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"Driven to be the best with what we had": A Critical Examination of Latinas in Private For-Profit Vocational Education



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# “Driven to be the best with what we had”:

# A Critical Examination of Latinas in Private For-Profit Vocational Education

A dissertation in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Iris Lucero

2021

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"Driven to be the best with what we had":

A Critical Examination of Latinas in Private For-Profit Vocational Education

by

Iris Lucero

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2021

Professor Daniel Solórzano, Chair

This qualitative study is a critical examination of Latinas' experiences in a Private For-Profit Vocational Education (PFVE) institution. PFVE institutions are for-profit schools that offer less-than-two-year certificate programs designed to prepare adult students for jobs and careers in an array of vocational trades such as dental and medical assistant positions. Communities of Color, specifically Women of Color, are a target population for PFVE institutions (Chung, 2008; Hentschke et al., 2010; Iloh, 2014; Iloh & Toldson, 2013; McMillan Cotton, 2017; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). To explore my interest in the prevalence of Latinas who are attending PFVE institutions (Oseguera & Malagon, 2010), I pursued two research questions: What factors influence Latinas to attend a PFVE institution? What impact did attending a PFVE have on their career goals? As the theoretical frameworks informing this

study, Critical Race Theory in Education (CRTE), Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE), and Cultural Intuition illuminate the racialized, classed, and gendered schooling experiences of Communities of Color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I held pláticas—a reciprocated conversation between researcher and co-constructor of knowledge as methodology and method (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2015)—with eight Latinas who graduated from a PFVE. Their experiences exemplifed all six capitals of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) (Yosso, 2005), as well as a newly identified concept, actualizational capital. Actualizational capital is the drive. Findings from these pláticas demonstrate the following: (a) Most of the Latinas attended a PFVE to attain a better-paying job, thus seeking upward socioeconomic mobility; (b) Some women attended a PFVE due to the lack of support, information, and guidance; and (c) A couple of Latinas chose to attend a PFVE based on time efficiency. All of the women experienced high levels of debt as a result of their PFVE attendance. For most Latinas, attending a PFVE had a positive impact as they gained self-confidence, work experience, and transferable skills in their designated fields while they actively worked toward pursuing their career goals, exercising their actualizational capital.

The dissertation of Iris Lucero is approved.

Tyrone Howard

Teresa McCarty

Robert Chao Romero

Dimpal Jain

Daniel Solórzano, Committee Chair

# DEDICATION

Para mis abuelas, Hermelinda Carrera Vargas and Eleodora “Lola” Campos Moran. A pesar de que no recibieron educación formal, fueron unas mujeres fuertes, trabajadoras, luchonas e inteligentes. Gracias por transmitirme sus enseñanzas de amor, compasión, bondad y fe.

Para mi ma, Micaela Martha Lucero: Este título es más tuyo que mio. Gracias por tus oraciones, apoyo, y por todo lo que has sacrificado por nuestra familia. ¡Esto es nuestro logro!

With love, for all the mujeres in my family—past, present and future—especially my nieces: Jazmine Andy Duran, Samantha Ariel Duran, Laura Lucero, and Lunabelle Alice Blanco. This is for you, a testament that you can do and be whatever you want to be. Follow your heart, and pursue a career you love, because unlike Ma and my grandmothers, we have the opportunities and resources to pursue our dreams. Aim high and reach all of your goals, because it’s possible to do so. You come from a line of extraordinary women, mujeres guerreras and luchonas; you have it in you to succeed in anything you do. I believe in you. May you pass down the teachings and traditions from our family and make sure to uplift and support the next generation of our family. I may be the first in our family to earn a Ph.D., but I know I won’t be the last. I love you!

With love to my son, my blessing, my heart, Xavier Chavoya-Lucero. I love you more than you will ever know. You came to my world at the perfect time. Thanks for teaching me to live in the moment, slow down, and breathe. You make my life complete. I hope that when you read this, you’ll be proud of your mama!

To all the Latinas who participated in this study. Thank you for trusting me with your narratives. You are extraordinary women! Your resiliency, courage and perseverance inspire me, and I hope this work inspires the women from our community.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES



LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I begin by thanking God for allowing me to pursue the desires of my heart. I have always wanted to go to college, but honestly never thought that I would be earning a Ph.D. My prayer is that my work, my praxis, will be grounded in love and used to promote social and racial justice for all, especially for Communities of Color.

I want to acknowledge and honor my parents, Isidro and Micaela Martha Lucero. Without them leaving Puebla, México to pursue a better future for me and my siblings, we would not have the opportunities and resources to live a good life. My parents did not have the opportunity to pursue their dreams. Instead, they brought us to the U.S. to give us the opportunities to live ours. For that, I will always be grateful, and I want to make sure to remind our children about your fortaleza and legacy. *Gracias, Ma y Pa. Que sin ustedes y sus enseñanzas, trabajo y apoyo, no tendríamos lo que tenemos*. To my siblings, Plácido and Martha: Thank you for your support throughout this journey. I share this degree with you and know that it's dedicated to our children and their children. My sister, Tamara Porter: Thank you, sis, for helping me through my educational journey. You've been by my side, always cheering me on since I started at West LA College. I am forever grateful for your friendship and prayers. Dillon Porter, my baby, you will always have my love and support.

This year has been extremely hard for the entire world with COVID-19, but especially hard for many families who lost loved ones due to this virus. Earlier this year, my family lost six family members. Sadly, my dad lost his three older brothers: Herminio Lucero Carrera, Medardo "Meda" Lucero Carrera, and Crisóforo "Chofo" Lucero Carrera. They perished a few weeks apart from each other. It's been tough on our entire family, but especially difficult for my dad. It's been a sorrowful and heartbreaking time, but we're all hanging in there taking care of one

another. My siblings and I had a special bond with our Tio Meda. He retired and moved from L.A. to Piaxtla, Puebla Mexico, where our family is from. He visited us a few times a year and when he stayed with us, we had a lot of fun. Tio Meda was witty at the tongue; his dichos made us laugh for days! I want to use this space to acknowledge my Tio Meda. He was so proud of me for pursuing this Ph.D., and admired that I had gone that far in school. We would sit in the backyard, his coffee in hand, and we would talk. I asked him to tell me about his parents, my abuelita Hermelinda Carrera y abuelo Emigdio Lucero. He loved to talk about them and his grandfather, Plácido Lucero. I'm glad I recorded our conversations. He got so excited to talk about our Lucero Carrera family, and encouraged me to seek more information about our ancestors. I'm so happy that he got to meet Xavier and Jonathan. ¡Tio Meda, Presente! Until we meet again!

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My dear friend and committee member, Dr. Dimpal Jain: It's your fault I got into this mess called the Ph.D.! I took my first research class with you during my junior year at UCLA and that was it; you saw something in me and encouraged me to pursue a doctorate. I appreciate you, your friendship, and your continuous support over all these years. You are an amazing scholar, teacher, but most importantly you are a great friend! Thank you!

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the work CCCP does, and working there inspired me to pursue a degree in education. Thank you, Santiago Bernal and Alfred Herrera. Please continue doing the important work with community college and transfer students, and know that I am committed to serving and working with that special population, too.

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# VITA

## EDUCATION

**University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)**
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**Master of Arts in Education (M.A.)** June 2011
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## PUBLICATIONS

Jain, D., **Lucero, I**., Bernal, S., Herrera, A., & Solórzano, D. (2017). Developing transfer pride: An exploration of a summer transfer enrichment program. *Community College Review*, *45*(3), 171–189.

Jain, D., Bernal, S., **Lucero, I.**, Herrera, A, & Solórzano, D. (2016). Towards a critical race perspective of transfer: An exploration of a transfer receptive culture. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *40*(12), 1013–1024.

## CONFERENCES

Lucero, I., Mares-Tamayo, M. (2020, May). Learning from Testimonios of Resilience and Success: Centering the Experiences of Latinx Students at a California Community College. Paper accepted to the annual conference of Critical Race Studies in Education Association (CRSEA), Newark, DE.

Lucero, I., Mares-Tamayo, M. (2020, April). Learning from Experiences of Resilience and Success: Centering the Experiences of Latinx Students at a California Community College. Paper accepted to the annual conference of the Council for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC), Tempe, AZ.

Jain, D., **Lucero, I.**, Bernal, S., Herrera, A & Solórzano, D. (2014, April). Towards A Critical Perspective of Transfer: An Exploration of UCLA's CCCP SITE+ Program. Paper presented at the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Philadelphia, PA.

Jain, D., Herrera, A., **Lucero, I.**, Bernal, S. & Solórzano, D. (2013, November). Towards A Critical Perspective of Transfer: An Exploration of a Transfer Receptive Culture. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), St. Louis, MO.

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

**California State University, Fullerton (CSUF)**
***Lecturer***
Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies — Fall 2015–Spring 2018
Course: "La Chicana"

**University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)** — Summer 2014–Spring 2017
***Teaching Assistant***
**Department of Education & Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies** (Cross-listed)

- Course: "Mexican Americans & Schools"

**Department of Education**

- Course: "Race, Class, Gender, & School Inequality in the United States"
- Course: "History of Higher Education"

**Honors Collegium / Academic Advancement Program**

- Student Research forum/Introduction to Research

**Department of Theater & Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies**

- Contemporary Chicano Theater

## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

**Student Equity—Pasadena City College (PCC)** — Jan. 2019 – Present
Pasadena, CA
***Assistant Researcher and Program Coordinator***

- Collaborated with Director of Student Equity on a research study examining the experiences of Latina/o/x students at Pasadena City College
- Created the research design, participant recruitment materials, developed student survey and interview protocol, and conducted data collection. Presented preliminary findings at PCC's Abriendo Caminos HSI Title V Grant symposium
- Planned and organized a college visit for Century High School, a continuation school in Alhambra. 20 students received a campus tour and had lunch with current community college students. Invited presenters from TRIO, EOP&S, MESA and other campus programs and resources

## RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

**UCLA Center for Community College Partnerships (CCCP)** — Sept. 2011–June 2014
*Graduate Student Researcher (GSR)*

- Participated as an integral part of a research team consisting of faculty and administration that examined the SITE+/STEP program, one of CCCP's summer programs to determine how the program embodied a transfer receptive culture.

- Worked with the Assistant Vice Provost for Academic Partnerships and the Assistant Director of CCCP on developing evaluation tools to measure the effectiveness of programs and utilized research methods to gather, analyze, and report data on issues relevant to the work of community college professionals and scholars.

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO A PRIVATE FOR-PROFIT VOCATIONAL EDUCATION (PFVE)

I begin Chapter One by sharing what led me to this research topic. Integrated with my narrative, I present the research questions guiding this investigation, followed by the background and profile of Private For-Profit Vocational Education (PFVE) institutions, then I continue by presenting the theories, methodologies and methods informing this study and conclude by stating the significance of this investigation. My interest in researching PFVEs stemmed from my own attendance in a PFVE many years ago. I define Private For-Profit Vocational Education (PFVE) institutions as for-profit schools that offer less-than-two-year certificate programs designed to prepare adult students for jobs and careers in an array of vocational trades such as dental, administrative, and medical assistant positions (Hentschke et al., 2010; McMillan Cotton, 2017; Oseguera & Malagon, 2010).

One morning while my mother and I sat at the kitchen table having our morning *plática* over coffee, a television commercial for a vocational program caught my attention (McMillan Cotton, 2017). According to the commercial, after the completion of a short-term vocational program, the school helped their students secure a job in that field (McMillan Cotton, 2017). For a young 18-year-old Latina, that proposition sounded promising. I translated what the commercial advertised to my mother. I asked her for a *consejo*, specifically if she thought I should call to seek more information. With her encouragement, I called and made an appointment to visit the school. On my father's only day off, my parents and I visited Computer Learning Center, a for-profit institution. Our visit was supposed to be just that, a visit. We never expected to leave the school having signed a contract to an expensive 15-month program. The certificate program was called Computerized Business Systems that was advertised as a program

designed to teach computer hardware and software. The tuition was expensive—more than my parents could afford. As a result, my parents and I had to apply for loans, but I felt encouraged when they stated they were willing to pay any amount towards my education.

A few weeks into the program, I heard the school was not accredited. I did not know what that meant, but soon found out it meant the units earned at a PFVE were not transferable to a community college and/or a four-year university. As I recalled, the representative told my parents and I the units were transferable. I was in disbelief. I worked through my feelings of sadness, disappointment, and shame and successfully completed the 15-month program. Upon completion, I did not have a job, my parents and I were enslaved to a large amount of debt, and I was left with a certificate that was not transferable to a two- and four-year college and university. Unfortunately, my experience of attending a PFVE is not uncommon.

Today, the students who attend PFVEs are predominantly women, single parents, low-income, independent, non-traditional students, and are more likely to be African American and Latina/os (Chung, 2008; Hentschke et al., 2010; Iloh, 2014; Iloh & Toldson, 2013; McMillan Cotton, 2017; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2011), in the 2007–2008 academic year from all students who are enrolled in undergraduate education, an estimated 2% is enrolled in a less-than-two-year for-profit institution and 2.6 percent is enrolled in a two-year for-profit. When broken down by race, these figures indicate that approximately 3% of Black students and 5% of Hispanic[1]/Latina/os were enrolled in a certificate program compared to 1% of Whites. Additionally, only 1% of Asian/Pacific Islander student and 2% of "other or two or more races" are enrolled in a less-than-two-year for-profit

[1] In the statistical data provided by the U.S. Department of Education (2011), the term Hispanic includes students who identified as Latinos.

institution (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). This means that Black students are two times as likely as whites to be enrolled in a less-than-two-year for-profit while Latina/o students are four times more likely than white students to be enrolled a less-than-two-year for-profit program (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). With the over enrollment of Latina/o students in for-profits institutions it is of high importance to investigate what factors influence them to attend this type of institution.

