overtly denied their support of the *Mujeres*’ pursuit of graduate school, by simply not making themselves available to mentor them. These examples reinforce transfer-deficit perspectives on the assumption transfer



students would not be academically prepared to enter graduate school or simply need to find alternative routes “to buy them time” to better prepare.

### **Transfer-Supportive Institutional Factors**

*What were the institutional factors that supported the Mujeres’ educational trajectories at four-year institutions and graduate school preparation process?*

“Transfer-receptive” programs are those strategically purposeful programs that not only support transfer students through the four-year experience but also create a sense of community amongst students. As the *Mujeres* at the UC campus explain, having access to transfer-receptive programs allowed them to connect to other Transfer Students of Color, often Transfer Women of Color, which allowed them to create a sense of community and solidarity amongst those with similar experiences. Most importantly, these transfer-receptive programs not only supported transfer students once at the four-year, these sought, recruited and outreached to the *Mujeres* prior to their decision to attend this campus. The transfer-specific practices illustrate the four-year institution’s commitment to welcome the *Mujeres* and support them through their academic, social, and cultural transition to the four-year campus. These transfer-receptive programs were found only at one academic center at the UC campus, but reflect effective models that could be replicated by other four-year institutions. If replicated, other four-year campuses will demonstrate their willingness and commitment to support transfer students’ trajectories towards the baccalaureate degree and beyond.

Despite confronting faculty with transfer-deficit perspectives, the *Mujeres* were able to meet and seek mentoring relationships with Faculty of Color. In fact, it was the rapport with Faculty of Color, and especially Female Faculty of Color, which provided the *Mujeres* the opportunity to feel empowered as undergraduate students at the four-year institution. As the

*Mujeres* note, Faculty and Female Faculty of Color were conscientious and respectful of the fact they were transfer students. These faculties did not belittle them or silence them in the classroom. In fact, these faculties employed culturally relevant and critical pedagogical practices that allowed the *Mujeres* to participate and engage to their full potential. Unapologetically, the *Mujeres* note the raced, gendered, and classed similarities with these Faculties of Color were the critical nuances that strengthen their rapport. In fact, the *Mujeres* often said they could not connect or felt welcome with white faculty on their campus. Additionally, the *Mujeres* credit Faculty of Color at the four-year institution for acknowledging the transfer experience in their discourse and supporting their educational aspirations. The *Mujeres* note they wish the institution would acknowledge how these Faculties value students and enhance their learning opportunities.

In fact, had it not been for transfer-specific programs and spaces, some of the UC *Mujeres* would have navigated the graduate process alone. In fact, for the *Mujeres* at the CSU and private schools, who did not access transfer-specific programs, indeed, navigated the graduate preparation process alone. As Natalia notes, “I had to fend for myself, again!” Though these *Mujeres* did not access programs or spaces to support them towards graduate school, self-initiated informal forms of support with other *Mujeres* sought them through these processes. Nonetheless, the importance of accessing transfer-specific programs while at the four-year institution reinforce the importance of the institution committing itself to support transfer students to not only reach the baccalaureate but also have support mechanisms to reach graduate and doctoral programs.

Upon understanding the important role research could play in their graduate application, the *Mujeres* sought opportunities to engage. Fortunately, most of the Faculty of Color and Female Faculty of Color whom expressed genuine care for the *Mujeres*’ educational trajectories,

invited them to join research projects. Through these research opportunities, Faculty of Color were able to mentor the *Mujeres* through the graduate school preparation process. In fact, Faculty, like Dr. Ronaldo, enacted critical pedagogical mentoring skills to ensure students like Monica, Vanessa, and Frances could “see themselves as graduate students” often because, as Monica shares, “the expectation was clearly stated at the very beginning.

These mentoring relationships were fruitful and beneficial to the *Mujeres*’ trajectories towards graduate school. As Ceja and Rivas (2010) note, same-race and same-gender faculty relationships prove to be more meaningful for Chicanas with aspirations towards graduate and doctoral programs. The fact the *Mujeres* felt a connection to the research these faculties invited them to practice, but on the individual level – connected to these individuals on the bases of their racial, cultural, linguistic, and class-sensitivity and pedagogical mentoring, strengthen the *Mujeres*’ aspirations to make it into and through graduate school.

### ***Transferistas: Chicana Navigational Resiliency***

*What were the navigational tools these Mujeres employed through their educational journey?*

As transfer students, the *Mujeres* often felt questioned, marginalized, stigmatized for not been given the opportunity to start the four-year institution immediately after high school. Despite these challenges, the navigational tools they employed at the four-year institution stemmed from their lived experiences and historicity as transfer students. The *Mujeres*’ Chicana transfer epistemology are the wealth of knowledge and experiences they possess as a result of starting their postsecondary education at the community college. Their transfer epistemology strengthens their learning, resiliency and skills identified through the experience of being transfer students. Additionally, the *Mujeres*’ transfer epistemology allowed them to invoke emotions,

feelings, and strategic memories to successfully navigate the four-year institution. Their epistemology was invoked as the *Mujeres* reflected on situations they encountered at the community college to circumvent barriers confronted at the four-year institution.

When the *Mujeres* confronted negative situations through their educational journey and especially at the four-year institution, they invoked strength through their parents' epistemic *consejos* as the reminder to forge ahead. Their Familial Epistemic *Consejos* stem from their families' knowledge acquired through the experience of immigrant, working-class background and confrontation with various forms of adversities. The *consejos* are the voices and advice the *Mujeres* acquired through their parents and families' lifetime experience, serving as the strength and armor as the *Mujeres* navigated through educational systems to obtain their goals.

