DISRUPTING THE DOMINANT DISCOURSE: EXPLORING THE MENTORING EXPERIENCES OF LATINX COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	The purpose of this study was to better understand the sources of mentoring and ways in which mentors, as forms of social and familial capital, facilitate the development of capital among Latinx community college students
Background	A more focused and nuanced understanding of the role of mentors in further developing Latinx students' capital is needed to guide mentoring programs in designing asset-based programs that recognize and build upon students' community cultural wealth
Methodology	Drawing from Solórzano and Yosso's (2001) work, we use asset-based, counter-storytelling as a qualitative, methodological approach to reframe the deficit perspective that is embedded in prior literature on Latinx college students. The sample included 11 Latinx community college students who participated in the Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program.
Contribution	Results suggest that mentoring programs designed to serve Latinx community college students may be more efficient and may provide more meaningful support by recognizing and building upon the assets and capital provided by students' networks and communities.
Findings	Interviews revealed that participants leveraged community cultural wealth in the form of mentoring networks established prior to and during college, to develop other forms of capital that enabled them to reach their educational goals.

Recommendations for Practitioners	The paper provides practical implications for mentoring programs, initiatives that include a mentoring component, as well as more generally for institutional agents who support Latinx students.
Recommendations for Researchers	Findings provide a foundation for future research opportunities that could further examine how supportive relationships with institutional agents promote the educational and professional success of Latinx community college students.
Future Research	Several suggestions for future research are provided, including qualitative work that explores how students identify and interact with mentors and other institutional agents during college and how they utilize these relationships to navigate the college environment.
Keywords	Latinx, college students, mentoring, community colleges, faculty

INTRODUCTION

In 2008, Latinx individuals represented 15 percent of the U.S. population and 12 percent of undergraduate students in higher education (Santiago, Taylor, & Calderón Galdeano, 2015). Additionally, the median age for the Latinx community is 27 compared to 41 years old for white non-Hispanics, making them the youngest and fastest growing group in the United States (Santiago & Stettner, 2013; Santiago et al., 2015). Latinx students are also enrolling in college at increasing rates (Llagas & Snyder, 2003). However, currently only 20 percent of Latinx adults hold an associate's degree or higher, compared to 36 percent of all adults. As such, in order to reach national goals, institutions need to find ways to close gaps in completion, including identifying and scaling effective programs and practices designed for Latinx students (Excelencia in Education, 2014). There is a particular need to promote racial/ethnic equity within particular fields. Notably, Latinx students currently have lower rates of entrance and persistence into science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields when compared to white and Asian American students (Rincón & Lane, 2017).

Community colleges play a critical role in promoting equity in degree completion as Latinx students are overrepresented and more likely to first enroll at a community college (Martinez & Fernandez, 2004; Santiago & Stettner, 2013). As accessible institutions that admit nearly all applicants, community colleges continue to serve as the primary point of entry into postsecondary education for groups that have been historically excluded and/or underserved including Latinx, African American, and non-traditional age students (Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2015). Community colleges can be an attractive option for several reasons, including relatively low tuition and fees, small classes, and flexible schedules that can accommodate working students and students with families. Additionally, community colleges are often located closer to home for their students relative to four-year institutions (Laden, 1999; Santiago & Stettner, 2013). At the same time, students' practical choices may come with costs, as factors such as attending part-time and working more than 20 hours a week have been consistently shown to decrease students' odds of persisting or transferring to a four-year institution (Cohen, Brawer & Kisker, 2013).

Although there is not one single initiative that is a panacea to support student success for Latinx and other minoritized groups, mentoring efforts have been recommended as a central strategy in improving completion rates (Crisp, Baker, Griffin, Lunsford, & Pifer, 2017). There is no single definition that accurately captures the diversity of informal and formal relationships that students identify as mentoring. Mentoring has been described as a process, a concept and a set of developmental activities. However, there is agreement among scholars that mentoring involves a relationship between individuals where a more experienced person is committed to providing developmental support (Crisp et al., 2017). There is growing evidence that both formal and informal relationships with supportive

faculty and staff, often referred to as institutional agents (Stanton-Salazar, 2010), are in some way related to success outcomes for Latinx students (e.g., Tovar, 2015; Zell, 2010). Additionally, there is a need for research that takes a broader view of mentoring by considering individuals outside of the college environment who are considered as mentors for Latinx community college students.

Unfortunately, mentoring programs are often conceptualized from a deficit perspective assuming that racially minoritized students are "at-risk" and come to college lacking social and cultural capital, including mentoring relationships (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Scholars have begun to document stories to counter the dominant discourse and are giving more focus to strengths-based frameworks that consider assets and capital that Latinx community college students are bringing to college (e.g., Acevedo-Gil, 2017; Carales & López, 2020; Sáenz, de las Mercedez, Rodriguez, & Garcia-Louis, 2017). However, a more focused and nuanced understanding of the role of mentors in further developing Latinx students' capital is needed to guide mentoring programs in designing asset-based programs that recognize and build upon students' community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). With these considerations in mind, the purpose of the present study was to better understand who serves as mentors for Latinx community college students and the ways in which students use their informal mentoring network to facilitate the development of various forms of capital (Yosso, 2005). The following questions were used to guide our work:

1. Who do Latinx community college students identify as mentors in their high school and college-going experiences?

2. In what ways do Latinx community college students' leverage mentoring relationships to develop community cultural wealth and expand various forms of capital?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of "mentoring" has been used as an umbrella term that includes a variety of formal and informal supportive relationships with family, supervisors, religious leaders, institutional agents, and various other types of support (e.g., advising, counseling, role modeling). The mentoring research to date has predominately focused on formal relationships studied in the context of a formal program that includes a mentoring component. More specifically, most mentoring studies to date have focused around a student who is matched with a faculty or staff member for a particular period of time (Crisp et al., 2017). For instance, the Puente Program (Laden, 1999) and the federally funded College Assistance Migrant Program (Castro & Cortez, 2017) are both programs with mentoring components that have shown promise in supporting Latinx and other racially minoritized students. Formal faculty mentoring programs have shown to contribute to Latinx students' transition and adjustment to college (Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). These programs provide a holistic set of supports to guide and support students in meeting their academic and career goals.