Applying a Chicana feminism lens, I share my lived experience in an *autohistoria-teoría* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). At 18 years of age, I found attending a PFVE as an opportunity to learn a skill and work to help my parents financially. My plan was to continue my education by transferring to a community college or four-year institution after the program. I believed the school representative when she told my parents and me that the school was indeed accredited. Today, PFVEs like the one I attended years ago are still around. They advertise certificate and degree programs on television, billboards, bus stops, metro train stations, and on the radio (McMillan Cottom, 2017). Most advertisements show People of Color as advocates and/or spokespeople of PFVE schools. As a scholar trying to make sense of the phenomenon of PFVEs, I am interested in investigating why individuals like myself found attending a PFVE an option. Years later, I did not know my lived experience in a PFVE was considered knowledge or that like me Latinas who attended PFVE we would be theorizing about our experiences at a PFVE. The women and I talked about our experience in education and a PFVE therefore applying our theory in the flesh (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981).[2]

[2] According to Moraga (1981), "A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives-our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on…all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience" (p. 23).

## Research Questions

California is among the states where the presence of PFVE institutions has dramatically increased in the last several years (Foster, 2004; Hentschke et al., 2010; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). On April 27, 2015, Corinthian Colleges Inc., the parent company to Everest College, Heald College, and WyoTech College, closed their doors, displacing 16,000 students in California alone (Federal Student Aid, n.d.; Kamenetz, 2015). Many of the students attending PFVE institutions are Latina women (Oseguera & Malagon, 2010). With both the popularity and negative outcomes of attending a PFVE, I am compelled to investigate why Latinas choose to attend a PFVE and what impact it has had on their future educational goals. Therefore, the research questions guiding this investigation are:

1) What factors influence Latinas to attend a Private For-Profit Vocational Education institution?
2) What impact did attending a PFVE have on their career goals?

In order to demonstrate the importance of this under-researched area, I share the characteristics that distinguish PFVE from other for-profit schools and how they differ from other institutions of higher education.

## PFVE Background and Profile

The presence of proprietary[3] or private for-profit vocational education (PFVE) dates back to the early 1600s during the establishment of the educational system in the U.S. (Chung, 2008; Dexter, 1904; Ruch, 2011; Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). Proprietary institutions once referred to family-owned businesses that taught a vocation or trade; the student paid the instructor, and the profits went directly to the proprietor/s (Ruch, 2001). During this time, as the systems of higher

[3] Proprietary, for-profits and PFVE will be used interchangeably to refer to for-profit schools.

education began to evolve there was no clear distinction between public, private, for-private, or non-profit school regulations (Ruch, 2001). However, there was a clear distinction between proprietary schools and traditional colleges (Dexter, 1904; Hentschke et al., 2010; Ruch, 2001; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). Historically, proprietary schools were designed to prepare the working-class population for the labor force (Ruch, 2001). For example, early proprietary schools provided training in cosmetology, car mechanics, and accounting, among other skilled trades (Ruch, 2001).

The PFVE schools were in high demand because they provided basic math, reading, and writing skills as well as a trade—something traditional colleges did not offer to everyone (Dexter, 1904; Hentschke et al., 2010; Ruch, 2001; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). Traditional colleges provided a curriculum focused on philosophy, literature, law, theology, Greek and Latin languages (Ruch, 2001). Hence, attending a traditional college was not an option offered to everyone but to white men and the elite; therefore, attending a PFVE became a tangible option for working-class people (Dexter, 1904; Hentschke et al., 2010; Ruch, 2001; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007).

Private for-profits differ from traditional two-year colleges and four-year institutions in many ways. PFVEs are privately owned, hence school information (tuition rate, enrollment statistics, etc.) is not made public. There are two types of accreditations: regional and national. Nonprofit colleges and universities such as community college, California States and University of California universities meet the regional accreditation standards because they are academically oriented institutions. For-profits and institutions that offer vocational and technical programs are accredited under the national accreditation standards. PFVEs are accredited under national accreditation, making it unlikely for students to transfer units to a community college

and four-year universities (McMillan Cotton, 2017; Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). PFVEs are expensive to attend; their tuition is higher compared to the community college system (Iloh & Toldson, 2013). Additionally, PFVEs have aggressive marketing tools, specifically targeting Students of Color who are low-income (Iloh, 2014; Iloh & Toldson, 2013; McMillan Cotton, 2017; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). And lastly, unfortunately, many students, most of whom are Students of Color, who attend PFVE institutions are left with high student debt and without employment (Iloh & Toldson, 2013).

There are two different types of for-profit schools. There are for-profits like University of Phoenix, Devry, and ITT Tech and PFVEs like Everest College. One key difference between University of Phoenix and Everest College is the degree and/or certificate they grant. For example, University of Phoenix, Devry, and ITT Tech award certificates and degrees (A.A., B.A., B.S., M.A.). However, I specifically focus on certificate-granting institutions such as Everest College, Heald College, WyoTech College, Westwood College, and International Career Development Center (ICDC) College in Los Angeles because these PFVE schools offer less-than two-year certificates, resulting in assistant-level jobs within the medical, dental, and corporate fields. PFVEs like Everest College, have received a lot of media attention lately due to their sudden closure. Corinthian Colleges Inc was under investigation for misleading students on job placement and for many students defaulting on their student loans (Federal Student Aid, n.d.; Kamenetz, 2015).

To show the different types of institutions in higher education, Table 1 shows the different types of post-secondary institutions and their objectives. The first column identifies the different types of colleges and universities. The second column provides the accreditation agency each school is accredited under. The third column provides a few examples of the programs

and/or majors each institution offers. The fourth column states the type of certificate or degree each school grants. The fifth and sixth column provides the estimated time of completion of each program/degree and tuition cost for each.

Table 1

*Institutions and Accreditations*

| Institutions | Accreditation | Program/s | Certificate/Degree | Time to Completion | Fees |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **PFVEs:** *Everest* | National | Medical Administrative Assistant Paralegal | Certificate A.A. Degree | 8 Months 2 years | $11-20k $32-35k |
| **For-Profits:** *University of Phoenix* | Regional *Specialized | Business, Communications Nursing, Business | BA./B.S, M.A., PhD A.A., Certificate | 10 months 10 months (1-5 years) | $19-24k $19-24k/Year |
| **Community College:** *West Los Angeles College* | Regional | Political Science/Math Medical Assisting/Dental Hygiene Healthcare Services/Office Assistant | A.A./A.S. for Transfer A.A./A.S. Non-Credit Certificates/Certificates | Depends on Certificate/ Degree | $46/Unit |
| **UCs/Cal States:** *UCLA CSUN* | Regional | Different Majors | B.A/B.S., M.A./M.S., PhD B.A/B.S., M.A./M.S., EDD | 4–5 years | $37k/Year $29k/Year |

Table 1 shows the different types of post-secondary institution and their objectives; it states the accreditation they are under, the programs/majors they offer, the certificate and/or degree they grant, the time it takes to complete the program/major, and their most recent tuition price.

I focus on PFVE institutions such as Everest College. This PFVE is accredited under National accreditation standards. Everest College grants certificates on vocational programs such as the Medical Administrative Assistant program. This program takes eight months to complete, and tuition is approximately $15,000 (per certificate program). As demonstrated in Table 1, there are different types of colleges and universities a student can choose from. For a student who is unfamiliar with the institution's objectives, it can be a confusing and/or overwhelming task. Existing literature on for-profits focuses on the rise of for-profit schools, the amount of money they spend on marketing, and the students they target (Chung, 2008; Hentschke et al., 2010; McMillan Cotton, 2017; Mettler, 2014; Ruch, 2001; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007; Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). When I proposed this project, the gap in the literature exposed the absence of students' experience at a for-profit as well as how they choose to attend a PFVE. However, that changed in 2017, when McMillan Cotton published a book based on her personal experience working at two for-profits with composite stories based on students she interviewed. She weaves in her personal experience as someone who worked in a for-profit along with the students' experiences as they decided to attend a for-profit with the economic aspect of the for-profit (McMillan Cotton, 2017). Furthermore, in 2015, for-profit colleges were investigated for fraudulent practices and were forced to shut down abruptly, leaving many students with high amounts of debt. In September 2021, Education Secretary Miguel Cardona "canceled $1 billion in student loan debt for about 72,000 defrauded borrowers" (Sheffey, 2021).

My further concern is that the majority of students who attend PFVEs are Students of Color and Latina women (McMillan Cotton, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Given these developments, it is crucial to investigate what factors influence Latinas to attend Private For-Profit Vocational Education institutions and what impact has attending a PFVE had on their

career goals. In attempt to answer these research questions, I turn to the literature on the college choice process, which explores how students decide when and what college to attend. There has been research documenting the college choice process of Latina/os from high school to two- and four-year colleges and universities (Hurtado et al., 1997, Perez & McDonough, 2008; Swail et al., 2004; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005). Studies focusing on the college choice process for Latinas assert that their college decision making does not fit the traditional model (Talavera-Bustillos, 1998; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005). Furthermore, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to the college choice process of Latinas attending PFVE institutions. Given the increasing visibility of PFVE schools and the gap in the scholarship, I am interested in examining the college choice process of Latina women who decided to attend a PFVE school and what impact attending a PFVE has had on their future academic goals.

## Theory, Methodology and Methods

The theoretical frameworks informing this study are Critical Race Theory in Education (CRTE), Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE), and Cultural Intuition. CRTE allows me to examine the racialized, classed, and gendered schooling experiences of communities of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE) and Cultural Intuition informed the way I conducted this research by centralizing the lived and shared experiences of Latinas in PFVEs (Delgado Bernal, 1998). This Chicana feminist framework also guides my methodology and method by utilizing plática, a reciprocated conversation between researcher and co-constructor of knowledge (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2015). The purpose of plática as method and methodology is to hold space for the women and me to share our narratives, thoughts, and feelings about our educational trajectories and experiences (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2015). My intention is to highlight the women's spirit of resistance and resiliency by showing the reasons and/or factors of their attendance in a PFVE institution. I argue that the

women who attend PFVE have aspirations to attend other forms of college, but due to a number of factors they choose to attend a PFVE. The methodology and method of plática allowed me to document the narratives of Latinas in PFVEs and honor them as knowledge producers.

I recruited 17 Latinas who are either attending, had attended, or graduated from a PFVE to engage in a plática. After reaching out to all 17, 9 declined to participate and 8 agreed to share their experience at a PFVE. With the help of some of the women that I recruited, I was able to locate other Latinas, which is why snowball sampling (Babbie, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994) was ideal for the recruitment method of this study. Seidman's (2019) three-part interview model served as an effective structure for the individual pláticas I had with the eight Latina women. The three-part interview model focused on three themes—the first theme focuses on the participant's life history, the second theme focuses on the details their life experiences, and the third theme focuses on a reflection the meaning of their experience (Seidman, 2019). The goal of the three-part interviewing model is to focus on our lived experiences to critically analyze the reasons why we chose to attend a PFVE (Seidman, 2019).

## Community Cultural Wealth

Grounded in CRT, Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) is defined as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). More specifically, this framework highlights the "array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities" Students of Color bring with them into educational spaces (Yosso, 2005, p. 69). These are skills and abilities students inherent from their home, communities, and lived experiences. The six capitals that inform this framework are aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital.

Aspirational capital is "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers." (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). This capital highlights the aspirations parents/guardians have for their children and future generation to pursue and accomplish their goals.

Familial capital "refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry as sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition. This form of cultural wealth engages a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family to include a more broad understanding of kinship . . . . From these kinship ties, we learn the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to our community and its resources" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). This capital also encompasses the support and encouragement from family and extended family members. Social Capital "can be understood as networks of people and community resources. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions" (p. 79). Navigational capital "refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions . . . this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind" (p. 80). To demonstrate how this capital was exemplified, I share Rocio and Dolores's experience. Resistant capital "refers those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80).

CCW is used to demonstrate how the eight women in this study exemplified each capital through their personal and educational experiences, and how that impacted their career goals. Additionally, their experiences inspired a newly identified capital, actualizational capital. Actualizational capital is the action of working toward a goal to make it a reality and is fueled by *ganas*, or determination and drive.

## Significance of this Study

This study on PFVE institutions contributes to the literature on the for-profit sector of education and most importantly, it highlights the narratives of Latinas who attend PFVE schools. This study provides transparency towards PFVE institutions and their role in the higher education arena, along with increased visibility of the population they are targeting, most of whom are Latinas. My goal is to understand the educational pathways Latinas take from kindergarten to post-high school. Most importantly, this research provides a platform for Latinas to share their lived experiences in a PFVE and higher education.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I shared my experience at a PFVE, the research questions guiding this investigation, and the background and profile of PFVE institutions. Then, I introduce the theories, methodology and methods associated with my study. I conclude the chapter by presenting the significance of this study. Given the increasing visibility of PFVE schools and the gap in the research, it is essential to review the published scholarship on my research topic. Therefore, in the next chapter I focus on a literature review on for-profit education, the history of Chicanas/Latinas in vocational education, and the college choice process of Latina women.

# CHAPTER TWO: FOR-PROFIT EDUCATION, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND LATINAS' COLLEGE CHOICES

In this chapter, I provide a review of the literature on for-profit education, focusing on key government legislation that helped develop for-profit education. Then I discuss the history of Latina/os and Chicana/os in vocational education, specifically focusing on how Latinas have been tracked into vocational courses. I conclude by presenting the literature on the college choice process of Latinas/ Chicanas, to conceptualize the traditional college choice model. To introduce each section of the literature review, I utilize photos and images (see Figure 1) to demonstrate the historical and contemporary presence of PFVEs and stress the importance of investigating why Latinas choose to attend a PFVE.