Using their voice as a defense mechanism, their *lengua* was an embodiment of their *resistencia*. To resist oppressive mechanisms, the *Mujeres* would simply name the assault and expressed their opinion about the matter. As transfer students, the *Mujeres* acknowledged their short-lived opportunity to engage at the four-year campus. As abruptly as they were faced to learn a new culture, they abruptly learned to use their voice and critique to resist various forms of transferism to ensure they reach their educational goals. While their voice became a salient weapon through their trajectories, the creation of transfer communities with other Chicana transfer students solidified their "strength in numbers." Though the UC *Mujeres* had accessed to transfer-specific programs, they also encountered the reality of having access to limited spaces which supported transfer students.

These self-initiated informal communities of support with other Chicana transfer students are what ignited the concept of *Transferistas*. Taking the concept of the college transfer function and highly politicized students, *Transferistas* are identified and defined as a group of

politicized Chicana students soulfully resistant and committed to their own movement from a community college to four-year institutions and beyond. *Transferistas* seek institutional support to ensure the process by which their academic credits and aspirations are accepted by receiving institutions, not only for the transfer process but their entire transitional and navigational journey as they reach and obtain graduate and doctoral degrees. Some of *Transferistas* navigational tools include the following: (a) Creating a sense of Chicana Transfer Communities; (b) Strategic planning course taking patterns; (c) Speaking out and for each other, discussed as *Lengua y Resistencia*; (d) Practicing nonverbal support, such as a nod or a wave to acknowledge each other's presence at the institution; (e) Creating on and off campus spaces; (f) Tackling Financial Hustles through innovative ways to financially support one another; and (g) Support each other as counselors, mentors, and resources through the graduate school preparation process.

### **Significance and Contributions**

As the Chicana/o population continues to increase, these students also continue to be overrepresented at the community college system. Chicana/o students perceive the transfer opportunity as the vehicle to acquire a baccalaureate degree and eventually enter graduate and doctoral programs (Ornelas & Solorzano, 2002; Ornelas, 2002; Solorzano, Rivas, & Velez, 2005; Suarez, 2003). Public postsecondary systems continue to systematically exclude Students of Color, thus the significance of this study is to document how Chicana transfer students were able to maneuver through various institutional obstacles to be in pursuit of graduate and doctorate degrees (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Ornelas, 2002; Laden, 1995).

Particularly with an increase of Chicana doctorates going through the community college route, we must try to understand how the experiences of the *Mujeres* in this study can inform

researchers, policymakers, and students regarding issues of matriculation, participation, retention, and attainment within baccalaureate and graduate degree granting institutions. As such, this study is the first attempt to not only specifically understand the Chicana transfer experience while at the four-year institution but also understand their experience through the graduate preparation process. The *Mujeres' testimonios*—their voices—ground and sharpen this body of work. By acknowledging the various forms of discrimination they encountered, the forms of support, and their own navigational strategies towards their graduate school preparation process, forges a new research agenda. If, indeed, we are committed to strengthen the entire educational pipeline for transfer students, we must delineate research and policy to support them through each phase of the process until they successfully reach and obtain their desired graduate degree. Further, with the low number of Chicana students transferring to four-year institutions, we must consider the long-term effects difficulty to transfer may have on this entire community and society in general. Hence, the significance of this study is multi-fold:

- Chicana/o students will represent the plurality in the K-12 education system in California. If education attainment levels continue as they have to date, Chicana/o students will continue to represent the majority of students in the community college system in California. Given that California has the largest community college systems in the country, we must understand how educational resources and processes within community colleges may help shape the opportunities of Chicana/o students.
- Chicanas are more likely to go through the community college system, into four-year institutions, and eventually doctoral programs. Thus, this is the importance of this study, to document how Women of Color, particularly Chicanas, are able to negotiate through various systems of oppression in the attempt to obtain their academic degree(s).

- In the United States, the national status of Chicana/o doctorate production continue to be low. However, one of every four Chicana/o doctorate recipient began at their postsecondary education at the community college level. Clearly, community colleges may help shape the opportunity of Chicana/o students pursuing a doctoral degree. We need to further document how these processes help inform educators, researchers, and institutions at the local, regional, state, and national level how to address the educational needs of this growing population.
- Given that this study is the first attempt to document the experiences of Chicana transfer students at the four-year institutions and through their preparation to graduate school, this study forges a new research agenda, centralizing on pivotal elements such as the Mujeres' navigational strategies to confront various social, political, and cultural transitions through each segments of postsecondary education.
- Additionally, this is the first study to document difficult nuances often omitted from the literature on community college transfer students. By centralizing an analysis on race and racism, other forms of marginalization such as transferism, classism, ageism and languageism, allow us to uncover the multiple layers of complexity which define the Chicana transfer experience. In other words, this research unapologetically names the wounds, assaults, and triumphs of the Chicana transfer experience.
- By employing *testimonios* through *platicas* as the primary method, encourage researchers and practitioners to consider methodological platforms which welcome participants to reflect on what is important for them to recapture and share to define their educational trajectories.