Parallel to the mentoring literature, there is a growing line of research that suggests Latinx college students benefit from informal relationships with institutional agents (e.g., faculty, academic advisors) and/or peers (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Cejda & Rhodes, 2004; Herrera, Hernandez Chapar, & Sanchez, 2017; Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, & Klingsmith, 2014; Suarez, 2003; Zell, 2010). Supportive relationships with faculty, staff and peers has been shown to be positively related to a number of psychosocial and academic outcomes. For Latinx students, this includes increased confidence and self-efficacy, sense of belonging, comfort with the college environment, various forms of engagement, persistence, and degree completion (Bordes & Arredondo 2005; Campos et al., 2009; DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Herrera et al., 2017). For example, findings by Tovar (2015) indicate that both the type and quantity of relationships were significantly related to Latinx community college students' academic success.

Although the extant mentoring literature gives little space to considering individuals outside of the college setting that students may view as mentors, recent work focused on Latinx students finds that

family members may provide a diversity of support to students (e.g., Kouyoumdjian, Guzmán, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2017; Luna & Martinez, 2013; Roxas & Gabriel, 2017; Zell, 2010). Baker and Griffin (2010) recommend that students consider individuals outside of the college environment in developing a mentoring network. There is limited evidence to suggest that romantic partners and friends may serve as mentors for Latinx students (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017). Also, in a qualitative study of ten Latinx graduates attending a selective university, Ceballo (2004) found that high school teachers and other adult mentors were influential in students' success. However, more research is needed to better understand who serves as mentors for Latinx community college students. Moreover, researchers have not yet begun to explore the extent to which Latinx community college students develop a network of mentoring relationships.

COUNTERING THE DOMINANT NARRATIVE

Although well-meaning, many mentoring programs are grounded in the belief that minoritized students have insufficient abilities, skills, and/or knowledge that can be made up for through participation in programs that provide students necessary social and cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). This perspective, in many ways, intersects with the dominant narrative surrounding Latinx students and other racially minoritized students that is rooted in deficit thinking (Valencia, 2012). Similar to the broader research on community college students, the majority of scholarship routinely refers to Latinx students using deficit language such as "at risk" and/or as less academically prepared. The consequence of this history of deficit perspectives on Latinx students is a dominant narrative that they are automatically "at risk" and/or less academically prepared than their White counterparts. In talking about the narratives crafted by majority culture and the counterstories generated by minoritized people, Delgado (1993) noted, "What both types of critics tend to overlook is that majoritarians tell stories too. But the ones they tell-about merit, causation, blame, responsibility, and racial justice-do not seem to them like stories at all, but the truth" (p. 666). Supporting this claim, Castellanos and Gloria (2007) note that literature on Latinx students is filled with stories of failure and stereotypes that appear to blame either cultural values or innate ability to explain why Latinx students lag in social mobility.

These assertions have become master narratives or dominant accounts that are generally accepted as universal truths (Valencia, 2002). Such scripts caricature Latinx and other minoritized groups in negative ways (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). For instance, parents who are not college educated are often described as a burden or even an obstacle to students' educational success (Valencia, 2002). Deficit thinking can have unintended effects on programs by shifting the focus to "curing these so-called ills" (Green, 2006, p. 25) whereby program goals and activities are developed based on assumptions on what participants lack rather than how to build upon their existing strengths. More importantly, disrupting this way of thinking and the dominant discourse that has historically engulfed Latinx students begins by portraying a more accurate and reflective picture of this community (Carales & López, 2020).

Strength-based frameworks and perspectives have been applied in recognizing how Latinx students transition and persist in college (Acevedo-Gil, 2017; Castro & Cortez, 2017; Pérez, 2014; Rendón, Nora, Bledsoe, & Kanagala, 2019; Rendón, Nora, & Kanagala, 2014; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). Similarly to findings on the role of mentoring for Latinx students, most of this work has focused on the four-year college context. With the exception of a large-scale qualitative study of 130 Latino men led by Sáenz (i.e., Sáenz, de las Mercedez, Rodriguez & Garcia-Louis, 2017; Sáenz, Garcia-Louis, de las Mercedez, Rodriguez, 2018; Sáenz, Garcia-Louis, Peterson Drake, Guida, 2018), scholarship to date has not given attention to uncovering forms of cultural wealth and capital that Latinx students use to navigate the community college context. Sáenz et al.'s studies apply Yosso's (2005) framework to understand how Latino men attending community colleges in Texas developed and used capital to navigate their educational pathways. Across the studies, Sáenz's research team found that Latino males relied on familial capital to develop aspirational capital. In particular, findings highlight female family

members as the primary supporters of Latino males' educational journey (i.e., Sáenz, de las Mercédez, Rodriguez, et al., 2018) and also shed light on how father support was shown to contribute to Latino men's educational success (i.e., Sáenz et al., 2017). For instance, fathers were shown to provide various types of encouraging words, stories, advice, and support to their sons who would, in turn, learn from observing their fathers' struggles and complicated working conditions. It is notable that Sáenz's work is focused on Latino males and does not consider the experiences of Latina women. Moreover, findings do not center mentoring as the mechanism by which Latinx students acquire cultural wealth and develop capital.

There has been very little empirical work conducted that explicitly examines the role of mentoring in facilitating the development of students' cultural wealth and capital (Luna & Prieto, 2009). Exceptions include work by Enriquez (2011) who explored ways in which undocumented Latinx K-12 students used social capital to pursue college. Consistent with the broader mentoring literature (e.g., Crisp et al., 2017), they found that students received emotional and financial support from multiple mentoring sources, including family, teachers, and peers. Interviews also revealed that undocumented students practiced "patchworking," whereby resources are pieced together to generate mentoring networks and capital, and to meet their needs as related to accessing college. Similarly, Luna and Martinez (2013) and Kouyoumdjian et al. (2017) recently explored unacknowledged resources and challenges of Latinx students attending four-year universities. Both studies found that Latinx students brought cultural wealth from their communities in the form of aspirational, navigational, social, and familial capital. Additionally, different sources of mentoring (e.g., faculty, relatives, peers) were shown to facilitate the development of aspirational and navigational capital. However, few studies to date have directly sought to understand who Latinx students attending community colleges identify as mentors or have sought to document the specific ways in which students leverage a diversity of mentoring relationships to acquire and develop various forms of capital (Enriquez, 2011). Furthermore, Rios-Ellis et al. (2015) note, "without a clear understanding of what *cultural capital* can mean to a unique population within an institutional context, student assets will continue to be underexploited and not fully utilized (p.37).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In response to the previous deficit-focused body of literature on Latinx students and their families, researchers have become more intentional about advocating for research and theoretical frames that advocate and give space to documenting students' assets and strengths (Green, 2006; Luna & Martinez, 2013; Rendón et al., 2014; Rendón et al., 2019; Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012). Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework provided a useful lens for addressing our research questions for a few reasons. First, community cultural wealth serves as a critique to deficit thinking and structures that have historically disadvantaged communities of Color. The framework also takes the perspective that communities of Color are spaces of strength, assets and wealth. Moreover, it centers the knowledge, abilities, and supports that Latinx students are thought to both bring to and develop during college (Luna & Martinez, 2013).