*Figure 1.* Former and current college students calling themselves the "Corinthian 100." http://genprogress.org/voices/2015/04/14/36095/the-corinthian-100-are-protesting-their-student-debt-with-plenty-of-support/. Photo taken by AP/Manuel Balce Ceneta.

## For-profit Education

Figure 1 features a group photo of several students calling themselves the "Corinthian 100." The "Corinthian 100" is composed of former and current Corinthian College students who are refusing to pay their student debt due to the sudden closure of Corinthian Colleges. Corinthian Colleges, Inc. is a for-profit education company, owner of 30 campuses nationwide including Everest College, Heald, College, and WyoTech College (Federal Student Aid, n.d.).

Specifically, the Corinthian 100 refuse to pay their student debt for Corinthian College's "low-quality, expensive education" (Wood, 2015).

Corinthian College, Inc. was under investigation for misleading students on job placement, and students' high student debt (Kamenetz, 2015). On April 27, 2015, the U.S. Department of Education announced the closure of these colleges. As a result of the of sudden company closure, 16,000 students in California were displaced (Federal Student Aid, n.d.; Kamenetz, 2015). Most of the students affected by the unethical practices of for-profit schools such as Corinthian Colleges are low-income students and Students of Color (Iloh, 2014; Iloh & Toldson, 2013). As of June 8, 2015, the U.S. Department of Education has been working with students by offering loan forgiveness programs to help relief their federal student debt (Federal Student Aid, n.d.; Kamenetz, 2015). In 2015, for-profit schools have received widespread media attention due to the closure of Corinthian Colleges. In September 2021, Education Secretary Miguel Cardona "canceled $1 billion in student loan debt for about 72,000 defrauded borrowers" (Sheffey, 2021). The fact is that for-profit institutions have existed since the 1600s. For the purpose of this study, I begin by providing a literature review on for-profit education beginning with the implementation of the seminal higher educational policy. I start with The Morrill Act Land Grant Act of 1862.

**1800s: An Era of Exclusivity & Need**

The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 established funding for land-grant colleges promoting traditional liberal arts education combined with training in agriculture, the natural sciences and teaching (Mettler, 2014; Ruch, 2001; Tierney, 2010; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). Prior to the implementation of this legislation, there was a clear distinction between who had access to a college education and what subjects were taught. College was intended for the elite and wealthy while the curriculum consisted of religious studies. However, with the enactment of

the Morrill Act of 1862, "college was open up to more than just the weatlthy. Higher learning no longer referred only to the study of classical disciplines and religion; the practical arts were also to be taught. Agriculture and science for the working classes demanded new kinds of institutions" (Tierney & Hentschke, 2007, p. 90). Soon after, Congress passed the second Morrill Act in 1890, benefiting historically Black colleges and universities (Mettler, 2014). The 1800s demanded agricultural education and for-profit institutions responded to the social and economic need of this era (Mettler, 2014; Ruch, 2001). In fact, the passing of The Morrill Act of 1862[4] and 1890 validated the need of a more practical college education, subsequently introducing vocational education into higher education (Mettler, 2014; Ruch, 2001).

**1900s: An Era of Government Support**

After World War 1 (1914–1918), as America grew geographically and economically during the industrialization era, the demand for factory workers, engineers, chemists and manufactures increased (Lee & Merisotis, 1990; Ruch, 2001; Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). To meet this demand, the Vocational Act of 1917 was enacted to financially support career-oriented programs (Ruch, 2001, Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). The Vocational Act of 1917, "was the first piece of federal legislation designed to support occupational and career education" (Zamani-Gallaher, 2004, p. 64). Career education referred to programs focused on preparing students in the fields of construction, mechanic and repair technologies, clerical assistance, transportation, and the health fields (Hentschke et al., 2010; Oseguera & Malagon, 2010; Ruch, 2001; Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). During this time, for-profits were not recognized as a legitimate educational instutions "receiving little or no official recognition from federal or state governing bodies"

[4] It is important to state that there has also been a good deal of critique of the Morrill Act, and the continued profit-making on stolen Indigenous lands that the Morrill Act legitimated. See Brayboy and Tachine (2021).

(Ruch, 2001, p. 60). That did not affect the increase of for-profit schools, in fact many independently owned for-profits prepared individuals for the workforce during this period (Mettler, 2014; Ruch, 2001).

After World War II (1939–1945), The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 better known as the GI Bill was enacted to pay for the college tuition of any war veteran interested in attending college (Chung, 2008; Mettler, 2014; Olson, 1973; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). With the financial assistance provided by The GI Bill, veteran's had the oppourtuinity to enroll and attend the college of their choice without worrying about tuition costs, as described by Olson (1973), "with tuition paid by the government, veterans attemped to enter the best insitutions their records permitted" (p. 605). Many veterans enrolled in all sectors of the postsecondary education including state schools and Ivy league schools, but most enrolled in technical/vocational schools, community college, and teacher-training colleges (Chung, 2008; Olson, 1973).

Additionally, with the passing of the GI Bill, thousands of new for-profit schools and programs sprang into existance specifically targeting veterans with GI Bill benefits (Chung, 2008; Mettler, 2014; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). In fact, according to Mettler (2014), "the original GI Bill is best remembered for providing financial aid to veterans who attended traditional colleges and univeristies, but more than two and a half times as many, 5.6 million, pursued vocational and on-the-job training, primarily by attending what were then called "trade schools" (p. 90). The GI Bill benefitted many veterans who took advantage of the financial help provided by the government and enrolled in college. The orgin of the contemporary 90/10 Rule, which restricts for-profits schools from receiving more than 90% of their revenue from finanical aid, 10% must come from alternative sources or out-of-pocket, also relates to the passing of the GI Bill (Murakami, 2021).

To extend financial aid opportunites to indivduals who wanted to attend college, President Johnson endorsed the comprehensive Higher Education Act of 1965 (Mettler, 2014). The Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 authorized financial aid programs such as student loans, grants and work-study for students enrollend in postsecondary and higher education (Mettler, 2014). Soon after, during President Richard Nixon's time in office (1969–1974), he urged congress to pass a law granting financial assistance to indivuals who wanted to attend college but could not afford it. In 1970, Nixon sent congress a message stating that no indivual qualified to attend college should not attend due to lack of money (Mettler, 2014). That's when Title IV was enacted. A Title IV institution is "an institution that has a written agreement with the Secretary of Education that allows the institution to participate in any of the Title IV federal student financial assistance programs" (Chung, 2008). Therefore, the passing of HEA and Title IV benefitted women and low-income individuals interested in attending college who could not afford it. According to Mettler (2014), "unlike the GI Bill, these policies were fully available to women, who quickly began to use them at comparable rates to men, particularly once the passage of Title IV" (p. 6).

At the time of the passing of HEA and Title IV, for-profit schools were not recognized as an institutions qualified to receive any type of government financial assistance (Mettler, 2014; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). It was not until 1972, that the "Higher Education Act Amendment recognized for-profit schools as eligible instituitons for federal aid programs, making for-profit post-secondary training a feasible alternative to public colleges" (Chung, 2008, p. 1). As a result, members of congress took the initiative and granted financial aid under HEA and Title IV to accredited for-profit schools (Mettler, 2014). Hence, attending for-profit schools became a

popular option for women and Students of Color, as Ruch (2001) stated, “for-profit education was the door of opportunity for women and People of Color to enter the labor force” (p. 58).

Historically, women, low-income individuals, People of Color, and people with disabilities did not have the equal opportunities to pursue higher education (Mettler, 2014; Ruch, 2001; Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). But now with the financial assistance from HEA, Title IV, and the GI Bill, many people decided to attend traditional colleges and/or for-profit schools (Chung, 2008; Mettler, 2014; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007; Zamani-Gallaher, 2004).

**2000s: An Era of Reconsideration**

The rise of for-profit schools increased in the late 1900s and into the 2000s (Hentschke et al., 2010; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). With the continuous financial support from HEA, Title IV, and the GI Bill, for-profits began targeting individuals who were women, low-income, and non-traditional students (Chung, 2008; Mettler, 2014; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007; Zamani-Gallaher, 2004), many who were African American and Latina/os (Chung, 2008; Hentschke et al., 2010; Iloh, 2014; Iloh & Toldson, 2013; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). According to Tierney and Hentschke (2007), “more Black and Hispanic [Latina/o] students attend two-year for-profit institutions than four-year for-profits—32% and 26%, respectively—but when compared with 16.6% at four-year public institutions, one can say easily surmise that Student of Color tend to find for profit institutions an attractive possibility” (p. 141).

Unfortunately, many students are left with high student loans, and without a certificate and/or employment (Iloh & Toldson, 2013). They are students like the “Corinthian 100,” who refuse to pay their high student debt. Until recently, there has been an increase of government scrutiny but still an inability to regulate these schools. Additionally, the government is working with students affected by these schools by offering loan forgiveness programs to help relief their federal student debt (Federal Student Aid, n.d.; Kamenetz, 2015). Due to the current situation

with PFVEs, legislation such as, The Gainful Employment Law aims to provide more transparency and regulation with the funds allocated to private for-profit vocational schools in the United States (Fain, 2014).

Recently, McMillan Cotton's (2017) published a book that centers "the gap between the educational gospel and the real options available to people" (p. 11). The educational gospel refers to the continuous faith we have in the educational system perceiving it as an investment into our future; investing in it regardless of how much it cost. This concept is from economics W. Norton Grubb and Marvin Lazerson (2004). McMillan Cotton draws from her experience as an insider, having worked in a for-profit as an admissions representative and over 100 interviews from students, employees, executives, and activists.

In each chapter she ties her experience along with a student experience to describes the student's choice to attend a for-profit. Therefore, highlighting the political, economic, and social realities of the students and their college choice to attend a for-profit. McMillan Cotton is the first author to write about the for-profits providing an insider's perspective, the students' narratives are based a composite of many individual interviews. Although she provides students experience in the for-profit, my work differs as it focuses on an in-depth analysis of Latinas in less than two-year certificate vocational programs.

This section presented an overview of For-profit education. With the over-enrollment of Students of Color, especially Chicanas/Latinas in PFVEs, it's evident that attending a for-profit continues to be a feasible and attractive option to young Chicanas/Latinas (Oseguera & Malagon, 2010, 2010; U.S. Department of Education; 2011). To understand what factors may have encouraged Chicanas/Latinas to attend a PFVE, I discuss the history of Chicanas and Latinas in Vocational education in the following section.

## History of Chicana/os and Latina/os in Public Vocational Education

The two young Chicana/Latina women in this photograph (Figure 2) [5]are setting the table for what seems to be an extravagant dinner. The Chicana/Latinas, dressed in maid outfits were students in a "Practice House" class offered at Jefferson High School in the city of Los Angeles in 1942. This is an example of a vocational course for young Mexican women during the 1940s. The vocational education of this time sent a historical message, that Chicanas/Latina women were not school material, but service material. Before discussing the presence of Latinas in public vocational education, I will begin by presenting the literature on education tracking.

*Figure 2*. Two young Chicana/Latina women photographed in a "Practice House" vocational education course taught at Jefferson High School in 1942, Courtesy of LAUSD Art and Artifacts Archives.

[5] This image is reminiscent of similar images from Indian boarding schools, and 1950s government-issued "textbooks" with titles such as "Be a Good Waitress," "Shoe Repair Dictionary," etc.—these texts emphasized training for domesticity and servitude. I examine the history of vocational and Indian boarding schools that "trained" young women of color for service-type jobs.

## Tracking

According to Pincus (1980), "the controversy over vocational education in the United States dates back to the Civil War" (p. 334), when the wealthy white businessmen of the time challenged the school curriculum that focused on Greek, Latin and theology studies. During this time, "skilled workers . . . and union-controlled apprentice programs were still the main source of job training" for the workforce (p. 335). The introduction of vocational education into public schools was initiated in the early 1900s. The implementation of vocational education in the U.S. public school system was intended to offer all individuals practical skills to supplement their academic development. According to Oakes (1985), the "earliest advocates of vocational education had viewed manual training as complementary to academic studies in the provision of a balanced education for *all* students" (p. 31). Manual training referred to providing students with hands-on training, that is a "meaningful way of learning—learning by doing" (p. 31). Although the introduction of vocational education in junior high and high school was intended to provide textbook and practical skills for the development of a well-rounded student, it did not work out that way for all students.

There was a shift in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century; as the U.S. entered an unprecedented industrial era, advocates of vocational training feared that schooling was becoming socially irrelevant and economically counterproductive, and emphasized the importance of providing manual training for students to enter the workforce (Lazerson & Grubb, 1974). During the industrial era, vocational education in public schools consisted of courses intended to prepare students with the technical skills necessary to enter the growing labor force (Lazerson & Grubb, 1974; Oaks, 1985). The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 granted federal funds for the establishment of vocational education in public schools (Ainsworth & Roscigno, 2005; Oakes, 1998). To meet the demands of skilled workers during the industrial era, the

implementation of vocational education had several goals: (a) supply the nation with skilled industrial workers; (b) provide students with marketable skills to enhanced their employment opportunities; (c) make the public school experience relevant to students' life experiences; and (d) equalize the educational opportunity to meet the needs and interests of students who were perceive as not academically fit for a college bound curriculum (Oakes, 1985). By 1918, vocational education was introduced to students in junior high school to help them decide their educational and vocational futures as they transitioned into high school (Oakes, 1985; Pincus, 1980).

However, as Oakes (1985) asserts, not all students were placed in such courses; only certain students were tracked into vocational education. Tracking, or "the process whereby students are divided into categories," carried the intention of introducing students to a curriculum that fit their different interests and abilities (p. 3). This early classification divided the students who were considered "college bound"—or those who were going to college upon high school graduation—from their peers who would go directly into the workforce. This division fell along racial lines (Pincus, 1980).