## Study Recommendations

The Latina/o student population continues to increase and be concentrated in California's community colleges, the largest community college system in the United States. This study examines the experiences of eight Chicana community college transfer students at the four-year institutions and their pursuit of graduate degrees. The first study of its kind, I identify transfer-obstructive institutional barriers, transfer-supporting institutional factors, and their navigations tools to excel and reach their baccalaureate and graduate degrees. Several factors discussed will help increase with the retention of Chicana transfer students once they reach a four-year institution. I also identify issues that need further research if we are to better our understanding of the Chicana transfer experience. The following research, programmatic and policy recommendations are targeted at educators, administrators, counselors, and policy makers. If implemented, they will help increase educational access and opportunities for Chicana community college students through each segment of postsecondary education.

### *Research Recommendations*

Given the limited amount of research that is specific to the experiences of Chicana/o transfer students in all three tiers of public postsecondary education in California, I pose the following research questions. Addressing these points will strengthen quantitative methods to measure the status and attainment rates of transfer students by race/ethnicity, gender, class, and additional forms of marginalization, and will increase qualitative efforts to critically examine the day-to-day lived experiences, resiliency, and resistance of these students.

- **Transfer college choice process:** How do Chicana/o community college transfer students navigate the college choice process? How do transfer students select which four-year



institutions to apply to? How do they choose which institution to attend? How do community colleges and four-year institutions support students through these processes? What navigational strategies do students employ to navigate these processes?

- **Transfer students at four-year institutions:** How do Chicana/o transfer students navigate four-year institutions? What barriers do they overcome to attain their baccalaureate degrees? What factors help their success rates? How do four-year institutions encourage and support students who are en route to graduate school? How does the type of system (CSU, UC, Private) impact the way transfer students navigate towards the baccalaureate degree? How do Chicana/o transfer students navigate the graduate school choice process? What navigational strategies do students employ to navigate these processes?
- **Transfer students in graduate programs:** What are the experiences of Chicana/o transfer students at the graduate level? Does the transfer experience affect career choice and opportunities for these students? Is there a transfer-experience through graduate and doctoral programs? How are these experiences similar or different than other first-generation Chicana/o doctoral scholars?
- **Faculty of Color support of transfer students:** What are the experiences of Chicana/o transfer students with Faculty at four-year institutions? What are the experiences of Chicana/o transfer students with Faculty of Color at four-year institutions? What support mechanisms do Faculty and Faculty of Color employ to encourage transfer students through the four-year experience and beyond? How can institutional system support Faculty of Color who demonstrate to be essential agents in the transfer experience to obtain a baccalaureate degree and beyond?

### *Programmatic Recommendations*

As noted, the Latina/o student population continues to increase and be concentrated in California's community colleges, the largest community college system in the United States. This study outlines critical transfer experiences, which both interfered and supported eight Chicanas from community college to the doctorate. The following programmatic recommendation could potentially strengthen opportunities for a greater number of Chicana/o transfer students to navigate the latter part of the educational pipeline.

- Implement transfer-readiness and development training for counselors, faculty, and administrators at all segments of postsecondary education.
- Institutionalize professional development training on the community college transfer experience and pertinent data to challenge transfer-deficit perspectives, to counselors, faculty, and administrators at all segments of postsecondary education.
- Institutionalize a “transfer-receptive culture” at all four-year institutions in California (Jain, et. al, 2011).
- Initiate prospective-transfer summer research programs for current community college students. These should include mentoring relationships with faculty at both the community college and the four-year institution.
- Initiate transfer-specific summer research programs at four-year institutions for transfer students. These should include mentoring relationships with faculty at both the community college and the four-year institution.
- Initiate transfer-specific undergraduate programs at four-year institutions for transfer students. These should include mentoring relationships with faculty at the four-year institution, throughout the academic calendar.

- Replicate or expand transfer summer bridge programs for newly admitted transfer students to all CSU, UC campuses, and private institutions.
- Increase need-based and merit-based financial support for students by increasing the number of academic terms allocated to receive financial aid.
- Increase financial aid information for recent transfer students, especially pertaining to their eligibility requirements. Additional financial aid information should also include institutional support to ease financial pressures, such as travel/lodging aid for research conferences; waivers for graduate school applications; need-based discounts for graduate entrance exams costs, etc.
- Initiate transfer-specific graduate school preparation processes and mentoring programs, where presenters are sensitive to the needs and realities of transfer students. These would mitigate time-sensitive pressures while providing critical information, such as accessing strong letters of support from community college faculty and counselors, as a way to ensure transfer applicants have a strong opportunity for graduate admissions.
- Institutionalize processes for transfer students to initiate their own student organizations and support groups while at the four-year campus.

### *Policy Implications*

The California Community College segment of the education pipeline is essential for California's Latina/o students. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight that all segments of postsecondary education play a critical role to encourage and prepare students to transfer into a four-year institution and, ultimately, pursue a graduate degree. With this in mind, the following policy recommendations are offered:

- Prohibit budgetary cuts that will further marginalize community college Students of Color opportunity to maneuver through their pursuit of baccalaureate and graduate degrees in the United States.
- Though we want to ensure all students in California have the opportunity to prepare and have options for their postsecondary paths, Latina/o-Chicana/o students continue to be concentrated at the community college sector:
- Implement the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC) counseling manual at the high school level, to ensure those students who begin their postsecondary career at the community college are armed with appropriate tools and language to navigate through the transfer opportunity.
- Prioritize parents and families in the process of strengthening educational outcomes for Chicana/o students:
- Strengthen alliances between high schools, community colleges, four-year institutions and graduate programs to ensure outreach, mentorship, and retention of community college and transfer students through entire educational pipeline.
- Essentially strengthen a holistic approach of supportive services for a high school-college-graduate school-profession pipeline, with families and students at the center.
- Strengthen alliances between community colleges and four-year institutions to ensure outreach, mentorship, recruitment, enrollment, and retention of community college students.
- Prioritize and strengthen the transfer function and work to develop an institutionalized transfer culture at all community colleges.
- Prioritize and strengthen the transfer-receptive culture at all four-year institutions and graduate programs.