Grounded in critical race theory (CRT), Yosso (2005) considers six overlapping forms of capital that racially minoritized students enact that are often not acknowledged or recognized by institutions including: (a) aspirational capital, (b) linguistic capital, (c) familial capital, (d) social capital, (e) navigational capital, and (f) resistant capital. Aspirational capital refers to students' ability to maintain their hopes and dreams for future lives despite their experiences and realities in an educational system that does not provide equitable opportunities for all students. Linguistic capital acknowledges that Latinx students arrive in schools with a rich cultural history that is transmitted through their home language. Familial capital is the support and nurturing that takes place through the *familia*, made up of family members and kin who provide a shared sense of community history and memory. Social capital denotes the networks of individuals who can make connections to community and educational re-

sources that help students in their journeys. Social capital includes supportive individuals who provide emotional support or in transmitting knowledge that is helpful to students. Relatedly, navigational capital describes the ability of racially minoritized students to move within institutions, including schools, health systems, and the job market. Finally, resistant capital expresses the ways that communities of Color teach their younger members to work within and ultimately subvert oppressive societal forces, such as racism and patriarchy. Yosso (2005) describes types of capital as "not mutually exclusive or static" but instead as "dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth" (p. 77).

METHODOLOGY

This research draws from a critical paradigm born out of CRT (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014) that assumes that race and racism are an inescapable part of society; that centers the lived experiences of racially minoritized citizens; and demonstrates a commitment to social justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In line with this paradigm and critical race theory's subgenre of Latina/o Critical Theory (or LatCrit) focused on the Latinx experience, we utilize counter-storytelling as the qualitative, methodological approach to describe the lived experiences of people whose experiences are not represented in the literature (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2005). The usefulness of critical race theory and LatCrit to this method is that it recognizes the value of experiential knowledge in furthering a broader understanding of racial subordination and to challenge dominant narratives or assumptions about subordinated populations (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Delgado (1993) defines the counter-story as those "aimed at challenging one of the inscribed and blithely repeated accounts by which majoritarians make sense of their world" (p. 670). Put another way, these center the perspectives of those who are oppressed by majoritarian society and offer alternative, experiential narratives that question or critique the status quo (e.g., Latinx students are not as capable at finding mentors as their white counterparts). The counter-story "recounts experiences of racism and resistance from the perspectives of those on society's margins" (Yosso, 2006, p. 2). Yosso (2006) posits that Latinx students have experienced overt and covert forms of racism throughout society, including in their education. This method offers four functions: (1) it humanizes the subordinated; (2) it can transform existing beliefs by providing new detail or context; (3) it empowers subordinated people to see beyond their current realities and to imagine future possibilities; (4) finally, it encourages the mixture of the story and a broader reality to construct a fuller picture than one could do alone (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

Counter-story telling is an anti-deficit methodological approach that allows us to give voice to community college students and to analyze the inequitable educational structures impacting participants. In this study, we explored community college students' experiences with mentors and institutional agents. Throughout the data collection process, the researchers noted that Latinx students had particular mentoring narratives to share with them, something that has not been well-explored in the research literature. We focused on those who serve as mentors to these students, but we also delved deeper into *how* individuals support students as they pursue their post-secondary education. To do this, we included a number of data sources: the extant literature on Latinx community college students (e.g., Nora, Carales, & Bledsoe, 2018; Lesure-Lester, 2003; Tovar, 2015) and on mentoring and institutional agents in a community college context (e.g., Crisp, 2010; Zell, 2010); interview transcripts with 11 Latinx students; finally, we drew from our own professional and personal experiences as community college professionals and Latinx scholars and allies. The use of these data sources is consistent with the data collected and analyzed in other studies utilizing this method (e.g., Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2006).

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were drawn from a larger research project that included in-depth interviews with community college students who participated in the Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program aimed at

increasing the number of K-12 teachers across STEM fields. The study site is a large, community college district located in South Texas. Mission Community College district (MCC, a pseudonym) is one of the largest community college systems in Texas, currently serving more than 90,000 students annually. The MCC student body is comprised of 62% Latinx, with more than half (53%) from an economically disadvantaged background and 70% receiving some type of financial aid.

An earlier phase of this project studied students' experiences with a teacher mentor who was assigned to them as part of the program. However, for this study, we were interested in better understanding and giving space to mentoring experiences that Latinx students, in particular, may have had prior to and/or outside of the program. As such, we focused on the 11 Latinx students who volunteered to participate in an interview and who identified as Hispanic, Latina, Latino or Latinx. Note that the term "Latinx" has grown in popularity over the last few years and was therefore used in place of Latina/o to move away from the gender binary (Salinas & Lozano, 2017). Although participants were not explicitly asked to identify gender, according to institutional records, five of the participants were women and six were men. As shown in Table 1, participants varied in age between 18 and 43 years old. Five students (45%) were 21 or younger, three (27%) were between 22 and 25 years old, and the remaining three were 26 or older. Although not included in the table, participants were in other ways representative of community college students including being the first in their family to attend or graduate college, being married and/or parents, and having learned English as a second language. Pseudonyms are utilized to protect participants' identities.