The students who were tracked into the college preparation classes were often white middle-class students, while the students tracked into the vocational education were Students of Color and white working class immigrant youth (Ainsworth & Roscigno, 2005; Oakes, 1985; 1980). Thus, vocational education aimed to "socialize the new immigrant poor by teaching the dominant moral values, the virtue of hard work, and discipline" (Oakes, 1985, p. 31). In this sense, vocational education and tracking worked together to socially and racially stratify a specific group of people (Ainsworth & Roscigno, 2005; Lazerson & Grubb, 1974; Oakes, 1985, Pincus, 1980).

The tracking of students into either college preparation classes or vocational education was distinguished by four characteristics: (a) teachers would identify students by their intellectual ability in a public way and then separate them into a hierarchal grouping system; (b) these groups were labeled by teachers as high ability, low achieving, average, and slow; (c) students would perceive themselves in accordance with the group they were tracked into; and (d) students experienced schooling differently depending on what track they were placed in (Oakes, 1985). With the overrepresentation of white students in the high achieving, college bound tracks, and low-income immigrants and Students of Color in the vocational track, it was evident that the assigning of students into vocational education was based on their ethnic, racial and economic background (Ainsworth & Roscigno, 2005; Oakes, 1985, Pincus, 1980). The justification for the overrepresentation of Students of Color in vocational education was the ideology that vocational education benefited them to achieve upward social mobility, when in fact, tracking restricted them from future opportunities (Oakes, 1985).

By the end of World War I (1918), the tracking of students into vocational education was implemented according to their perceived intellectual ability and Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores (Oakes, 1985). IQ tests were considered a scientific justification for the placement of students into certain types of classes. Any student who scored below 70 on their IQ test was perceived as unfit for the labor force. The students whose IQ scores ranged between 70 and 80 were considered suited for semi-skilled labor, and those who scored between 80 and 100 were ideal for clerical labor. Students who scored in the 100–110 or 115 range were encouraged to pursue semi-professional positions, and those who scored above 115 were expected to pursue professional fields (Oakes, 1985). Additionally, school counselors and guidance programs also reinforced the grouping practices of students into a college readiness curriculum and vocational

education (Oakes, 1985). With the supposedly scientific process offered by basing course placement on IQ tests, various school staff members felt further justified in assigning poor students and Students of Color into vocational education in the early twentieth century. This had an especially huge impact on Chicana/o and Latina/o students in the educational pipeline.

## Chicana/o and Latina/o Students in Public Vocational Education

In the early twentieth century, vocational training was of importance for the growth of the economy (Gonzalez, 1990; 1999). In the Southwest, Mexican-descent students were seen as particularly ideal candidates to fulfill the heavy labor of the era (Gonzalez, 1990, 1999). Gonzalez (1990) writes extensively on the ways that social segregation and a racialized ideology of Mexican populations implicated the educational experiences of Mexican children. The ideology that supported the segregation of Mexican children was enacted by district officials and school staff who rationalized their decisions on the basis of language, perceived intellectual ability, and differentiated curriculum (Delgado Bernal, 1999; Gonzalez, 1990, 1999).

First, Mexican children were deemed to be lagging behind in learning English, a deficit perspective that therefore made them culturally different from their mainstream peers. Second, the intellectual ability of Mexican children was measured by IQ test scores. It should not be surprising that those scores were lower compared to white students given that the tests were neither culturally relevant nor administered in students' dominant language (Gonzalez, 1990; Torres-Rouff, 2012). Finally, the belief that Mexican children inherited their parents' low level of intelligence and "patterns of employment" supported the notion that the best educational fit for Mexican children was vocational education (Gonzalez, 1999, p. 56). Most often the Mexican students on the vocational track stayed there from elementary to junior high (Gonzalez, 1999).

Vocational education for Chicana/os and Latina/os in public schools throughout the first half of the twentieth century had two goals: (a) adaptation of the individual to the general

economic activities within larger society, and (b) an emphasis on technical, trade, or industrial training (Gonzalez, 1990, p 89). Their experiences in such courses were heavily based on their gender. Mexican boys were placed in courses where they learned about agriculture, body shop and upholstery. Girls were placed in classes where they learned to become maids and domestic workers, with curriculum focused on cooking, childbearing and housekeeping (Delgado Bernal, 1999; Gonzalez, 1990,1999; Torres-Rouff, 2012). An example of the vocational training young Chicana/Latina received is seen in Photo 2. The black-and-white photograph is of two young Chicana/Latina women in 1942 who were students in a "Practice House" class at Jefferson High School, a public high school in Los Angeles. Both are dressed in maid outfits learning how to set the table. This is an example of the vocational curriculum created for Mexican girls and women during this era. According to Gonzalez (1999), Mexican girls "learned to keep a neat house, care for children, serve as a domestic servant, keep house for an employer, and sewing and needlework" (p. 64). The public vocational education of this time pervaded the educational experience of Chicanas/Latinas and sent a historical message that Chicanas/Latina women were not school material but service material.

Whether in segregated Mexican schools or in integrated schools, Chicana/o and Latina/o students were consistently tracked to a vocational curriculum as opposed to an academic track in public schools throughout the early twentieth century (Alonso, 2015; Mares-Tamayo, 2014). Public schools predominantly prepared Chicana/o and Latina/o children for service and labor jobs as illustrated in photo 2 (Delgado Bernal, 1999; Gonzalez, 1990, 1999; Oakes, 1985). In this way, these students' educational and life pathways were already designed for them.

By tracking Mexican children into vocational training, the Chicana/o and Latina/o community was consistently denied the opportunity for socioeconomic upward mobility and/or

the option to pursue higher education (Delgado Bernal, 1999; Gonzalez, 1990, 1999; Oakes, 1985). It is thus evident that educational institutions for Chicana/o and Latina/o youth in Southern California have historically assumed that students' trajectories were best directed toward the workforce and away from higher education. Chicana/o and Latina/o students, more specifically Latina women continue to be tracked into vocational programs that limit their access to college or university studies (Delgado Bernal, 1999).

This section has established the historical precedent of public vocational education for Chicana/o and Latina/o students. In order to understand why PFVEs are even seen as viable option for Chicanas/Latinas, a review of college choice literature will be discussed in the next section.

## The Traditional College Choice Model

Chiquis Rivera, the young Latina woman on the advertising image below (Figure 3) is the daughter of the late Jenni Rivera, a Mexican American songwriter, actress, television producer, and entrepreneur known for her work within the regional Mexican music genre. In the advertisement, Chiquis is the spokesperson for International Career Development Center (ICDC) college. ICDC is an example of a PFVE institution in Los Angeles that offers non-degree certificate programs such as Accounting Office Specialist, Paralegal, Medical Assisting, and Medical Administrative Assistant. Advertisements such as Figure 3 may be one of the factors that may lead a Latina to choose to attend a PFVE. In May 2016, ICDC was one of many for-profits that were shut down due to fraudulent practices.

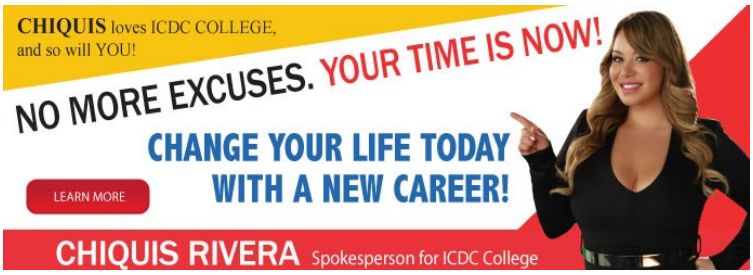


*Figure 3*. Chiquis Rivera is the spokesperson for International Career Development Center (ICDC) College, a PFVE in Los Angeles. https://www.zoobubble.com/store/icdc/.

Research on the for-profits asserts that an increasing number of Latinas continue to attend PFVE institutions (Oseguera & Malagon, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The goal of this study is to examine what factors influence Latinas' decision to attend a PFVE and how these decisions shape their future academic careers. To critically analyze the factors that may contribute to their decision to attend a PFVE it is of high importance to review the literature on Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) traditional college choice model, followed by the literature on the college choice process of Latina and Latino students and conclude by focusing on the scholarship focused on college choice of Latinas.

In higher education, the term college choice is defined as "a complex, multistage process during which an individual develops aspirations to continue formal education beyond high school, followed later by a decision to attend a specific college, university or institution of advanced vocational training" (Hossler et al., 1989, p. 234). The authors describe the college choice as a complicated process initiated by the student. More importantly, they demonstrate how the student has the aspiration and agency to attend college or vocational school after high school. Yet, I argue that the Latinas in my study have the aspiration to pursue higher education, yet they choose to attend a PFVE. As such, one of the goals of this research is to understand why they chose to attend a PFVE. To understand the complexities of the college choice process, I begin by discussing Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) traditional college choice model.

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) developed a three-phase model that describes the college choice process of high school students transitioning to higher education. The three phases are: predisposition, search and choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1992). The predisposition phase is the developmental stage; this is where a student decides she wants to pursue higher education. The next phase is the search phase; in this stage the student begins collecting information about the colleges she is interested in attending. The choice phase is the final phase where the student chooses, applies to, and attends the college of her choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1992).

**Predisposition Phase**

Hossler and Gallaher (1987) found that there are individual characteristics and organizational factors that contribute to the student's predisposition to attend college. Studies show that college planning begins as early as eighth grade (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). Some of those individual factors include each student's social economic status (SES), their academic achievements, and parents' knowledge about college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1992). Additionally, students were more likely to attend postsecondary education if their friends and peers planned on attending college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1992). Organizational or school factors also play a critical role in the predisposition phase of a student. Schools that offer a wide range of academic, social, and extracurricular activities have a positive impact on each student's decision to attend higher education (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1992). In the predisposition phase, the colleges and universities do not play an active part in the thought process of the student. The student's background, family, peers, and school programs are factors that influence their thinking in terms of attending college (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1992).

**Search Phase**

According to Hossler and Gallagher (1987), the student enters the search phase in tenth grade and ends towards the middle of their senior year in high school (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hossler & Stage, 1992). In the search phase, the secondary institution has an active role in the student's decision to apply and attend college. In this phase, the college and the student seek each other, the student gathers school information and the institution recruits the student (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Here students visit the college and university campus, and talk with friends about attending college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). However, this relationship is not as linear or reciprocal as it appears. According to the authors, high achieving students and students with high SES search for schools based on their SAT scores and narrow their school choice geographically and by the quality of the school (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1992). If the institution does not meet the student's expectations based on their SAT scores and location, the student is more likely not going to attend college at all.

The search process for Black students from low-income households and/or first-generation usually takes longer and is less efficient (Litten,1982). Black students tend to rely on high school counselors for college advice. These students often lack the understanding of the true cost of attendance, and many do not know that they are financial aid eligible (Litten, 1982). Students of Color, low-income and first-generation college students seldom know the different types of post-secondary institutions and their missions. More specifically, most do not know the difference between for-profits, community colleges, state schools, and research institutions (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

**Choice Phase**

After the student has gathered information about the schools she is thinking about attending, she enters the choice phase, this happens in their junior and senior year of high school

(Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). In this stage the student narrows down the institutions she wants to attend. The findings of this study affirm that students with high SES tend to enroll in institutions of higher education (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1992). Additionally, a student's background, family, peers, and school programs are factors that encourage students to think about attending post-secondary education (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1992). Parents' educational levels also have a positive influence in the student's college choice process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1992). As stated by Hossler and Stage (1992), "students whose parents had a college education were more than twice as likely to apply for college" (p. 431). Yet it is important to note that Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) scholarship on the college choice process does not address how Students of Color and first-generation college students navigate through the college choice process.

McDonough (1997) provides a micro-level analysis of how young women navigate through the college choice process. More specifically, she utilizes Bourdieu's cultural capital to examine how high school students' college choice is influenced by their social class as well as cultural and organizational factors. Cultural capital refers to the "property that middle- and upper-class families transmit to their offspring" to maintain their class status and privilege (McDonough, 1997, p. 8). McDonough found that "not all college-bound students face equal choices" (p. 150); that is, not all students begin their schooling experience with the same quality of education and resources and/or with their family understanding the college process.

Upper-middle class and working-class students often have a different understanding of academic achievement. Students from upper-middle class view academic achievement as something they can manipulate, for instance taking SAT prep courses and hiring a private counselor would increase their chances of attending a postsecondary education. Working-class

students view academic achievement as “an inflexible fact of their admissions potential” (McDonough, 1997, p. 12). Findings showed that students from similar social class backgrounds shared similar college choice patterns and many made their college choice decisions based on implicit and explicit messages received from their family, peers and school networks (McDonough, 1997). According to McDonough (1997), research has stated that African Americans, women and low-SES students are especially likely to attend less-selective colleges. Perez and McDonough (2008) concluded that not all students have the same resources to make an informed decision about college. Given this development, an overview of how both Latina and Latino students experience the college choice process will be presented in the following section.

## The College Choice Process of Latina and Latino Students

Hurtado et al. (1997) conducted a quantitative study examining the differences in college access and college choice among Latinas and Latinos, Asian/Pacific Americans, Black and white students. Their findings revealed that compared to other groups, “Latino[a] students are least likely to engaged in extensive search and choice process” (p. 64). Most of the Latinas and Latinos who decided to pursue higher education began their educational career at the community college (Hurtado et al., 1997; Swail et al., 2004).

Additionally, a 2004 report by the Pew Hispanic Center found that Latina and Latino youth were less likely to aspire to attend higher education and pursue advanced degrees, enroll and graduate from a postsecondary institution, enroll in a selective college or university, be academically qualified, and earn a Bachelor’s degree within four years (Swail et al., 2004). According to the same report, Latina and Latino students were more likely to enroll in a two-year than a four-year college, delay their entry into institutions of higher education, attend part-time and attend more than one college, and enroll at publicly-funded institutions (Swail et al., 2004).