- Develop and train all faculty, staff, counselors, and institutional agents at the four-year experience about the transfer experience, trajectories, and aspirations.

### ***Las Ocho Mujeres Ahora***

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of *las ocho Mujeres* and where they are now, as this dissertation is filed. Though *testimonio platicas* were conducted in 2007, the five-year lapse allow us to understand where and how their educational trajectories have developed. However, this section also allow us to pose additional research questions, as outlined above, about potential areas warranted to fully understand the Chicana transfer experience through each segment of postsecondary education, especially through the last segment: the doctorate.

Table 7 indicates the following: (a) field of doctoral study; (b) estimated time to degree, as disclosed during the *testimonio platicas*; (c) primary source of funding during their doctoral education; (d) the *Mujeres*' year in their doctoral program during the *testimonio platicas*; (e) year in doctoral program as this dissertation is filed; and (f) the *Mujeres*' current status in their doctoral program.

**Table 5: *Las Ocho Mujeres Ahora* – Current Doctoral Trajectories**

<i>Mujer</i>	Doctoral Field of Study	Estimated Time to Degree*	Primary Source of Funding	Year in Doctoral Program During <i>Testimonio</i>	Year in Doctoral Program (2012)	Current Status in Doctoral Program (2012)
Andrea	Sociology	6 years	Loans, Work, Fellowships	4th	N/A	ABD, withdrew from Ph.D. (2010)
Citlali	World Arts & Culture	unsure	Loans, Work	5th	N/A	withdrew/pushed out of Ph.D. (2008)
Frances	Women Studies	unsure	Loans, Work, Fellowships, TAsHips	8th	13th	ABD, writing findings chapter
Luna	Education	8-9 years	Loans, Work	7th	Completed	Ph.D., 2012
Maria Trinidad	Education	5 years	Loans, Work, Fellowships	1st	6th	ABD, Spring 2012
Monica	Education	5-6 years	Work, TAsHips, Fellowships, Spousal Support	3rd	Completed	Ph.D., 2010
Natalia	Education	unsure	Work, Parental Support, Fellowships, Teaching	8th	N/A	ABD, withdrew from Ph.D. (2008)
Vanessa	Education	5-6 years	Loans, Fellowships, TAsHips	2nd	7th	passed qualifying exams, preparing for proposal defense

As highlighted, Monica and Luna successfully completed their doctoral degree over the course of this study. Maria Trinidad and Vanessa completed their coursework, and passed their qualifying exam. However, Maria Trinidad recently defended her dissertation proposal and received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to proceed with data collection for her study. Andrea, Citlali, and Natalia decided to withdraw from their doctoral programs. Both

Andrea and Citlali felt faculty in their respective departments were unable to support their proposed dissertation study. Additional elements such as overt racism, classism, sexism, and complete disregard to support their doctoral trajectories led them to withdraw. Natalia, though she receives unconditional support from her faculty advisor and successfully defended her dissertation proposal and collected all data for her study, familial and professional responsibilities pulled her from the program. These will be further discussed in the following individual synopsis through the *Mujeres'* pursuit of the doctorate.

---

*Andrea*

Andrea successfully defended her dissertation proposal. However, other than her doctoral advisor, she did not feel supported by other faculty in her department. Given that she completed her undergraduate degree at the same institution, she reached out for faculty support in other departments. Unfortunately, many were unable or unavailable to support her through her doctoral trajectory. Andrea decided to withdraw from the doctoral program and is, at this point, unsure whether she would return to complete her dissertation.

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*Citlali*

Tired of faculty declining to support her proposed dissertation topic, Andrea withdrew from doctoral program. Though she feels guilty leaving the program, after so much debt has been accumulated, she states,

There's only so much I can do in that department. If I always have to define what a 'Chicana' meant and why it's so important to me – I don't belong there. Though I decided to start the program because 'it was destiny,' I wasn't prepared for what I encountered.

Citlali, at this point, does not see nor plan to return and complete her doctoral degree.

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*Frances*

Frances successfully passed qualifying exams and dissertation proposal defense. After received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), she immediately began collective data. Currently she is writing her dissertation findings chapter, planning to file this year.

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*Luna*

Dr. Luna completed her dissertation and filed, successfully, during the Spring of 2012. She is the first Doctora in her family and plans to continue writing on topics such a social and political issues to revolt!

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*Maria Trinidad*

Maria Trinidad successfully passed qualifying exams and dissertation proposal defense. Currently as ABD status, she recently obtain approval to collect data for her dissertation study. She plans to write her dissertation and file within one year.

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*Monica*

Monica successfully completed and filed her dissertation in 2010. As the first *Doctora* in her family, she continues to mentor her younger siblings through the educational pipeline. Dr. Monica is currently a lecturer at a California State University campus.

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*Natalia*

Though Natalia withdrew from doctoral program after obtaining ABD status. Although she receives unconditional support from her faculty advisor and collected all data for her study, familial and professional responsibilities pulled her from the program. As she shares,

I pursued the Ph.D. because I love teaching. But now I'm teaching. I am not like many of the young scholars who want to publish and present and go through all of that. I see scholars, and clearly, I hold them in high regard. But my priority is teaching. I'm teaching now and loving every minute of it. The luxury is that I don't need a doctorate to teach where I'm at now. So it's difficult to say if I'll return at this point.