Table 1. Description of participants

Pseudonym	Major	Gender	Age
Maria	math	female	43
Michael	math and engineering	male	19
Samuel	science	male	23
Vince	math	male	24
Graciela	math	female	20
Carlos	math and engineering	male	21
Jose	science	male	20
Jessica	math	female	27
Cyndi	science	female	18
Ana	math	female	28
Eric	science	male	21

*Participants granted researchers access to institutional data including race/ethnicity, gender and age. Students' major was provided by participants during the interviews.

PROCEDURES AND ANALYSIS

Each of the 11 participants was interviewed one time, and interviews were conducted at a time and place according to the students' convenience and lasted between 35 and 60 minutes. To gain further insights, the participants also granted the researchers access to reflective notes that were submitted as a class assignment across three semesters. The notes provided participants the opportunity to reflect

on their experiences observing and learning with a teacher mentor. The notes served as a form of triangulation and enabled the researchers to better understand the participants. Prior to data collection, the lead interviewer engaged in a reflection and active writing about her own mentoring and college experiences as a means of bracketing or setting aside her experiences and biases (Creswell & Maietta, 2002). A semi-structured interview protocol that covered topics such as students' supportive mentoring experiences on and off-campus was used. Students were explicitly asked, for instance, to name and describe individuals they perceived to be "mentors" in their lives.

The interview transcripts were coded independently using Dedoose by the research team using an inductive or open coding approach (Saldaña, 2015) to identify who the sources of mentoring were for students (e.g., college faculty, high school teachers, family) and in what contexts (e.g., their homes, on the college campus, in faith-based contexts). After taking notes on the transcripts and generating reflective memos, the group came together to discuss what codes repeated, what patterns appeared to emerge, and each of their own biases and observations about the data. The initial codes were negotiated among the group, and the codes were collapsed into more refined categories for a second round of coding. For example, we each noted that mothers emerged as a particular source of mentoring and support among many of the participants. In the second round, the Community Cultural Wealth framework (Yosso, 2005) was used deductively in order to identify how mentors and institutional agents identified in the first round of coding provided support to students and how this assistance boosted specific types of capital.

We noted that some experiences described by the students in this study could have been coded as more than one type of capital (e.g., some stories shared could have been an example of social capital and navigational capital). Therefore, we negotiated how to describe these examples in the findings, but we also acknowledge that the types of capital that Yosso (2005) described are often intertwined and influence each other. We also discussed our own experiences as community college practitioners, how these experiences aligned or differed from the emergent findings of the present study, and the relationship to the extant literature. For example, we note in the findings that one student's divorce turned out to be a positive change in her academic career; this runs counter to previous work on single parents in community college contexts (Goldrick-Rab & Sorenson, 2010). This difference, as explicated below, is due to the student's level of mentoring and support she received from others while pursuing her degree.

As per Creswell (2013), each research study should utilize at least 2-3 trustworthiness measures. The researchers took several measures in order to boost the trustworthiness of this study, including using multiple investigators and transcribing the audio files of the interviews in order to seek participant feedback (Creswell, 2013). As noted, field notes and memos were kept throughout the data collection and analysis processes in order to make observations, to bracket personal feelings or biases, and to note areas to explore further (Creswell & Maietta, 2002). Moreover, participants granted the researchers with access to reflective notes which served as a form of data triangulation. Further, we have presented our methods and findings with thick descriptions in order to adequately demonstrate how the conclusions were drawn. In the findings, for instance, we use direct quotes from individual participants in order to help their voices come through more vividly and provide as much context for quotes as possible.

POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

As researchers who serve as the tool for data collection and analysis in this qualitative project, we acknowledge that our backgrounds and experiences with community colleges and Latinx students help shape our understanding of the wealth Latinx students bring with them to campus – even when we observe that this wealth goes unacknowledged in the extant literature. The first author, who identifies as white, spent over 20 years at Hispanic Serving institutions as a student, faculty member, and administrator. Her personal and professional experiences with Latinx students counter the dominant narrative by showing countless examples of exceptional Latinx students who were able to leverage

cultural wealth from their home communities to persist in racist and/or hostile educational environments. The second author, who identifies as Latina, taught as an adjunct instructor for approximately five years at a community college in a Latinx-majority city in the South. From her own family experience, she understands the persisting negative stereotypes about Latinx students in K-12 and postsecondary education, both as a student and a researcher. She also recognized the importance of mentors in various parts of her life (e.g., work, school, family) from high school through her doctorate.

The third author identifies as a Mexican-American, Latino male who has extensive student affairs experience working with and serving community college students and administrators. His success has also been influenced by various familial and professional mentors throughout his life. This recognition has influenced his passion for giving back to his community and willingness to mentor Latinx and other students of Color. The fourth author is a doctoral candidate and experienced student affairs administrator, who as a Black male navigating predominantly White institutions, has not only heard the dominant discourses that surround Black men on college campuses, but has experienced their impact in the form of microaggressions, racism, and inherent hostile culture. Through this personal lens, the fourth author is interested in supporting minoritized students, opening space for them to share the counter-narratives of their experiences, and to shift the dominant discourse.

LIMITATIONS

Our study captured the various forms of capital Latinx students utilized to navigate the community college environment, but a few limitations are important to note. First, our study elucidates the experiences of a small group of Latinx community college students. These students chose to participate in a program designed to develop their interests in teaching in a STEM field. Connecting to programs like these requires some level of capital, which also demonstrates their willingness to learn from others and to be mentored. Study participants' experiences should therefore not be assumed to be representative of a broader group of Latinx community college students. Additionally, none of the participants appeared to struggle to find on-campus or off-campus mentoring and was in a program that provided multiple mentors, including their teaching mentors. This study, therefore, does not capture the experience of students who may struggle to find mentors or other sources of support.