Although this information is invaluable to understanding some reasons to why Latina and Latino students lag behind their peers, the study does not provide the lived experiences in K-12.

A qualitative study by Perez and McDonough (2008) was conducted to better understand how Latina and Latino students in California negotiated the choice of going to college and what role the student's family, classmates, and high school played in their college choice process. The authors identified three themes in their study with 106 high-achieving, college-bound Latina and Latino juniors and seniors.

The first theme supports previous studies that indicate that Latina and Latino students rely on family, friends and high school staff for college information (Zarate & Gallimore, 2005). What makes this study unique is that in the college planning stage, Latina and Latino students seek college information and guidance from people who the students and their families trust—most of whom were extended family members and/or family friends (Perez & McDonough, 2008). The second theme is similar to the first theme. When it comes to choosing a college, these Latina and Latino students relied on information and experiences provided by their friends, siblings, relatives, high school staff and trusted acquaintances. As stated by Perez and McDonough (2008), "advice from these individuals concerning which colleges to apply to or select was based on their personal experiences and networks—good or bad" (p. 256). The third theme focused on the role chain migration had on the college choice process of Latina and Latino students. Chain migration asserts that new migrants learn of opportunities by networking with previous migrants. Hence, Latina and Latino students in fact used education chain migration when choosing an institution of higher education (Perez & McDonough, 2008).

Latina and Latino students applied, enrolled and attended colleges/universities, "where they knew people had attended and had successfully graduated or were currently attending and

were enjoying their college experiences" (p. 259). As asserted by the authors, "traditional models of college choice are not sufficient to explain the college decision . . . for this population of students" (Perez & McDonough, 2008, p. 261). Literature asserts that Latina and Latino are choosing to attend college, however their college choice process does not align with the traditional Hossler and Gallagher models (Perez & McDonough, 2008). The purpose of my study is to investigate the college choice process of Latinas. Therefore, in the next section, I present a brief summary of the literature based on Latinas.

## The College Choice Process of Latinas

Studies have found that Latina girls and Latino boys experienced school differently affecting their college enrollment (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005). As early as kindergarten, a student's academic ability, parental involvement and teacher expectations play a significant role in predicting college enrollment (Zarate & Gallimore, 2005). In fact, studies concluded that Latinas are more likely to graduate from high school and attend two-year colleges and four-year universities compared to Latino males (Swail et al., 2004; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005). For Latino boys, "academic achievement (as measured by standardized test), parental factors and language proficiency consistently predicted their college enrollment" (Zarate & Gallimore, 2005, p. 385). The contrary is true for Latinas; their "teacher-rated classroom performance and pursuit of college counseling in high school were consistent significant predictors for college enrollment" (Zarate & Gallimore, 2005, p. 385). These findings demonstrate that Latina college enrollment was in part due to their close relationships with their teachers and counselors than their parent's expectations and academic achievements (Zarate & Gallimore, 2005).

For Latinas and Chicanas, the college choice process differs from the traditional college choice models (Talavera-Bustillos, 1998). Latinas and Chicanas entered the predisposition phase

in the tenth grade as oppose to Hossler and Gallaher's (1987) college choice model where students enter this phase in the eighth grade (Talavera-Bustillos, 1998). Hossler and Gallaher (1987) college choice model indicates that students enter the search phase in the tenth grade while Latinas and Chicanas enter this phase in the twelfth grade. Unlike the traditional college choice model which indicates that the choice phase occurs during the twelfth grade, Latinas and Chicanas enter the choice phase two months after their high school graduation (Hossler & Gallaher,1987; Talavera-Bustillos, 1998). Most of the Latinas and Chicanas chose to attend a community college (Talavera-Bustillos, 1998). Although the college choice process for Latina and Chicanas occurred at a later period, they demonstrated the aspirations to pursue higher education and many had the support from their families to continue their education (Ceja, 2004; Talavera-Bustillos, 1998).

Ceja (2004, 2006) found that Chicanas were influenced by their parents to pursue college in direct and indirect ways. That is, parents shared motivational messages with their daughters, encouraging them to do well academically and the importance of pursuing higher education. Additionally, for young Latinas and Chicana's, "their parents' experiences served as a vivid reminder that they did not want to struggle like their parents" (Ceja, 2004, p. 357). In a later study, Ceja (2006) found that in the Chicana college choice process, siblings played a significant role assisting their sisters with the application process. Chicana's who were the first in their family to go to college had to navigated through the process by themselves and returned to their families sharing the knowledge they acquired to help guide their younger siblings.

Perez and Ceja (2015) stressed the urgency to examine the college choice process of Latina/os for several reasons. While they are the fastest growing population in the U.S., they are not attending and/or graduating from college at the same rate (Perez & McDonough, 2008).

Research indicates that an educated population benefits the individual and nation economically and socially (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). It is documented that the college choice process for Latina/os differs from their white peers (Hurtado et al., 1997; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Swail et al., 2004; Talavera-Bustillos, 1998). Although there have been studies on the college choice process, the models do not capture the intersecting experiences of Students of Color, first-generation college students and low-income students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Hurtado et al., 1997; Perez & Ceja, 2015; Perez & McDonough, 2008). In response to McDonough's (1997) call for studies documenting the college choice process of students who choose to attend proprietary schools, my goal with this research is to document the lived experiences of Latinas who have or are attending a PFVE and understand the factors that influenced them to choose to attend a PFVE. Additionally, I argue that advertisements such as Figure 3, where a young Latina celebrity is advertising a PFVE, may be a contributing factor to the college choice process of Latinas into PFVE institutions.

## For-Profit College Choice

Chung (2008) conducted a study examining whether students self-select into US for-profit college or whether the choice of for-profits is accidental or due to external reasons. She used several data sets including the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 and the associated Postsecondary Education Transcript Study. Chung utilized a random utility model of college choice with a multinomial logit regression and came up with four college choice alternatives: (a) No college; (b) A for-profit college; (c) A non-profit two-year college; and (d) a non-selective non-profit four-year college. She found that students self-selected into the for-profit institutions and three factors emerged from the study. She found that students self-select to attend a for-profit and that students socioeconomic background and parental involvement in their schooling heavily influenced their choice of attending a for-profit. Students with frequent High

school absences are more likely to attend for-profits. And the location of the for-profit colleges in the student's areas is also another factor. According to Chung (2008) the majority of students enrolled at a for-profit after high school.

Iloh and Tierney (2014) conducted a comparative case study comparing one for-profit institution and one community college. More specifically, they examined students' college choice of for-profit schools and community colleges. They used rational choice theory to investigate how the student makes a choice based on program cost and benefits. They surveyed and conducted individual and focus group interviews with 137 students enrolled in similar associates vocational nursing degree and certificate programs. The for-profit school student sample also included a surgical technician program. Findings demonstrated that for students who chose to attend a for-profit, their choice was based on "long-term benefits, which allowed them to take the rest of accruing high levels of debt" (p. 23). In other words, student who chose to attend the for-profit chose the high tuition cost as an investment toward their career. For students who choose to attend community college, they looked at the "immediate benefits…such as lower costs and the multiple educational pathways inherent in the culture of the institution" (p. 23). Students who chose to attend the community college, their decision was based on the college's low tuition cost and the ability to transfer to a four-year university, if they decide to do so after completing their program.

Most recently, Iloh (2018) introduced a new conceptual approach to college choice claiming that the traditional college choice framework is limited and problematic to present day college decisions. Iloh developed a new model based on her analysis of empirical studies involving students attending for-profit and community colleges. The Iloh model of college-going decisions and trajectories is a three-component ecological model based on the experiences of

nontraditional, low-income, and Students of Color. The ecological framework is comprised of three intersecting dimensions based on information, time, and opportunity. More specifically, Iloh describes it: "At one point in someone's life, the three [information, time, and opportunity] constructs might suggest one decision and trajectory and another point might present another possibility. With this model, college-going is not a static process but, instead, is an ongoing interplay of these factors" (p. 235). In other words, a student's college choice decision is based on what the student is experiencing at that particular time. This new conceptual model provides a new approach to college choice.

## Chapter Summary

Chapter Two provided a comprehensive literature review presenting (a) the for-profit literature, (b) the history of Latina/os and Chicana/os in vocational public education, (c) the college choice process of Latinas/Chicanas and (d) the for-profit college choice literature. Chapter three will detail how I use Critical Race Theory in Education (CRTE), Chicana Feminist Epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998), Cultural Intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998), as theoretical and methodological frameworks to understand the phenomenon of Latinas in PFVE schools. Additionally, plática (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) will be utilized as methodology and method to examine what factors influence Latinas to attend Private For-Profit Vocational Education (PFVE) schools and what impact did attending a PFVE have on their future career goals.

# CHAPTER THREE: CRT, CHICANA FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY AND PLÁTICAS

In this chapter, I present the theoretical and methodological frameworks guiding me in this research study. I use Critical Race Theory in Education (CRTE), Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE), and Cultural Intuition. I adopt a CRTE perspective to assess the roles of racism and other intersecting forms of oppression in the higher education trajectory of Latinas (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Additionally, I used Delgado Bernal's (1998) Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE) and more specifically, her concept of Cultural Intuition, both theoretically and methodologically, to inform the way I conducted this research. CRTE, CFE, and Cultural Intuition provide frameworks that centralize the lived experiences of Latinas in education and in Private For-profit Vocation Education (PFVE) institutions.

The methodology and method that I employed in this qualitative study are pláticas, an informal two-way conversation between contributor/participant and researcher to gather a deeper understanding of their educational trajectories (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). Additionally, I present the design of my study, contributor/participant profiles, and recruitment strategy, as well as describe how I am using plática as a methodological tool in conjunction with Irving Seidman's (2019) three-part interview model. Seidman's framework provides an interview structure for a plática with each Latina. I conclude the chapter with an overview of how I analyze the data.

## Theoretical Frameworks

### Critical Race Theory in Education

The theoretical framework used in this research project is Critical Race Theory in Education (CRTE). Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged from Critical Legal Studies (CLS), which resulted from a group of law scholars who analyzed and challenged race and racism in the United States' legal system. Additionally, scholars asserted that the scholarship of critical legal

studies excluded the experiences of People of Color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Tate, 1997; Yosso, 2005, 2006). Delgado and Stefancic (2001) describe CRT as a movement of activists and scholars interested in examining and transforming the connection among race, racism, and power. What makes this theory especially important is that CRT sustains a social justice agenda with the goal to understand and transform the complexities of a radicalized society.

CRT and education are relevant to each other when dealing with school curriculum, instruction, assessment, funding, and segregation issues (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Therefore, a CRT in educational approach is crucial to deconstruct the oppressive structures and discourses in schools' ideologies and practices (Ladson-Billings, 1998). In addition, Yosso (2005) considers CRT in education to be a framework that we can utilize theoretically and analytically to challenge the way race and racism impact educational practices. Solórzano defines CRTE "as a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the subordination of scholars of color" (p. 123). Solórzano (1997, 1998) identifies five CRT tenets in education: (a) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; (b) the challenge to dominant ideology; (c) the commitment to social justice; (d) the importance of experiential knowledge, and (e) the use of interdisciplinary perspectives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2006). Next, I describe how each of the five CRTE tenets (Solórzano, 1997, 1998) inform my study:

***Tenet 1***

The first tenet is the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism. One of CRTE's main assertions is that race and racism exist and are present in our society. It also acknowledges the multiple layers of oppressions People of Color experience—these oppressions are based on

gender, class, sexual orientation, language, culture, immigrant status, phenotype, accent, and surname (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso 2001; Yosso 2005, 2006). I am centralizing the experiences of Latina women in PFVEs. More specifically, I focus on how their educational experiences are racialized.

***Tenet 2***

The second tenet challenges dominant ideology; notably, it challenges white privilege and the deficit frameworks used to explain educational inequalities toward Communities of Color. CRT challenges traditional claims that the educational system and its institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso 2001; Yosso 2005, 2006). In this research, I am critically analyzing how and why Latinas are tracked into PFVE schools.

***Tenet 3***

This tenet focuses on the commitment to social justice. The goal of CRTE is to eradicate all forms of oppressions and empower Communities of Color and other oppressed groups. A CRTE approach is committed to social justice and offers a transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppressions (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso 2001; Yosso 2005, 2006). As a social justice researcher, I am committed to sharing the experiences of Latinas and exposing the predominantly unethical practices of PFVEs with the goal of creating fair educational practices for the good of society.

***Tenet 4***

The importance of experiential knowledge is the fourth tenet. This tenet allows us to analyze, validate, and understand the lived experiences of Communities of Color and other oppressed groups. Most often, their experiences are shared through forms of storytelling,

biographies, poetry, family histories, and pláticas, which I use in this project (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso 2001; Yosso, 2005, 2006).

***Tenet 5***

The fifth tenet is the use of interdisciplinary perspectives. CRTE invites and implements research and methods from other educational disciplines such as women's studies, history, ethnic studies, sociology, and law to better understand the experiences of Communities of Color. CRTE analyzes racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia from a historical and interdisciplinary perspective (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2005, 2006). In this study, I utilize photographs and images (see Chapter Two) to stress the urgency of examining Latinas' experiences in PFVEs.

CRTE is important in that it provides a critical racial analysis of the practices, theories, and ideologies schools implement into their teaching methods. It also provides a deeper understanding of the obstacles Students of Color encounter in schools. Most importantly, CRTE provides a framework that looks closely into the lived experiences of Latinas/os and Chicanas/os in education. For that reason, the use of CRTE in my study is crucial in that it provides a theory that supports, honors, and humanizes the narratives of the Latinas in my study. Thus, CRTE will assist me in critically analyzing and validating the factors that may contribute to the attendance of this specific population of Latinas in PFVE schools. In the next section, I demonstrate how I am using both Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE) and Cultural Intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) as methodology, and I explain how these frameworks provide both theory and analysis in my research process.