Natalia has not disregarded completing and obtaining her doctoral degree. However, at this point in her life, she is a successful faculty at a community college campus and will engage with her advisor to delineate realistic steps, and she'll consider then whether to return or not.

---

*Vanessa*

Vanessa successfully passed qualifying exams. She is currently writing her dissertation proposal. Though it has taken her longer than expected, she plans to defend in the 2012-2013 academic year and file within a two-three time frame.

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**Future Scholarly Work**

Given this is the first study to not only document the Chicana transfer experience at the four-year institution, but also their trajectories through the graduate school preparation process, this forges an solid research agenda centered on the Chicana transfer experience through each segment of postsecondary education. I will discuss the following, encompassing the future of my scholarly work: (1) Future analysis from *testimonio* data on the eight *Mujeres* in this study; (2) Delineate tenets of the Chicana transfer research agenda; (3) Necessary quantitative analyses of

the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) on Chicana transfer doctoral production rates; (4) Solidify theoretical, methodological and epistemological platforms to accurately honor and document the Chicana transfer experience through educational pipeline.

First, because this was a retrospective study of the Chicana transfer experience, with current doctoral students, I have the opportunity to further analyze *testimonio* data on the eight *Mujeres* ' experienced through graduate and doctoral programs. As noted in the last section of this chapter, three of the eight *Mujeres* withdrew from their doctoral programs. As such, I would want to explore the experiences of these *Mujeres* and understand another component of the literature that is omitted and neglected altogether: the experiences of doctoral non-completers, or as I would phrase – the experience of doctoral students pushed out of academe. To further analyze the current data, I propose the following research questions: What are the institutional factors that supported or interfered with the Chicana transfer experience in pursuit of their doctoral degree? What strategies did these *Mujeres* employ to navigate and reach their doctoral degree? Of those *Mujeres* who withdrew from the doctoral program, what institutional factors or personal decisions led to these outcomes?

Though the primary goal is to document the Chicana transfer experience of the eight *Mujeres* with current retrospective *testimonio* data, the overall goal is to strengthen an agenda on the Chicana transfer experience. As such, additional research studies that allow to further understand the Chicana transfer experience across the state of California is warranted. Cross-sectional studies on the Chicana transfer experience at the California State University, University of California, and private institutions would be helpful to understand similarities or differences amongst transfer experience between campus type and culture. Most importantly, future studies

should include theoretical and methodological approaches to allow qualitative efforts to critically examine the day-to-day lived experiences, resiliency, and resistance of these students.

Third, quantitative analyses of Chicana transfer doctoral productions need to be revisited. I propose an analysis of the Survey of Earned Doctorates for the 2000-2010 eleven-year time frame. Updating these data will allow us to further understand trend analysis of the transfer trajectory to the last stop of the educational pipeline. I would want to understand not only how many Chicana doctoral scholars began their postsecondary trajectory at the community college – but additional data, otherwise not documented:

- What fields are transfer doctorates obtaining their degree;
- What type of baccalaureate granting institution did they attend;
- What type of doctoral granting institution produces higher number of transfer doctoral scholars;
- Are Chicana transfer doctoral scholars obtaining degrees at slightly higher rates than their male counterparts;
- What type of faculty support and mentoring access do Chicana transfer doctoral scholars receive;
- What are the Chicana transfer doctoral scholars' post-doctoral paths.

Lastly, my implementation and interpretation of critical race theory and Chicana Feminist Epistemology forge a new lens I call Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis, as discussed in Chapter 2. I want to further develop this lens to fully delineate critical tenets of understanding the role of Chicana researchers when conducting research with other Chicanas or Communities of Color. The historicity a Chicana scholars bring to the research practicum is one that continues to be

marginalized in academe (Anzaldúa, 1982, 1999, 2000; Cruz, 2001; Cuadraz, 1997; Delgado-Bernal, 1998). The way I think about research, practice research, and am cognizant to produce and articulate research to multiple audiences, beyond the research institution, are those that establish my presence in academe. Thus, a Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis allows me to bridge academic scholarly talents to grassroots community activism, while acknowledging the latter informs and strengthens the former. The Chicana Feminist Critical Praxis framework...

welcomes  
me  
my Chicana  
self  
historicity  
epistemology.  
this lens  
guides me  
through each phase  
phases of...  
academic research  
prominent scholarly work  
research activism.  
The way I interpret  
my presence  
through theory,  
the way I conceptualize  
and, too often, reconceptualize  
theory and methods  
reaching  
new methodologies...  
producing new knowledge.  
the way I embrace  
data  
question,  
interpret,  
articulate,  
present  
data...  
is all rooted in my  
intuition  
subconscious  
*mi facultad*  
to remain honest

and humble  
to those  
willing to share  
willing to sacrifice,  
those too often  
marginalized  
ignored  
erased by  
traditional paradigms  
*de que no se que  
ni porque.*  
but hope thrives.  
as already established.  
those willing to listen  
and act on  
timely  
decisions  
to strengthen  
educational opportunities  
for those historically  
marginalized,  
listening to  
their experiences  
their recommendations  
their needs.  
these are found in the data  
if you allow yourself to see.  
these are ignited  
ignited and forged  
by their day-to-day realities.  
co-creation  
listening  
documenting  
re-evaluating  
day-to-day truths.

This is imperative.  
without it,  
I won't  
or wouldn't  
and  
can't call it  
praxis.