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to identify individuals who Latinx community college students identify as "mentors" in their lives and better understand the ways these students leveraged various mentoring relationships to develop cultural community wealth and expand various forms of capital. Collectively, the students' experiences with mentors provide a powerful counter-narrative (Yosso, 2006) that describes Latinx community college students as receiving various types of support in the form of social, familial, navigational, and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) that students receive from their home community. Among the mentors from the students' community were parents, siblings, extended family members, romantic partners, high school teachers, and religiously affiliated youth group leaders. Students also talked about the positive influence that college instructors, mentors from on-campus academic or extracurricular programs, and academic advisors provided during college. These mentors collectively served to cultivate diverse forms of capital for students as they worked toward transferring to a four-year university and earning a bachelor's degree. The following paragraphs describe the ways in which participants leveraged relationships with individuals students identified as "mentors" to cultivate cultural community wealth and develop aspirational, familial, social, navigational and resistant capital. A pictorial representation of our findings is provided in Figure 1.
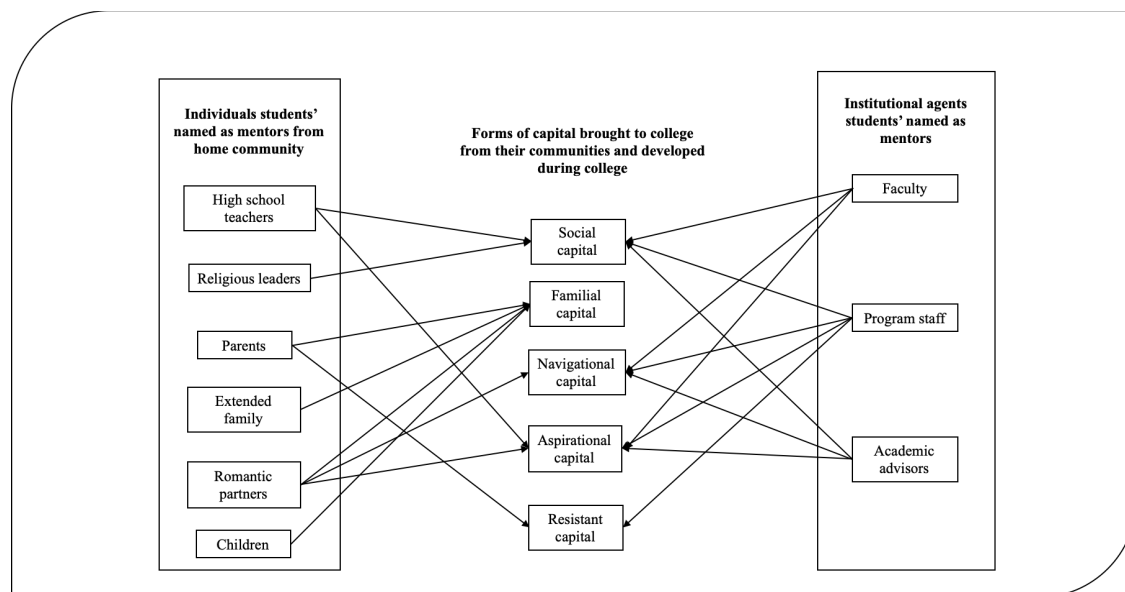
**Figure 1. Opportunistic mentoring networks developed by
Latinx Community College students**

ASPIRATIONAL CAPITAL

Study participants were all considering pursuing degrees in STEM fields, a sector in which Latinx students are critically underrepresented (Santiago et al., 2015). For many of them, participation in a preparation program for aspiring math and science teachers was a way to explore the various options of a STEM degree, while also receiving financial help as they completed their associate's degrees and worked towards transferring to a nearby university. All of the students recognized the importance of education in pursuing their professional goals, and three of the participants specifically talked about goals that would require a graduate or professional degree. For example, Eric was already working in a genetics laboratory part-time while he pursued his bachelor's degree in biochemistry, and he ultimately hoped to get into medical school or a doctoral program. Similar to Eric, Jose expressed his interest in going to medical school to become a pediatrician. Michael held aspirations of becoming a math teacher early in high school. His teacher at the time encouraged him to consider pursuing a degree in engineering since he showed a natural ability in math. While Michael's ultimate goal was to continue with his engineering degree, the teaching program offered him flexibility for the future. He stated, "The thing that really got me [about the program] was, it wasn't about the teaching – it was about being able to get a teaching certification [with] my engineering degree." Michael went on to say, "Being able to get both, which was great for me [because] I wanted to be an engineer first and then be a professor in college or something. But now I get to be a teacher and engineering. Different, but the same." What we observed with these students is the aspirational capital to understand the full breadth of education and training their goals would require as well as the ability to recognize backup plans and flexibility in these goals. In some cases, the mentors, like Michael's high school math teacher, encouraged the students to think bigger or to consider alternatives they might not have considered otherwise. This dexterity that Eric, Jose, and Michael showed was fostered by the mentoring they received by their advisors in the teaching program.

Jessica, a non-traditional aged student, faced a number of personal obstacles in her college career. She began her college experience as a nuclear medicine major because her then-husband would only pay for classes in a major that he viewed as lucrative. Jessica described an encounter with a nanotechnology professor who shared her own experience as an older student, and it was this professor who encouraged Jessica to consider switching her major to education. In thinking about her journey, Jessica reflected, "You know, it took me a really long time to want to go to college. I wasn't the type of

person that comes out of high school and says 'This is what I want.'" While going through her separation and divorce, Jessica failed a math class, but her personal connection with the instructor, whose class she retook and in which she earned a 97, gave her the resilience to keep trying even during a personally challenging time. This connection was built from this faculty member's willingness to stay after class and talk to Jessica about what she was going through while also providing encouragement: "[This math teacher] gave me the opportunity to help me on the side and work with me because my math has always been a struggle for me, but once I caught up, it's been kinda easy since then."

Ana's aspirational capital manifested itself as sheer determination to keep working toward her degree despite significant roadblocks. Since graduating from high school in 2004, she had been enrolled in college almost continuously for more than a decade. She spent six years at a nearby university, four of which she spent trying to be successful in school while struggling with undiagnosed attention deficit disorder and depression. She made the decision to leave the university without the GPA she needed to graduate. Notably, Ana's parents were supporting her financially through her schooling, and she made the choice to take financial responsibility for her education, so she did not feel she was wasting her parents' money when she did not pass her classes. Graciela alluded to her struggle with learning disabilities and a tumultuous relationship with her family and how her faculty member's mentoring took the form of sharing their experiences and their empathy for Graciela's struggle: "It's nice to know that some of these people can be there [and struggle in college] and get that far." Given the dismal outlook that much of the literature on community college students gives on students' chances of successfully transferring to a four-year institution and/or pursuing a graduate degree (e.g., Jenkins & Fink, 2015), these students exhibited positive hopes for their future goals and accomplishments.