## Chicana Feminist Epistemology and Cultural Intuition

Delgado Bernal (1998) centralizes Chicanas' perspectives in the field of education by introducing CFE as a theoretical and methodological framework. Similar to Strauss and Corbin's (1990) notion of theoretical sensitivity, which Delgado Bernal defines as the "personal quality of the researcher based on the attribute of having the ability to give meaning to data" (p. 563), Delgado Bernal borrows from the four principles of theoretical sensitivity. However, her concept of Cultural Intuition differs in that it honors the collective memory and experiences of the community to the researcher's personal experience (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Delgado Bernal (1998) defines cultural intuition as a unique viewpoint that is based on a Chicana researcher's perspective and insight. She introduced four sources of Cultural Intuition that are the foundation of CFE: (a) personal experience, (b) existing literature, (c) professional experience, and (d) the analytical research process. As Women of Color, our lived experiences are different than those of men and white women. CFE challenges Western traditional patriarchal ideologies and is grounded in exposing, naming, and addressing the multiple oppressions Chicanas experience such as, racism, sexism, cultural domination, immigration status, bilingualism, and religion (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Within this methodological approach, I incorporate all four sources of cultural intuition. I now take a moment to share how I draw from all four sources of my cultural intuition in order to guide the methodology of my study.

### *Personal Experience*

As I shared in Chapter One, I attended a PFVE a few months after graduating from high school. An inviting television commercial advertising a vocational program aired on the screen. I had thought that calling and inquiring about the promising program would not hurt. According to the commercial, after completing the less-than-two-year vocational program, the school helped students secure a job—this sounded very promising to a young Latina looking to help out her

family financially. After the campus visit, my parents and I left the school having signed a contract to an expensive, 15-month Computerized Business Systems certificate program.

As a former student of a PFVE, I know what it felt like being on the school campus and how it felt to be deceived by the school's false promises. I have a first-hand understanding of PFVE school polices, class sizes, and curriculum. Therefore, the knowledge I have acquired from my lived experience at a PFVE allows me to "understand events, actions, and words," something that someone who has not attend a PFVE would not understand. This particular experience guides me as I investigate why each of these Latinas attend a PFVE (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

***Existing Literature***

As mentioned in Chapter Two, the history of for-profits dates back to the 1660s, when working-class individuals paid proprietors a fee to teach them a trade (Chung, 2008; Dexter, 1904; Ruch, 2011; Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). However, the rise of for-profits occurred with the implementation of The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, when funding was allocated to land-grant colleges promoting training in agricultural and the natural sciences (Mettler, 2014; Ruch, 2001; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007; Tierney, 2010). The number of for-profit schools increased during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, providing vocational education in a number of manual labor and clerical support jobs (Hentschke et al., 2010; Ruch, 2001; Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). Most importantly, existing research asserts that for-profit schools target low-income, women, and Black and Latina/o students (Chung, 2008; Hentschke et al., 2010; Iloh & Toldson, 2013; Iloh, 2014; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). The unethical practices of for-profits were investigated by the U.S. Department of Education for misleading their students on job placement and for a large number of students defaulting on their student loans, resulting in the closure of a

PFVE company and displacing more than 16,000 students in California (Federal Student Aid, n.d.; Kamenetz, 2015). As a researcher, it is important that I am well-informed about what has been written about this topic because "having an understanding of this information provides some insight into what is going on with the events and circumstances" (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 565) being studied to help me critically examine PFVEs.

### *Professional Experience*

I worked for four years as a Peer Mentor at UCLA's Center for Community College Partnerships (CCCP). CCCP is an outreach center responsible for creating strong academic support programs aimed to inspire and motivate first-generation, low-income, underrepresented, and non-traditional community college students transfer to a four-year university (Herrera & Jain, 2013). As a peer mentor, I had the opportunity to meet and work with students to demystify the transfer process. During my time at CCCP, I met a good number of students, most of whom were Latinas who were attending, had attended, or were thinking about attending a PFVE institution. I felt compelled to share my own experience at a PFVE and I made sure to explain the differences between a PFVE and traditional colleges/universities. After our conversations, many women shared feeling a sense of relief to have confided their educational experiences and plans with me. The years spent working closely with students at CCCP provided me with "an insider view of how things work" when talking with students who were attending, or had attended a PFVE (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 566).

### *Analytical Research Process*

Applying my Chicana feminist lens to the way I gather, read, and analyze the scholarship on the topic of Latinas in PFVE schools will be different due to my positionality. As a Chicana/Latina who attended a PFVE and is now in graduate school, my approach to the data is

informed by my lived experiences, my graduate studies, and my knowledge of for-profits. Additionally, this may be a topic that is stigmatized for women to talk about. Therefore, being a former PFVE student *and* woman, I ask questions in a respectful manner. Given my personal experience and knowledge with this topic, I have been able to "look more closely at the data and bring meaning to the research." Consequently, my approach has helped provide me a deep and critical analysis of Latinas in PFVEs (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

I have elaborated how CFE and Cultural Intuition inform my research process. As I shared, I employ all four sources of my Cultural Intuition—my personal experience, knowledge of existing literature, professional experience, and analytical research process—as I carry out this research. Without question, my passion for this research stems from my own personal and educational experiences. In the following section, I share my positionality.

**Positionality**

As a first-generation college student and former PFVE student, I feel it is my responsibility to write about this phenomenon. Who, better than me—a Chicana/Latina, PFVE graduate, and Chicana junior scholar—is better equipped to examine the PFVE experience? While it is with fear that I share my narrative, I must confess that I have found courage in the women scholars who embrace the vulnerability that comes with sharing their own personal narratives in their research (Calderon et al., 2012). In doing so, I find strength that I can do the same and share my experience. Cruz (2006) asserts that the production of knowledge is carried in our brown bodies, the bodies of our mothers and grandmothers, passed down maternally. Therefore, in sharing my experience, I am honoring the women who came before me; they taught me to fight for social justice. I am ready to share the knowledge I gained and carry from attending a PFVE institution.

I was born in Puebla, Mexico. My family and I immigrated to the U.S. in the early 1980s. I am the first in my family to graduate from college and be in a graduate program. I was raised in a Black and Latina/o community in South Central Los Angeles. At a young age, I knew my body was racialized. I was placed in remedial classes when I entered elementary school. The reason? I did not know how to speak English. I was a smart little girl. Before attending pre-kindergarten, I knew the alphabet, vowels, and numbers up to 100 in Spanish. Although I did not have the language back then to adequately name the discrimination and racism I experienced with white teachers, I knew that my body was racialized because my first language is Spanish. These are some of the traumas my body and psyche have experienced.

Villenas, Godinez, Delgado Bernal, and Elenes (2006) remind us that Latina bodies are racialized in educational institutions in the U.S. and their experiences are important to explore. Our brown bodies are often tracked into gender-specific jobs and service types of jobs (Delgado Bernal, 1999; Oseguera & Malagon, 2010). Latinas are racialized and gendered in that we are covertly and overtly told that we do not belong in school to become knowledge producers and theorists, but that we belong primarily in vocational programs learning a trade (Delgado Bernal, 1999). An example of the early vocational education for Chicanas and Latinas is demonstrated in Photo 2 of Chapter Two (p. 19). My intention with this research is to share first-hand experiences at a PFVE—from myself as well as other Latinas—with the hope of investigating the reason "why" they decide to attend a PFVE institution. Based on my experience as a former PFVE graduate as well as the literature presented in Chapter Two, I speculate that some of the factors that may influence Latinas to attend a PFVE may include: (a) tracking; (b) not knowing the system of higher education; (c) family and financial obligations; and (d) the persuasive television, radio, and billboard advertisements (Osegura & Malagon, 2010). Hence, this critical

examination of PFVE institutions is conducted in the hopes of bringing greater awareness to the educational opportunities available to Latinas.

I recognize the privilege I have now as a graduate student. Despite my traumatic educational experiences, I have been able to persevere and earned a spot in this PhD program. My early educational experiences and my postsecondary educational trajectory have informed my desire to analyze PFVE schools with a critical lens. As a Chicana junior scholar and member of the Latino/a community who is focusing on Chicana/Latinas, utilizing both CRTE and a Chicana Feminist lens is essential in that these tools provide me with the theories and methodologies necessary to help guide me as I conduct this much-needed research. To successfully and respectfully document the lived experiences of Latinas in PFVEs, I present the method I use in this qualitative study.

**Methodology and Methods**

I utilized plática (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) as methodology and method in this study. The purpose of a plática as method and methodology is to hold space for the women and I to share our narratives, thoughts, and feelings about our educational trajectories and experiences (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). My intention is to highlight the women's sprit of resistance and resiliency by showing the reasons and/or factors of their attendance in a PFVE and how their decision to attend a PFVE influenced their educational goals and careers. I argue that the women who attend these institutions have aspirations to attend college, however, due to a number of factors, they choose to attend a PFVE. The method and methodology of plática allows me to document the narratives of Latinas in PFVE and honor them as knowledge holders and knowledge producers.

The research questions guiding this study are: What factors influence Latinas to attend a Private For-Profit Vocational Education institution? What impact did attending a PFVE have on

their career goals? I believe that being a former PFVE student, Chicana/Latina immigrant, and first-generation college student from a working-class family, I share many similarities with the Latinas in my study. For that reason, I selected plática (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) as a method and methodology. Next, I define plática and describe how I use it as a method.

### *Plática*

Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) describe how plática can be utilized as methodology and research method within a Chicana/Latina feminist lens. The translation of plática is a conversation. Thus, pláticas are shared conversations among family and friends where stories and lived experiences are vocalized and relationships are built. These conversations are not only a way to exchange stories, thoughts, and memories, but it is through these interactions that knowledge is produced and transmitted among individuals. According to Fierros and Delgado Bernal, "Our family pláticas allow us to witness shared memories, experience, stories, ambiguities, and interpretations that impart us with a knowledge connected to personal, familial, and cultural history" (p. 2). It is through these two-way conversations that knowledge is produced, shared, and reinforced.

There are five principles of plática methodology. Next, I explain how I am employing plática as methodology within a Chicana/Latina feminist framework in my study (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016).

### *Principle 1: Core Principle*

The core principle is the use of Chicana/Latina feminist theory and other critical theories that centralize the lived experiences of marginalized individuals. My study is informed by both Chicana/Latina feminist theories and CRTE—both theories allow me to centralize and validate the lived experience of Latinas in PFVE schools.

***Principle 2: Relational Principle***

The second principle honors participants as co-constructors of knowledge and views the individuals as contributors. In my research, I view the Latinas as contributors and co-constructors of knowledge whose lived experiences are real, valid, and important to share. Through our conversations, we theorize about our experiences at a PFVE.

***Principle 3: Inclusion Principle***

The inclusion principle is the connection between everyday lived experiences and the research inquiry. This principle acknowledges the lived experiences of the contributors/participants[6] and includes them in the research process. The goal of sharing our lived experiences is to critically analyze why we considered attending a PFVE as an educational option.

***Principle 4: Safe Space Principle***

The intention of the fourth principle is to establish a space for healing. Through self-reflexivity, this space can be used as healing for both the contributor and researcher. I believe that by holding space, the contributor and I will be able to heal from any bad educational experiences we have internalized.

***Principle 5: Reciprocity Principle***

The reciprocity principle relies on relations of reciprocity, vulnerability, and reflexivity. This principle encourages the researcher to be open and vulnerable with the contributor. In the two-way conversation with the contributors, I am willing to be vulnerable and honest about my educational trajectory.

[6] I use the terms Latina contributors and contributors/participants interchangeably to refer to the women participants in this study.

I have been told in both professional and social situations that my personality makes people feel comfortable and trustworthy; it is this *confianza* that I feel is needed to have a plática that incorporates all five principles of plática as methodology and method. These are compatible with both CFE and CRTE as theories that place the experience of Latinas in the center. Since the women in this study shared their knowledge and contributed to this research process, the use of plática as a methodology and method allows me, the researcher, to connect the theories learned in the classroom with the epistemology our brown bodies carry. It is through plática that I am able to connect my personal and academic experiences; as Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) state, "pláticando has been a pivotal and necessary component of traversing academic spaces that have allowed us to weave the personal and academic." The use of plática as a methodology allows me to engage in more substantive conversation and co-construction of knowledge with the contributors/participants of this study.

## Design of this Study

In the previous section, I discussed how plática inform my methodology, and I demonstrate how I used plática as a research method. In this section, I describe the design of my study, beginning by presenting a contributor/participant profile, followed by my recruitment strategy. Then, I describe how I use plática as a data collection tool, more specifically how Seidman's (2019) three-part interview model helps guide me to document the lived experiences of Latinas in PFVEs.

### *Contributor/Participant Profile*

The contributors/participants for this study all met the following criteria:

1) Be Latina. The contributor/participant must self-identify as Latina, Chicana, and/or Hispanic.[7] This is defined as someone who is from any Latin American country, and/or whose ethnic heritage and lineage is connected to Latin America. Additionally, PFVEs have an over enrollment of Latinas in their programs, which is one of the reasons why I am specifically focusing on Latinas (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).
2) Be between the ages of 18 and 40+. PFVEs are an educational option for adult women. I believe documenting the experiences of women from a wide age range will enrich my data.[8]
3) Be low-income and/or from a working-class family. I believe that we will share similar experiences coming from a working-class background. Additionally, research affirms that PFVEs target low-income students (Chung, 2008; Hentschke, Lechuga, & Tierney, 2010; Iloh, 2014; Iloh & Toldson, 2013; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007).
4) PFVE attendance. Latinas must be currently attending, have attended, or graduated from a PFVE. Attending a PFVE is a unique educational experience that I am interested in examining with Latinas who are familiar with the schooling practices of PFVEs.