## **Appendix A Recruitment Letter**

Hello, my name is Martha Rivas and I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at University of California, Los Angeles. I would like to invite you to collaborate in my dissertation study, which examines the educational experiences of current Chicana doctoral students who began their postsecondary education at the community college.

As research indicates, the majority of Chicana/o students are concentrated at the community college level but very few eventually transfer to four-year institutions (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002). However, when we look at the overall Chicana/o doctorate production between 1990 and 2000, one of four Chicana/os began their educational trajectories at the community colleges. Unfortunately, the literature that attempts to document or address the experiences of Chicana/o students through this educational pathway is virtually non-existent. Given that the majority of Chicana/o youth are attending community colleges, my hope is that this research project begins to uncover and shed some light on the factors that contributed (positive and/or negative) to the matriculation of community college transfer student to doctoral programs. To answer pending questions regarding these educational experiences, I seek for collaborators that meet the following criteria:

- Female students
- Chicana, Mexican, Mexican-American, Latina/Hispanic of Mexican descent
- Current doctoral students
- Began postsecondary education at the community college
- Ph.D. disciplines preferably within education, social science, and biological sciences; but other disciplines are welcomed to participate
- Primary site is UCLA, but surrounding institutions will be considered (UCSB, UCSD)

Your collaboration will include completing a preliminary demographic survey, participate in *testimonio* sessions, which will be divided into three-part series. These *testimonios* will be scheduled on dates, times, and locations that best accommodate your availability. A detailed description of these sessions will be sent to those who agree to collaborate in this research. For now, if you are able and willing to participate, please respond to this email by contacting me at [azarivas@ucla.edu] or by calling me at (310) 123-4567 and we can begin to move forward with this process.

Should you have questions or concerns before agreeing to take part of this project, feel free to contact me at the contact information above. Further, if you know of other Chicana doctoral students who began their postsecondary education at the community college, please feel free to redistribute this letter via email, widely.

I truly appreciate your time and support on this critical research project.

Sincerely,

Martha A. Rivas  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of California, Los Angeles

## **Appendix B**

### **Informed Consent Form**

Hello, my name is Martha Rivas and I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies at University of California, Los Angeles. I would like to invite you to collaborate in my dissertation study, which examines the educational experiences of Chicana doctoral students who began their postsecondary education at the community college.

If you agree to collaborate in my research study, I will send you a preliminary survey that asks for your personal, family, and educational background information. Upon receiving this survey, I will contact you via email or by phone, to schedule one-on-one *testimonios*. I will ask that you take part of a three separate *testimonios* as *platica* sessions that will last about two hours each. If you agree, we can arrange the dates, times, and location that best accommodate you. I will provide you with the *testimonio* conceptual questions before we actually meet. This is only to provide you with an idea of what we could converse, please do not feel you need to write in your answers before our meeting. However, you may find it helpful to jot down some notes if certain issues come to mind before our meeting. You are more than welcomed to refer to these during our sessions should you feel we miss anything you want to share. Further, I will follow up on these *testimonios* with emails to clarify some questions or uncertainties (due to recording) that I may have. I realize you are extremely busy, so should you not be able to respond to these post-*testimonio* questions, I completely understand. Also, should you have additional information or questions you may have, post-*testimonios*, I welcome you to contact me. As the analysis of the findings evolve, I will ask if you can meet for a one-on-one “member check” meeting. Here, “member check” sessions are where you have the opportunity to see how the data is analyzed and how the findings are concluded. I welcome all participants to discuss, openly, whether they agree or disagree with the findings and or conclusions of the study. As the researcher I will ultimately have the responsibility of the final product but my hope is that as participants, you feel free to share your experiences and opinions throughout the entire process.

During the *testimonio* sessions, I will ask information about your personal and educational experiences. With your written permission, I will tape-record these sessions. I will use these recording and notes for future research and scientific purposes. Again, I will ask that you provide written consent before we begin recording the *testimonio* sessions.

All of the information collected during this study will be kept confidential. I will never use any information that would disclose your identity. I will ask that you select your own pseudonym, for purposes of confidentiality. This pseudonym will be used in all taped, written notes, transcriptions, and presentation versions of this research. All of the data collected will be stored on a password-protected computer. Audiotapes will be properly labeled and stored in a locked cabinet. Only my academic advisor, Dr. Daniel G. Solorzano, and myself will have access to the tapes, transcripts, and notes from the *testimonios*. This is a scholarly project and the material collected will be eventually published. As this study is completed, I will be the sole investigator responsible for the security of transcripts and notes for future research. The same confidentiality guarantees described here will apply to future storage and use of the materials.

In sharing your experiences as a community college transfer student while at the four-year and navigating towards graduate programs, the information you share may be used to recommend policy initiative and directions for future research. My hope is that everyone, academic and broader communities, understand and learn from your experiences. Your participation in this project is voluntary. You are welcome to refuse to take part or withdraw at any point from the project. You can decide to decline answering certain questions and have every right to review the tapes to determine if you want to edit or erase part or an entire interview. Further, you are welcomed to add comments that are not necessarily discussed or addressed within the confinements of the conceptual protocol. The primary method is *testimonios* – please feel free to discuss and share your experiences as you recall them and share accordingly.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to email me at [azarivas@ucla.edu](mailto:azarivas@ucla.edu) or call me at (310) 123-4567. You are also free to contact my faculty advisor, Professor Daniel G. Solorzano, at (310) 123-4567.

If you agree to take part in this research study, please sign the form below. You will be provided with a copy of this agreement for your future references.