FAMILIAL CAPITAL

Cultural stereotypes about Latinx families contend that students' families provide little to no support to students because they do not value education (Valencia, 2002). When asked about important sources of mentoring, all 11 of the participants in this study mentioned the crucial support their families provided them. Notably, parents and partners provided monetary support in the form of help with tuition, childcare, a place to live, as well as emotional support and encouragement. We frame familial support as mentoring because the students described their relatives and partners as mentors, and family members' actions demonstrated an awareness of the importance of a college education, helping their students navigate college through monetary or logistical support, and in giving career advice. A divorce actually ended up being a positive thing for Jessica. She noted that her ex-husband refused to financially support her desire to become a teacher. Instead, he wanted her to pursue nuclear medicine, which he thought would be more lucrative than teaching. After her divorce, Jessica moved in with her mother and her mother's partner, who encouraged her, watched her two young children so she could study, and made it possible for Jessica to be a full-time student pursuing her teaching credentials.

Jose described how his close relationship with his mother kept him on track to succeed. His mother's experience as a nurse gave him some insight into the medical field, which he ultimately wants to pursue. Jose chose to live at home with his parents and a younger brother, and he shared that his mother texts him multiple times during the school day to check on what he is doing and if he is going to class. He described, "She's always been pushing me, she wants a better life for all our brothers, [and] she really pushes the education part." Similarly, as Eric argued, his mother "basically forced me to go to college," but she also opened his eyes up to the options that college would provide him. Eric remarked,

> I got a job in high school working at Walgreens, and she said 'If you want to continue at Walgreens, that's ok, there's nothing wrong with that, but without an education there's only so much you can do. There's only so hard you can work, and you will reach a ceiling fairly quickly. So start at a community college. First of all, it's less expensive. Second of all, it's an

> experiment, just take classes, find out what you like, find out what you wanna do ... I mean it's a fresh start, moving out of state, going to a brand-new school. Find you and be less lazy.

Additionally, although not well-documented in the literature, Maria, a student who returned to college after many years, named her children as a valuable source of academic support. Her children were in high school and could help her in mathematics courses like calculus. Maria's husband, who did not attend college, offered to cook and take care of the house to give Maria the time and space she needed to study. For all the participants in this study, it was clear that having significant familial capital played a prominent role in students' abilities to go to college. Support also took many forms, including help around their household, shared childcare responsibilities, and verbal encouragement.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

High school teachers, college instructors, and academic advisors played a pivotal role in students' academic journeys. College instructors played important roles as mentors, which is not surprising given their close proximity to students on a daily basis. Here, we explore other influences who connected students to resources and knowledge that helped them succeed. Jose specifically named his high school teachers as the mentors who taught him how to take notes, study, and how to critically listen, some college knowledge skills critical to student success (Conley, 2005). Additionally, three other participants also talked about their high school mentors. Graciela named her high school teacher as a role model who helped her apply to college and find scholarships. It was this teacher, Mr Hernandez, who inspired Graciela to become a teacher herself: "I want to be somebody like Mr Hernandez is to me."

In Eric's case, an advisor was the source of social capital when he placed into developmental mathematics at the beginning of college. One day in his developmental course, his advisor made a presentation to students in the class and told them, "Don't think that just because you're taking developmental courses now that you can't aspire [to] something like the honors college." Eric was motivated enough to apply to the honors college and was accepted; later, the same advisor connected him with the teacher education program where he received significant financial support that followed him to the 4-year university he transferred to. For these students, connections with high school teachers, college faculty, and institutional agents like advisors opened up opportunities to gain knowledge and skills that enhanced their college experience.

The STEM teacher preparation grant-funded program in which students in this study participated in provided students with mentoring in multiple forms that helped build social capital. First, the program enabled students to access grant funds to help them pay for their tuition. The program's program coordinator recruited students and taught a three-term, one-credit hour course that exposed students to the teaching profession and served as a reflective, supportive space for students to reflect on their student teaching experiences at local urban elementary, middle and high schools. For Ana, the additional grant was particularly helpful as she was paying for college on her own. Michael described the program coordinator as "charismatic" and appreciated how she told stories of her own experience to connect with students in the program. That connection served to build Michael's confidence in himself as a student teacher and said that his comfort with the coordinator "made it a lot more comfortable [for me] to teach."

NAVIGATIONAL CAPITAL

Part of the mentoring students received came in the form of assistance in helping them navigate their institution. Ana's romantic partner played a pivotal role in helping her remain focused on school and choose the classes she needed to complete her degree requirements. Ana's boyfriend graduated from college, and she saw him as someone who understood what it was going to take for her to graduate. She said, "He knows how to study, and so he's the one that was able to turn me around and say, 'Try this, try that,' and that's why I was able to get back into some routine." The impact of his mentoring

on how to balance her education with other aspects of her life helped Ana do to better in college. Vince, Carlos, Samuel, and Cyndi all named their teacher mentors, who they worked with through the program; these participants were recruited from and described skills or lessons they could use that were also positive for them in their college experiences. Vince's mentor taught him how to be better organized while Samuel's mentor showed him how to move forward and learn from his mistakes.

On-campus mentors also helped students in navigating the institution and their academic goals. When Ana received a B in a course that she believed she should have received an A in, her math professor Frank walked her through a complicated process of appealing for another course. The process behind the appeal might have frustrated other students into quitting, yet Frank's support and insider knowledge gave Ana the confidence to keep pursuing the appeal. Ana's situation with the grade appeal and the support she received from Frank speaks to the importance of positive faculty interactions and provides an example of what an informal mentoring relationship looks like in reality.

Similar to Ana, a positive interaction with a faculty member made a huge difference for Jessica. As previously mentioned, Jessica talked to an instructor after failing a math class the first time around: "I said, I can take you again in the summer, and like, 'Sure, you know, you're a really good student.' Then I took her again in the summer, and I passed her class with a 97." Jessica described this instructor as a good teacher, and this encounter provided her with encouragement to retake the course and complete it with a higher grade. In considering a future in nutrition, Eric's advisor pointed out to him the doors that a doctoral degree might open up in the professional world:

> So my advisor in the honors college was very supportive of me wanting to study nutrition, but he's like, 'Why stop there?' You can go for an MD and have more authority. Perhaps you could do more if you have two letters after your name, and that's something I hadn't thought about.