The contributor/participant profile is intended to specifically recruit Latinas who have attended, are attending, or have graduated from a PFVE. Next, I present my recruitment strategy.

[7] The term Hispanic refers to Latina/os. The U.S. Census uses the term Hispanic as an umbrella term for people who identify as "Hispanic or Latino."

[8] See Table 2. Latina Profiles, Figure 4. Year(s) Latinas Attended PFVE & Age of Attendances, and Table 3. Latinas' PFVE Trajectory in Chapter Four.

**Recruitment**

Snowball sampling (Babbie, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994) was the method used for recruiting participants for this study. This method is used "when the members of a special population are difficult to locate" (Babbie, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994). My goal was to engage in a plática with 8 to 10 Latina contributors/participants. The reason for choosing to interview 8 to 10 women is to provide an in-depth analysis of the lived experiences and educational trajectories of each Latina. With the help of participants, family members, college friends, and colleagues, I recruited a total of 17 Latinas. Unfortunately, not all women felt comfortable talking about their experience at a PFVE. Nine women declined the invitation to participate in this study.

As shared earlier in this chapter, while working at UCLA's CCCP, I had the opportunity to meet Latinas who were attending or had graduated from a PFVE. After sharing my research topic with them they showed interest in being part of my study. Since then, the Latinas who participated in the CCCP programs and I have kept in touch. However, when I invited them to participate in this project, they declined the invitation. From personal experience, I know that admitting and talking about attending a PFVE institution can be a shameful and embarrassing topic to discuss. I reached out a total of 17 Latina women with experiences at a PFVE. It is worth noting that most of the Latina women live in the community I grew up in—South Los Angeles—and they did not know each other or meet one another. Knowing that many of the women from my community attend or attended a PFVE makes this personal. I will never know why 9 women declined to share their experience at a PFVE with me, but I want to honor them in this dissertation study, too.

Borrowing from Seidman's (2019) three-part interview model, I held an individual plática with 8 contributors/participants.

## Individual Plática Using the Three-part Interview Model

In this section, I present Seidman's (2019) three-part interview model. More specifically, I describe how combined the three-part model with Fierros and Delgado Bernal's (2016) plática. Seidman (2019) describes the three-part interviewing model as a method that "combines life-history interviewing and focused, in-depth interviewing informed by assumptions drawn from phenomenology" (p. 14). As described by Seidman, "a phenomenological approach to interviewing focuses on the experiences of participants and the meaning they make of that experience" (p. 16). In other words, employing the three-part interviewing model is to focus on the life history and lived experiences of my contributors/participants to make meaning of their experiences in order to help explain the phenomenon of Latinas in PFVEs. It is recommended to space each interview three days to a week apart, in doing so, the contributor/participant will have time to reflect on what was shared during the plática. Unfortunately, this recommendation did not work for my participants. To respect and accommodate their busy schedules, as some of them are working mothers and have other obligations, we did not meet three times, we had one 90–120-minute long plática. One of the plática principles is anchored on trust, reciprocity, vulnerability and reflexivity (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). Thus, working around their busy schedules was my priority.

However, for the purpose of this study, I applied Seidman's (2019) three-part interview model to conduct one 90- to 120-minute interview with each contributor/participant. Seidman's (2019) three-part interviewing model which has three themes, the first theme focuses on the participant's life history, the second theme focuses on the details their life experiences and the third theme focuses on a reflection the meaning of their experience. Below, I present how I used Seidman's (2019) three-part interview model and describe how this interview structure will help guide the plática I will share with the contributors/participants of my study.

## Individual Plática

### *Theme 1: Focused Life History*

This part of the plática focused on the contributor/participant's K-12 educational experiences, family history, and more specifically, what led her to attend a PFVE. The purpose of the opening the plática with this this open-ended theme is to "put the participant's experience in context by asking . . . her to tell as much as possible about . . . herself in light of the topic to the present time" (Seidman, 2019, p. 21).

### *Theme 2: Details of Their Experience*

The second theme focuses on "concrete details of the participants' present lived experiences in the topic area of the study" (Seidman, 2019, p. 21). I asked the contributor/participant to describe in detail her choice of attending a PFVE. More specifically, I asked her to describe when she began to think about college (predisposition phase), when she began to gather college information (search phase) and what made her choose to attend a PFVE (choice phase) (Perez & Ceja, 2015; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Talavera-Bustillos, 1998).

### *Theme 3: Reflection on the Meaning of Their Experience*

The final theme of the three-part interview allows the "participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences" (Seidman, 2019, p. 22). This part of the three-part interview aligns with principles 4 (safe space principle) and 5 (reciprocity principle) of the plática methodology (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). Holding space for each other allowed the contributor/participant and I the ability to reflect and share our experiences to make sense of our college choice. I believe this exchange will allow us to theorize about our experiences at a PFVE.

After engaging in individual plática with 8 contributors/participants, I transcribed the pláticas to identify common trends and themes. After carefully identifying each theme, I coded and began to analyze each theme.

Additionally, I was interested in investigating what programs these young women decided to enroll in, given that women tend to be tracked into gender-specific jobs (Oseguera & Malagon, 2010). For that reason, I speculated that there will be an overrepresented number of Latinas in gendered programs that train them as medical, dental, or administrative assistants. The majority of the Latinas in my study, six to be exact were in the medical assistant program and only two in the dental assistant program. Overall, the goal of each plática is gain a deeper understanding of what factors encouraged them to attend a PFVE.

**Data Analysis**

In this section, I describe how I analyzed data from the individual plática I had with each Latina. More specifically, I identify how the five tenets of CRTE, CFE, and the four concepts of Cultural Intuition (Delgado Bernal,1998) guided me as I engaged in the coding and analyzing of the data.

Cohen and Manion (1986) define triangulation as a way to "map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint" (p. 254). There were three points in the triangulation process. First, I reviewed the data and organized it in chronological order. Second, I referenced my memos and journal entries, and last, I consulted with qualitative experts in the field of education. Triangulation allowed me to bridge multiple perspectives to understand why Latinas attend a PFVE and to provide a critical examination of what factors influenced Latinas to attend a PFVE and how this decision impacted their future academic and career goals. I used CRTE, CFE, and Cultural Intuition (Delgado Bernal,1998) to centralize the lived experiences of Latinas because it honors and humanizes their narratives and life histories. For that reason, I utilized the five tenets of CRTE, CFE, and the four concepts of Cultural Intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) as theoretical and

methodological guides to engage in the data by critically examining and analyzing the personal, social, and educational factors that may have led Latinas to attend a PFVE.

Additionally, Seidman's (2019) three-part interview model aligns with the five tenets of CRTE, CFE, and the four concepts of Cultural Intuition (Delgado Bernal,1998) used in this study. Each part of the three-part model focuses on the life history of the Latinas, detailing their experiences, and honoring them with the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of their experiences.

Each plática was audio recorded by two recording systems—a recorder and my laptop—and I took notes during our conversation. After each plática, I took time to memo each conversation by writing down a summary of the plática. Each plática was transcribed by a transcription company, one plática was transcribed by Temi, and the other seven were transcribed by Rev.com. The Latina women code-switched between English and Spanish. I transcribed the Spanish portion of the plática after receiving the transcripts from the transcription company. There were two stages of coding in analyzing my data. (a) After receiving each plática transcription, I organized each plática in chronological order and categorized content by Seidman's (2019) themes, which included life history, details of their experience, and reflection on the meaning of their experience. (b) After carefully analyzing each individual plática, I identified, coded, and labeled reoccurring themes across all eight individual plática. This second stage took about three drafts and three meetings with my chair to sort through the data. Additionally, I sought assistance from my academic friends to talk through my findings and possible themes. Ultimately, I decided to focus on three of the most salient themes of the findings.

## Pláticas with 8 Latinas Who Attended a PFVE

I held pláticas with 8 women. I audio recorded each individual plática, which were approximately 90 to 120 minutes long. Some of the pláticas went longer than 120 minutes, most ran for two hours; with the approval of each Latina. All of the women code-switched during our plática, meaning that they spoke English and Spanish. I edited and translated the Spanish portion of the transcripts to English. Each plática was conducted in different locations. The first plática was held in my home. Another plática was held in a participant's home. Three pláticas were held in a private room inside a local library, and three were held in a conference room/office at a community college. The location was decided by each Latina and was based on their comfort level, schedules and proximity from their home, work and school location.

Chicana feminist research is such an important approach to this particular scholarship because it focuses on the lived experiences of Latinas in PFVEs. My hope with this study is to heal from my educational experience as I reconceptualize why Latinas, myself included, decided to attend a PFVE institution.

## Chapter Summary

Chapter Three detailed how I use Critical Race Theory in Education (CRTE), Chicana Feminist Epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998), Cultural Intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998), as theoretical and methodological frameworks to understand the phenomenon of Latinas in PFVE schools. Additionally, I described how plática (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) was utilized as a methodology and method to examine what factors influence Latinas to attend Private For-Profit Vocational Education (PFVE) schools and what impact did attending a PFVE have on their future career goals.

The following chapter is an introduction to the eight extraordinary Latina contributors in my study. The goal of dedicating a chapter to the Latina participants is to provide more context

to show the complexities of their lived experiences to humanize them. Ultimately, I aim to demonstrate the layers of their identities, as mothers, daughters, wives, single mothers, caretakers and students, just to name a few.

# CHAPTER FOUR: "I WANT TO SUCCEED" INTRODUCTION TO LATINA CONTRIBUTORS

In this chapter, I introduce the eight Latina contributors[9] in my study. I begin by presenting a demographic table and relevant timeline that includes key information about each participant. The Latina Profile Table (Table 2) presents the contributor's name, age, self-identification[10], marital status/mothers, program completed/year(s) attended, worked/working in the field; community college (CC) and/or four-year university experience, and career goals. Followed by a Timeline (Figure 4) showing the year(s) that the contributors attended a PFVE and their age at the time of their PFVE attendance. After the Timeline, a brief introduction to each Latina is presented. The profiles provide a preview into the lived experiences of eight extraordinary Latina women. Each profile is organized in reverse chronological order as it relates to the year(s) they attended a PFVE. I finish the chapter with a demographic summary.

I begin with the Latina Profiles Table and Timeline.

[9] I use the terms Latinas, contributors, participants interchangeably to refer to the women in my study.

[10] The women self-identified as: Latina, Chicana, Hispanic or on their place of birth/origin. For the purpose of this study, Latina refers to someone from a Latin American country, and/or whose ethnic heritage and lineage is connected to Latin America.

Table 2

*Latina Profiles*

| Name | Age | Self-identification | Marital Status/ Mothers | Program Completed/ Year(s) Attended | Worked/ Working in field | Community College (CC)/ 4-year university experience | Career Goals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Silvia | 23 | Hispanic | Partnered | Medical Assistant **2015** | Yes | -Attended a UC for 2 quarters before attending a PFVE<br>-Graduated from CC in 2019 | -Transferred to for-profit university to pursue BSN<br>-Plans to apply to the master's program at a private university to become a Nurse Practitioner |
| Julia | 30 | Latina | Partnered | Medical Assistant **2015** | Yes | -Attended CC before enrolling in a PFVE | -Thinking about returning to PFVE to become a RN |
| Alondra | 29 | Nicaraguan | Single | Medical Assistant **2010-2011** | No | -Attended CC before enrolling in a PFVE<br>-Currently taking 1 to 2 classes at a local CC | -Earn Child development degree from CC<br>-Transfer to 4-year University for BA |
| Gloria | 33 | Latina | Single mother w/ 2 children | Medical Assistant **2006-2007** | Yes | -Was accepted to a State school but did not go because she did not understand the financial aid process<br>-Attended CC before enrolling in a PFVE<br>-Currently attending a CC while working full-time | -Apply & get admitted into a nursing program at a CC<br>-Earn a BSN from a 4-year university<br>-Earn a certified nurse midwife (CNM) |
| Dolores | 32 | Salvadoran | Single mother w/ 3 children Divorced | Dental Assistant **2005-2006** | Worked in the field before deciding to quit to return to school full-time | -Visited a CC before enrolling in a PFVE<br>-Currently enrolled full-time at a CC | -Apply and get admitted into a dental hygienist program<br>-Become a dentist/orthodontist |
| Paloma | 34 | Mexicana | Single mother of 1 child Recently got married | Medical Assistant **2004-2005** | Yes | | -Thinking about returning to CC to pursue Cosmetology |
| Rocio | 42 | Latina | Married w/ 3 children | Medical Assistant **1996** | Yes | | -Continue to work in Pediatrics |
| Sonia | 59 | Mexicana | Remarried with 1 child | Dental Assistant **1978** | Yes | -Was accepted to an out of state university after High school, but parents did not let her go<br>-Returned to school 10 years after graduating from PFVE<br>-graduated from CC with AA & Nursing degree<br>-graduated from State School BSN & Public Health Nursing<br>-All while working in the field | -Currently works as a consultant/ RN & Public Health Nurse at a Head Start program<br>-Plans to retire soon |

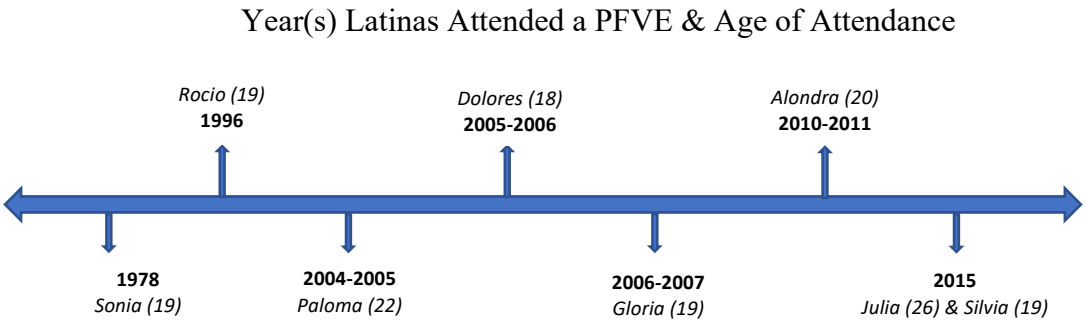


*Figure 4.* This timeline shows the year(s) that the Latinas in this study attended a PFVE and their age at the time of their PFVE attendance.