[IRB statement]

---

I have read and understand this consent form. I agree to take part in this research study.

---

Participant's Name (please print)

---

Participant's Signature

---

Date



**Appendix C-1  
Preliminary Demographic Survey**

*Understanding the Chicana Transfer Experience From Community College into the Doctorate*

***Parental Background Information***

Mother's Name	Father's Name
Mother's Place of Birth	Father's Place of Birth
Mother's Date of Birth	Father's Date of Birth
Maternal grandparents' Place of Birth	Paternal grandparents' Place of Birth
Mother's Schooling	Father's Schooling
Mother's Occupation	Father's Occupation

***Siblings Background Information***

Last, First Name	Gender, Age	Birth Order	Schooling	Occupation

Last, First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C-2 - EDUCATION BACKGROUND INFORMATION

*Understanding the Chicana Transfer Experience From Community College and into the Doctorate*

***Education Background***

<b>Name of Institution</b> (elementary, jr high, h.s., community college, four-year, graduate)	<b>Private/ Public</b>	<b>Location</b> (City, State)	<b>Attendance From</b> (month, yr)	<b>To</b> (month, yr)	<b>Goal/Degree, Year</b> (transfer, AA, AS, BA, MA, etc)	<b>Field of Study</b>	<b>Main Source of Funding</b> (work, loans, scholarships, etc)	<b>Extra Curricular Activities</b>

**Appendix D-1**  
***Testimonio* Conceptual Protocol I**

1. What did you want to be when you “grew up”?
  - a. How did you imagine yourself in the future?
  - b. How did you come to this/these conclusions?
  - c. Were there certain individuals or circumstances that helped you form these aspirations?
  
2. Were there certain expectations of you in respect to school?
  - a. Where these expectations different for your siblings?
    - i. If so, how so and with who in particular?
  
3. Tell me about your high school experiences.
  - a. What kinds of classes did you take?
  - b. How were these courses selected?
  - c. How was the classroom experience for you?
  - d. What were your teachers/administrators like?
  - e. What were the counselors like?
  - f. How were your classmates?
  - g. Were you in any extra curricular activities?
  - h. Were your parents involved in your schooling experiences?
  - i. Who were influential people during this time? Why? How?
  
4. What were your plans or goals after high school?
  - a. Did you have any expectations for life after high school?
  - b. Did you have any fears or doubts about life after high school?
  - c. Did you feel there were certain expectations of you after high school? If so, what were they and by who?
  
5. Do you recall when you were first introduced to the concept of “college”?
  - a. When was that?
  - b. Were there certain individuals that helped you understand this concept?
  - c. Were there certain resources that helped you understand this concept?
  
6. Lets talk a bit about how you began your postsecondary education at the community college.
  - a. When were you introduced to “community colleges”?
  - b. Were there certain individuals that helped you understand this process?
  - c. Were there certain resources that helped you understand this process?

7. Did you feel you had “choices” other than a community college? If so, what were they?
8. Did you always consider enrolling at the community college?
  - a. Where there certain circumstances that guided you to the community college?
  - b. Where there certain individuals that guided you to the community college?
  - c. Where there certain resources that guided you to the community college?
9. What or who influenced your decision to attend community college?
  - a. Did your family influence you to attend college?
  - b. Were there certain family members that influenced you through this process?
    - i. Mother?
    - ii. Father?
    - iii. Siblings?
    - iv. Grandparents?
    - v. Uncles/Aunts?
    - vi. Extended Family?
  - c. Did peers that influenced you through this process?
10. What was the experience of going to the community college for you?
  - a. What kinds of courses did you take?
  - b. How were these courses selected?
  - c. What were professors like?
  - d. What were counselors like?
  - e. How much interaction did you have with faculty, staff?
  - f. Did you maintain a social life on campus? (extra curricular activities).
  - g. Did you maintain a social life off campus? (community organizations).

**Appendix D-2**  
***Testimonio* Conceptual Protocol II**

1. Lets talk about your experiences while at the community college(s).
2. Did you have additional responsibilities outside of school? Explain.
3. Did you have specific goals or aspirations when you first began at the community college?
  - a. What were they?
  - b. Where there certain individuals that helped you attain these goals/aspirations?
  - c. Where there certain resources that helped you attain these goals/aspirations?
4. Did you have expectations of community colleges? Explain.
  - a. Was community college what you expected?
  - b. Did you have expectations of the institution?
  - c. Were there certain expectations you felt were in place for you because you were:
    - i. Woman?
    - ii. Chicana?
    - iii. Community college student?
5. Do you think other students at your community college(s) went through the same experience you did? Explain.
6. Lets talk specifically about *wanting* to transfer to a four-year institution.
  - a. When were you aware of the transfer option?
  - b. Were there certain individuals that helped you understand this process?
  - c. Were there certain resources that helped you understand this process?
7. Tell me about your pathway to a four-year institution
  - a. Where there instances or situations that *motivated you to apply*?
  - b. Who influenced your decision to apply?
  - c. Did you have additional influential people during this time? If so, who were they and how?
8. Were there any challenges you faced *deciding to apply* to a four-year institution?
  - a. Did you have other options? What were they?
9. Tell me about your transition to the four-year institution.