Jose was impressed with the breadth of his Biology II teacher and that instructor's support for the college's Biology club. However, Jose also named the tutors in the college's tutoring center as an important source of support. When specifically asked how the college provided him with support, Jose responded, "The tutoring services that they have here – that's really helpful. I try to use those for when I have papers to write. They're really helpful in going over to see if there is any grammar errors, punctuation errors."

The extant literature has shown that students may stop out or drop out of college if they encounter difficulty navigating the institution (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Rendón, 2002; Tovar, 2015). From mentors on and off-campus, the participants received information that helped them navigate their college campus in different ways, from making sure they choose the correct classes to understanding institutional policies. In Eric's case, his advisor helped him think about the future job market and how his educational choices would impact his professional career later.

RESISTANT CAPITAL

Through expressing their professional and academic aspirations, the participants in this study noted the hope that a college degree would open doors to a successful career. For the students in this study who were all considering careers in teaching, a sense of paying it forward emerged. Carlos, for instance, wrote in his reflective notes about his teacher mentor: "I would like to teach every subject in a way where the students know the importance of the subject and how they could use it in their lives, like my mentor." As previously noted, high school teachers served as important mentors for a number of the participants, and their aspirations to be the advocate for others through becoming teachers themselves emerged.

The development of resistant capital through mentoring experiences was arguably more prevalent for the women in particular, and their mentors supported their present and future resistant capital to resist various forms of oppression. Ana spoke at length about her family's influence; her father was a dentist, her mother never attended college, and Ana was raised in a traditional small town where women typically married, had children, and remained in the home. Her father encouraged Ana and her three sisters to obtain their postsecondary degrees in order to provide for themselves and would tell his daughters, "You don't need a man to take care of you." Similarly, Jessica's aforementioned divorce enabled her to pursue her dream of becoming a teacher after being "broke free" from a controlling husband who did not support this dream. As her mother provided financial and childcare support to Jessica, she also told Jessica, "You need to get this [degree] done for you."

As a young girl, Maria described having a love for math and a desire to be a physicist. However, she recalled that when she told her fourth-grade teacher about this ambition, he laughed at her and sarcastically said, "Good luck with that" because Maria was born into a poor family. Maria pointed out that she was not going to college to become a physicist; instead, she was studying to become a math teacher. Yet it is notable that Maria came to college by first obtaining her GED, and some thirty years after this encounter, she was in a position to pursue a degree in a subject that she loved as a child. She gave credit to her husband and children for providing her with the time and support to help her pursue her college degree. In this case of these women, education was a means of resisting patriarchy and poverty – and their pursuit of education was strengthened by the on and off-campus sources of support they had in their lives.

DISCUSSION

Our study is important in that it disrupts the dominant narrative that persists on Latinx students by providing an asset-based counter-story (Rendón et al., 2014; Yosso, 2005). Rather than viewing Latinx community college students as a problem to be "fixed," lacking college knowledge (Conley, 2005) and/or abilities and resources to be successful in college (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), we highlight their cultural wealth which they developed through a network of mentors from both the students' communities and college campus. Building upon recent work by Luna and Martinez (2013), Kouyoumdjian et al. (2017), Rendón et al. (2014), and Sáenz, Garcia-Louis, Drake, and Guida (2018), we find that Latinx students successfully draw upon their community cultural wealth through various individuals that the participants identified as mentors in order to piece together an opportunistic mentoring network (Higgins & Kram, 2001) that was then used to further develop capital during college. In particular, various mentors collectively served to cultivate and develop students' aspirational, familial, social, navigational, and resistant forms of capital.

In contrast to much of the mentoring literature that gives focus to a very specific set of individuals who can serve as mentors for students (namely faculty, staff and more experienced peers) (Crisp et al., 2017), results demonstrate the potential value and importance of Latinx students developing capital through a diversity of individuals who may or may not have any connection or experience with college. In this way, findings expand our view about who can and may be serving as mentors for Latinx students. For example, although not previously well-documented in the literature, interview data reveal that students' high school and college-age children may serve as important sources of mentoring support for Latinx community college students. As another example, in contrast to deficit-focused research that assumes minoritized students are not receiving academic or college knowledge support prior to college (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), our findings show high school teachers as important forms of support, in particular for Latinx participants who enrolled in college immediately following high school. Building upon recent work by Sáenz and colleagues (2017; 2018), our findings highlight that regardless of educational background, Latinx students' families can and do provide both tangible (e.g., financial) and intangible support (e.g., develop aspirational capital) for Latinx students to be successful in college. The findings also serve to create a counter-story by documenting Latinx parents and family members as mentors, further dispelling the dominant narrative that Latinx

families do not value education (Valencia, 2002) and cannot help students' develop capital that will be of use in a college context (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Although this study is not explicitly focused on STEM, we note that findings contribute to the growing body of research that examines the experiences of Latinx STEM college students (Peralta, Caspary, & Boothe, 2013; Rendón et al., 2019; Rincón & Lane, 2017; S. Rodriguez, Pilcher, & Garcia-Tellez, 2019).

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Mentoring and other high impact programs can be extremely resource intensive and are rarely offered to a broader group of students who are expected to benefit from such programs (e.g., Campos et al., 2009). This is problematic as completion goals in the United States will not be able to be met if community colleges are not able to be more creative with existing resources and take effective programs to scale (Crisp, 2016; Santiago & Settner, 2013). Present findings, therefore, have practical implications for mentoring programs, initiatives that include a mentoring component, as well as more generally for institutional agents who support Latinx students. To begin with, our findings reinforce the importance of providing space for students to cultivate their own mentoring relationships, both formally and informally, with faculty and institutional agents. Fostering opportunities for Latinx students to thrive in college, by connecting them with individuals who have their best interests in mind, allows them to harness other forms of capital noted in our findings. In this way, our findings provide a more nuanced understanding of the types of support and capital that Latinx community college students tap into in order to succeed.

There are several ways community colleges can maximize the supportive mechanisms that honor and enhance Latinx cultural assets. For example, we know that Latinx students place value in *familismo* (S. Rodriguez et al., 2019) so it is important to provide them opportunities (e.g., cultural organizations and activities) to build their own communities on campus as a way of nurturing this particular form of capital. Secondly, institutions could provide professional development for faculty and staff that challenges deficit-thinking regarding the Latinx population. Third, formal mentoring programs should provide guidance on how to elicit validating experiences and work effectively with the Latinx community. Lastly, faculty might consider incorporating culturally-relevant pedagogy into the curriculum that is more reflective of the Latinx experience.

Similar to findings by Enriquez (2011), we find that Latinx students use their cultural wealth to put together a "patchwork" of support that has been termed in the business literature as an opportunistic network (Higgins & Kram, 2001). Opportunistic networks are diverse, yet often have mentors who have weak ties as well as provide redundant information to mentees while perhaps overlooking some important pieces of support that the mentees need. Postsecondary institutions have the potential and responsibility to create more effective ways to respond to and serve Latinx students (L. F. Rodriguez & Oseguera, 2015). Collectively, findings suggest that programs and faculty may provide more meaningful and efficient support by first *recognizing,* and then *building upon* the network of mentors that Latinx students are already developing before and during college using their cultural wealth. A potential model for this is what Villaseñor, Reyes, and Muñoz (2013) term as *mujerista mentoring*, defined as a "collectivist, asset-based model that values the lived experiences and multiple ways of knowing of Chicanas/Latinas, focused on the building of communities and reciprocal mentoring relationships, and challenging models of mentoring that re-inscribe hierarchies between mentors and protégés" (p. 50).

Mentoring programs are typically very expensive in part because they assume the same high level of need for all students. Community colleges must find innovative ways to reach more students with increasingly limited resources (Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2015). Our findings suggest that it is inaccurate to assume that all Latinx community college students lack capital or need the same types and level of support from institutions and mentoring programs. Rather, programs would be more efficiently designed by building upon, rather than duplicating, support that students have already developed outside of formal programs. Additionally, helping Latinx students to understand the value and

power of these networks and other forms of capital they possess are constructive anti-deficit approaches for institutional agents to consider in serving this population. In this way, findings from our study serve as a useful starting place. Institutions who have a clear understanding of the students they serve and the qualities they possess prior to enrollment will be more effective at serving them while they are enrolled. This process begins by asking students whether or not the institution is meeting their needs. Following the recommendation of Villalpando (2004), the best way to understand the resources and sources of support that Latinx students have is to simply ask them about their experiences. To that end, surveying students about their experiences with faculty and staff in and out of the classroom could also help institutions gain valuable insight that will enable them to enhance their efforts in these areas.

In this study, we also found that meaningful mentoring interactions with faculty and institutional agents did not always happen through formal mechanisms (e.g., as a consequence of a formal program like the grant-funded program the participants in this study were part of). Instead, important interactions happened when faculty members stayed after class ended to discuss a student's situation, or when an institutional agent like an advisor helped a student through a challenge like a grade dispute with another faculty member. This study shows that individuals can have profound impacts on students, and colleges might consider ways to make these individual efforts part of the broader institutional culture by recognizing faculty who do this work, including mentoring efforts in annual review processes for all faculty including adjuncts, and making efforts to ensure that mentoring does not become invisible labor.

Transforming the deficit narrative about the Latinx community college experience begins with acknowledging and validating the various cultural assets and attributes these students utilize to succeed. Community colleges and other post-secondary institutions should be more proactive and intentional in exposing these strengths when developing programs and services designed to enhance their college experience (Dowd, Pak, & Bensimon, 2013). Identifying and focusing on what Latinx students possess instead of what they lack is a good start (Sáenz, Garcia-Louis, de las Mercédez, & Rodriguez, 2018). Utilizing an asset-based perspective, we acknowledge that Latinx students leverage their family and prior social networks to succeed in college. Given that Latinxs are likely to begin their post-secondary journey in community colleges, faculty and staff at these institutions may turn out to be their primary, and perhaps most significant, sources of support at the institution. Faculty who recognize that Latinx students possess various sources of knowledge may be better equipped to cultivate validating and familial relationships essential in the personal development and success of Latinx community college students (Rendón, 2002). Therefore, institutions should be intentional in hiring individuals who value and can identify these non-traditional forms of capital found in Latinx students. Moreover, institutions should provide adequate training of faculty and staff to ensure they have the capacity and cultural awareness to properly guide Latinx community college students when opportunities for these informal interactions occur (Tovar, 2015). Assisting students in leveraging their existing capital, while also connecting students with new supportive relationships that can further develop those forms of capital, serves as an opportunity to fuel their postsecondary success and future educational and career ambitions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Findings from the current study provide a foundation for future research opportunities that could further examine how supportive relationships with institutional agents promote the educational and professional success of Latinx community college students. We recommend, for instance, that researchers consider qualitative work that explores how students identify and interact with mentors and other institutional agents during college and how they utilize these relationships to navigate the college environment. What types of interactions matter most to students? What can institutions do to stimulate these interactions? Additional scholarship should focus on exploring how community college faculty and staff develop meaningful mentoring relationships with students. This line of inquiry

would be useful for those who may not fully understand how to relate to or connect with the various cultures that exist within a community college environment. Future research may also explore other forms of support and cultural assets Latinx students utilize to reach their goals. A generation of new knowledge in this area helps to interrogate current measures of success, rather than allowing institutions, administrators, or policy makers to define success. Allowing Latinx students to articulate, in their own words, what success means to them is another way of disrupting the dominant discourse of their college experience.

CONCLUSION

The current study gives empirical attention to studying Latinx community college students through an asset-based lens and is useful in understanding how they strive to meet their educational goals. More importantly, this approach counters the deficit narrative of Latinx students by demonstrating how they leveraged their existing capital gained through high school, precollegiate, and early college mentoring experiences to navigate the community college environment. In line with prior research in this area (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Bordes & Arredondo, 2005; DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Luna & Prieto, 2009; Tovar, 2015; Zell, 2010), our findings underscore the potential for a variety of mentors to serve as critical sources of support for Latinx community college students. Moreover, mentoring programs and other support programs should have tailored approaches that place value in the assets and capital Latinx students already bring with them to college. This would ensure that institutions are intentional about serving the unique needs and characteristics of Latinx students.

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BIOGRAPHIES

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