- a. How did you decide which institution to *attend*?
  - b. Were there people or circumstances that influenced your decision?
10. Did you have specific goals or aspirations when you first began at the four-year institution?
  - a. What were they?
  - b. Did you have expectations of the institution?
  - c. Were there certain expectations you felt were in place for you because you were:
    - i. Woman?
    - ii. Chicana?
    - iii. Community college transfer student?
11. Did your family have certain expectations of you after completing your undergraduate degree? If so, what were they?
12. Describe yourself as an undergraduate student at a four-year institution.
  - a. Was it what you expected? Explain.
  - b. Was it different? Explain
  - c. Did you maintain a social life on campus? (extra curricular activities).
  - d. Did you maintain a social life off campus? (community organizations).
  - e. Did you have additional responsibilities outside of school?
13. Were there any instances that being a community college transfer student was an advantage? If so, when and how so?
14. Were there any instances that being a community college transfer student was a detriment? If so, when and how so?
15. Were there instances that you might have thought your experiences as a community college transfer student were different than those who were not? If so, when and how so?
16. Do you think other community college transfer students endured the same experiences you did? Explain.

**Appendix D-3**  
***Testimonio* Conceptual Protocol III**

1. Tell me about your pathway to the Ph.D.
  - a. When were you aware of what a Ph.D. meant?
  - b. Were there certain individuals that helped you *understand* this process?
  - c. Were there certain resources that helped you understand this process?
  - d. Were there certain activities/organizations that helped you understand this process?
  - e. Were there any challenges you faced *deciding to apply* to a Ph.D.?
  - f. Did you have other options? What were they?
  
2. Tell me about the *process of applying* to Ph.D. programs?
  - a. Were there certain individuals that helped you apply to the Ph.D.?
  - b. Were there certain resources that helped you apply to the Ph.D.?
  - c. Were there certain activities/organizations that helped you apply to the Ph.D.?
  - d. Did you have any concerns or fears of applying to the Ph.D.?
  
3. Were there people or certain circumstances that influenced your decision to pursue a Ph.D.? Explain.
  
4. Did your family understand what pursuing a Ph.D. meant?
  - a. Was your family supportive?
  - b. Did your family have additional expectations of you? Explain.
  - c. Did you have additional expectations of yourself? Explain.
  
5. Were there any challenges you faced *deciding to pursue a Ph.D.*?
  - a. Did you have other options? What were they?
  
6. Why did you decide to pursue a Ph.D.?
  - c. Why did you decide on this particular program/campus?
  
7. What was your experience entering the Ph.D. program ?
  - a. Did you have expectations of the program?
  - b. Did you have expectations of yourself as a doctoral student?
  - c. Were there certain expectations you felt were in place for you?
  - d. Were there certain expectations you felt were in place for you because you were:
    - i. Woman?
    - ii. Chicana?
    - iii. Community college transfer student?

8. Did you have additional responsibilities outside of school? Explain.
9. Did you have specific goals or aspirations to fulfill upon receiving a Ph.D.?
  - a. What were they?
  - b. What lead you to decide on this?
  - c. Are there certain individuals helping you attain these goals/aspirations?
  - d. Are there certain resources helping you attain these goals/aspirations?
10. What are your professional goals?
  - a. What are your personal goals?
  - b. Do these two compliment one another?
  - c. Do you have any concerns about the future as a Ph.D.?
11. What are your views or expectations of your life after the Ph.D.
12. Do you have concerns or fears about life after the Ph.D.? Explain
13. Were there any situations or instances you encountered were you felt discriminated against because you were a community college transfer student? Explain.
  - a. How would this situation be different if you had not been a community college transfer student?
14. When, or if you would write a book about your experiences as a Chicana community college student, what would you title it? Why?
15. If you could go back, would you do anything differently in your educational trajectory? If so, what would that be and why?



## Appendix E

**Table 5: *Las Ocho Mujeres* – Pathways Towards the Doctorate**

Mujer	Applied to Graduate School Last Year in BA	Type of Graduate Program	Accepted into Graduate School	First Year Post-BA	Grad Campus	Years of Work before Reapplying to Graduate School	Graduate Goals	Applicant to Type of Graduate Program	Accepted into Graduate School	Grad Campus	Field of Study	Primary Source of Graduate Funding (prior to PhD)	Applied to Ph.D.	Accepted into Doctoral Program	PhD Campus	Field of Study
Andrea	Yes	Ph.D.	Yes	Ph.D.	UC											
Citali	No	N/A	N/A	work	N/A	4 years	M.A.	Ph.D.	Yes	UC	World Arts & Culture					
Frances	Yes	M.A.	No	work	N/A	1 year	Ph.D.	M.A.	Yes	UC	Urban Planning	Work, Financial Aid	After receiving 2nd MA in Women Studies (5-years post-BA)	Yes	UC	Women Studies
Luna	Yes	M.A.	Yes	M.A.	Private	3 years	Ph.D.	Ph.D.	Yes	UC	Education					
Maria Trinidad	Yes	M.A.	Yes	M.A.	UC	N/A	Ph.D.	Ph.D.	Yes	UC	Education	Loans, Work, Fellowships	While completing MA			
Monica	Yes	J.D.	No	work	N/A	3 years	JD/Ph.D	M.A.	Yes	Private	Education (Gender Studies)	Loans, Research Internships	While completing MA	Yes	UC	Education
Natalia	Yes	M.A./Teaching Credentials	Yes	M.A./Teaching Credentials	CSU	6 years	M.A.	M.A.	Yes	CSU	Chicana/o Studies	Work	While completing MA	Yes	UC	Education
Vanessa	Yes	M.A.	Yes	M.A.	UC	N/A	Ph.D.	Ph.D.	Yes	UC	Education	Loans, Fellowships, TAs	While completing MA			

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