## Latina Profiles

### Silvia: Straight to the Point

Silvia, 23, identifies as Hispanic, first-generation U.S.-born, and first-generation college student. Her parents are Mexican immigrants. She applied to 32 universities during her junior year in high school. She was accepted into Columbia University, her dream school, but declined the offer because she did not want to leave her boyfriend behind. Instead, she stayed local and enrolled at a University of California campus close to home.

Unfortunately, Silvia's mother got into a horrible car accident that left her immobile for six months. To help her mother through recovery and support the household, Silvia took over her mother's job, cleaning houses during the week, and picked up a second job on the weekends. Eventually, going to school and working two jobs took a toll on Silvia, and she decided to withdraw from college at the end of her freshman year. After Silvia's mother made a full recovery, Silvia decided to return to school. She was encouraged to visit a PFVE institution by her sister-in-law, who was attending a PFVE at the time. Silvia visited the for-profit institution and enrolled in the medical assistant program.

After graduation, she was placed at a primary care clinic to finish her externship hours, but she did not like the workplace atmosphere. She requested to be placed elsewhere and began working at an urgent care clinic to complete her hours. She did so well that she was offered a full-time position. After working in urgent care for nine months and interacting with staff, she was encouraged to pursue a career as a nurse practitioner. She quit her full-time job and enrolled at a community college. Once at the community college, rather than complete several prerequisites to apply to the nursing program, she decided to go another route. Instead, Silvia earned her Associate of Arts degree and transferred to a for-profit four-year university where she is working toward a Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN). After earning her BSN, Silvia aims to enroll in a Nurse Practitioner Master's program at a private university.

**Julia: Time versus Cost**

Julia, 30, was born and raised in Los Angeles, California; both her parents are Mexican immigrants. She identifies as Latina. She is the youngest of three brothers; she and one of her brothers are the first in their family to go to college. During Julia's junior year of high school, her mother decided to take her out of school and enrolled her in a private religious high school to become a missionary. Julia simultaneously took evening classes at a local community college while completing high school.

Julia worked as a campus aide at several elementary schools after high school. After several years, she quit her job as a campus aide to work in a department store. She took a leave of absence from work to traveled to Nebraska to care for her sick brother, who was fighting cancer. Tragically, he lost his battle four months after her arrival. Julia's inspiration to become a nurse came from her experience with the hospice care nurses who cared for her brother. When Julia returned to California, she reviewed her community college transcripts and knew she would have to take additional science classes to get into a nursing program. Julia's co-worker told her

about the short-term medical assistant program he was enrolled in at a PFVE. After two months of thinking about the pros and cons of attending a PFVE, she decided to enroll in the medical assistant certificate program.

Upon completion of the program, Julia was hired to work in an oncology office to complete her externship hours. She earned less money working as a medical assistant than she had while working in retail. Julia found out how much her classmates were earning and began to look for other job opportunities. She got a few leads, went on a few interviews, and was able to negotiate for a better salary. She is currently working at an urgent care clinic where she earns more than minimum wage. Her future career goals include returning to a PFVE to become a Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN). Her reasoning holds that attending a for-profit will be expensive, but it will save her time. She is also considering attending a private university and earning a Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN).

**Alondra: Exploring Options**

Alondra, 29, was born in Los Angeles, California and identifies as Nicaraguan. Alondra's mother immigrated to the United States from Nicaragua when she was seventeen years old and had Alondra at age nineteen. Alondra grew up in a single-parent household and is a first-generation college student.

Alondra was diagnosed with a learning disability when she was five years old and was placed in special education classes from kindergarten through High school. With the help of her high school counselor, Alondra enrolled at her local community college. During Alondra's second semester at a community college, she heard about a medical assistant program at PFVE institution in Los Angeles and decided to enroll. Upon completion of the program, she received job placement at a clinic where she was to finish her externship hours. However, after she completed her externship, she was not offered a full-time position. After attending several

interviews and not landing a job, she was discouraged and decided not to work in the medical field.

Alondra plans to become a preschool or kindergarten teacher to work with young children and is currently enrolled at a community college, where she is taking one to two classes a semester while she works full-time. She aspires to transfer to a four-year university and earn a Bachelor's degree (B.A.) in Child Development with a teaching credential.

**Gloria: "Life Happens"**

Gloria, 33, is a first-generation college student, and single parent to two young boys ages eleven and seven. She identifies as Latina; her parents are Mexican immigrant. With her high school counselor's guidance, Gloria applied to several local universities, ultimately getting accepted to a California State University. Unfortunately, she did not understand the financial aid process and declined the offer. While she enrolled at her local community college, she attended for only one semester. Due to a lack of financial aid assistance, she could not continue.

Gloria and her friend were walking past a PFVE and decided to inquire about the programs offered. The staff made her feel important and answered all of her questions. They also explained the financial aid process. She left the PFVE that day having enrolled in the medical assistant certificate program. She worked in her field of training immediately after completing the program. Although she attended a PFVE twelve years ago, she is still in debt.

During our plática, Gloria shared that she had recently resigned from her full-time position as a medical assistant at an Obstetrician-Gynecologist (OB-GYN) office to return to school for a degree in nursing. She is currently a full-time community college student working on the prerequisites to get into the nursing program. Due to her PFVE student loan debt, Gloria does not qualify for any financial assistance, and, thus, holds several jobs, working 20 to 40 hours a week to make ends meet. Unfortunately, she has struggled to find a job that will

accommodate her school schedule. Still, she remains steadfast in her commitment to become a registered nurse (RN). She has educational and career aspiration that include earning a Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN) and a Master's of Science in Nursing (MSN) degrees to become a certified nurse-midwife (CNM).

**Dolores: "I Want to Succeed"**

Dolores, 32, is a single parent to three girls, ages 14, 12, and 2. She was born in Los Angeles, California; her parents are from El Salvador. She identifies as Salvadoran. Dolores is a full-time student at a local community college and is the first in her family to go to college. Her educational plans include gaining acceptance into a dental hygienist program, working her way to a four-year university, and attending dental school to become a dentist and orthodontist.

During her junior year of high school, she became pregnant with her first child and married her boyfriend. After the birth of her daughter and upon earning her high school diploma via homeschool, her husband encouraged her to pursue college. Dolores saw a commercial for a PFVE institution and decided to look into the program. After visiting the PFVE, her husband discouraged her from enrolling due to the steep tuition costs, suggesting instead that she enroll at a community college. Dolores had a negative experience with a community college counselor, and based on that experience, she instead decided to attend a PFVE in Los Angeles.

After Dolores completed the dental assistant certificate program, she found a dental office that allowed her to finish her externship hours while paying her a reasonable salary. She worked there for a few years. Eventually, Dolores and her husband divorced. As a single parent, Dolores faced the urgent need to find a job that paid more. For five years, she worked extended hours before deciding to return to school to pursue a dental hygienist program. She enrolled at a community college close to her home.

Currently, Dolores is a full-time student at a community college, taking advantage of all the programs available to her as a single parent and first-generation college student. She has not lost sight of her goal of becoming a dentist, but first, she is taking care of her three daughters. Her two oldest daughters are ready to enter high school; therefore, right now, her focus is on their college preparation. She wants them to go to college and pursue a career of their choosing. Once her two oldest daughters start college, she hopes to have their help with her two-year-old daughter before she resumes her pursuit of the dental field.

**Paloma: Accent as Asset**

Paloma, 34, was a single parent for ten years until she got married a few months before our plática. Her son is eleven years old. Paloma identifies as Mexicana and is the first in her family to go to college. At nine years old, Paloma immigrated from Tijuana, Mexico to Los Angeles, CA where she was placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes until her sophomore year of high school. Due to getting in trouble for hanging out with the wrong crowd of friends, Paloma attended a continuation school for her junior and senior year and participated in the Conservation Corps program, where she learned how to work in landscaping. This program allowed her to simultaneously complete her high school credits toward graduation and earn a wage.

Her experience at a PFVE began after she earned her high school diploma from the continuation school. After she completed the PFVE program, she worked as a medical assistant for about twelve years. During those years, she thought about returning to school for a career change; taking her friend's advice, Paloma enrolled at her local community college. When Paloma showed up at the community college, she felt lost, out of place, and overwhelmed. She never returned.

Paloma is interested in pursuing a career in cosmetology, but due to complications in her life, she has decided to wait on returning to school. Paloma is currently working in an optometrist's office earning minimum wage.

**Rocio: Family is Priority**

Rocio, 42, self-identifies as Latina, her parents are Mexican immigrants. She is married and has three children. Her eldest son attends college at a state school, her daughter is a community college student, and her son is in elementary school. After graduating from high school, Rocio met her husband and soon after became pregnant with her first child. That's when she thought about her son's future and the need for more income. Members of Rocio's family, who were attending a PFVE at the time, encouraged her to enroll. Upon completion of a medical assistant certificate program, Rocio landed a job in a pediatrics office, where she has worked for 22 years now.

Rocio and her siblings are the first in their family to go to college. Although she is comfortable where she works, Rocio wishes she would have returned to college to become a registered nurse. Her priority is and has been her family; she is saving money to send her children to college.

**Sonia: Driven**

Sonia, 59, identifies as Mexicana and is a first-generation college student. She and her parents immigrated from Mexico when she was a young girl; she is the oldest of eleven children. While she was accepted to an out-of-state university her senior year in high school, her parents did not allow her to attend a university so far from home. Her experience in a PFVE was motivated by her aspiration to become a dental assistant. A few months before completing the dental assistant certificate program, Sonia and her boyfriend married and welcomed their son. She worked in the dental field after she completed the program. She divorced ten years later.

Sonia enrolled at a community college ten years after graduated from a PFVE, where she completed an Associate's Degree (AA) and the prerequisites to a nursing program. While at the community college, she was diagnosed with a learning disability caused by test anxiety. Despite this, she graduated at the top of her class. Upon earning her AA, Sonia was accepted into nursing programs at several community colleges. Two years after earning her nursing degree, she continued her education, earning a Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN) and Public Health Nursing all while working in nursing full-time and without any school debt. Sonia has since survived cancer and remarried while working as an RN for the past 16 years. Sonia serves as a consultant and registered nurse for Head Start.[11] She plans to retire soon.

**Demographic Summary**

In this section, I present in-depth demographic findings as they pertain to Latinas' age and year(s) of PFVE attendance and Self-identification. The following table, Latinas' PFVE Trajectory shows the participant's name, year(s) attended, age when attended, program, program duration with externship hours, and tuition cost.

[11] Head Start is a federally funded programs designed to promote school readiness for children from low-income families. The program serves children between 3 and 5 years old. Children who attend these programs participate in various educational activities. They also receive some free medical and dental care services (https://www.childcare.gov/).

Table 3

*Latinas' PFVE Trajectory*

| Name/ Age | Year(s) Attended | Age when Attended | Program | Program Duration w/ Externship Hours | Tuition Cost |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Silvia 23 | 2015 | 19 | Medical Assistant | 9 months 200 hours | $20,000 |
| Julia 30 | 2015 | 26 | Medical Assistant | 8 months 250-300 hours | $18,000 |
| Alondra 29 | 2010-2011 | 20 | Medical Assistant | 9 months 120-280 hours | $17,000 |
| Gloria 33 | 2006-2007 | 19 | Medical Assistant | 9 months | $12,000-$14,000 |
| Dolores 32 | 2005-2006 | 18 | Dental Assistant | 9 months | $12,000 |
| Paloma 34 | 2004-2005 | 22 | Medical Assistant | 10 months | $10,000 |
| Rocio 42 | 1996 | 19 | Medical Assistant | 9 months | $8,000-$10,000 |
| Sonia 59 | 1978 | 19 | Dental Assistant | 9 months | $8,000-$9,000 |

**Latinas' Age and Year(s) of PFVE Attendance**

Over the span of 37 years, PFVEs have been a college choice for the Latinas in the study. At the time of our plática, the women's current ages ranged between 23 to 59. There are gaps in the years that they attended a PFVE. For example, Sonia was 19 years old when she attended a PFVE in 1978. Rocio, 19, attended in 1996, 18 years after Sonia's PFVE attendance. Paloma, 22; Dolores, 18; and Gloria, 19 attended a PFVE between 2004 and 2007. Alondra, 20; Julia, 26, and Silvia, 19, attended a PFVE between 2010 and 2015.

During their attendance at a PFVE their ages ranged between 18 and 26 years of age. Four out of the eight women were 19 years old when they attended a PFVE, a year after they graduated from high school. Research informs us that California has been one of the states where

the presence of PFVE institutions have increased (Foster, 2004; Hentschke, Lechuga, & Tierney, 2010; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). The Latinas' age range is significant in that it highlights how long PFVEs have been accessible to the Latinx community. In a span of 37 years, PFVEs has been a college choice for the eight women in this study.

**Self-identification**

PFVEs are predominantly attended by Women of Color (Chung, 2008; Hentschke, Lechuga, & Tierney, 2010; Iloh & Toldson, 2013; Iloh, 2014; McMillan Cotton, 2017; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). According to Oseguera and Malagon (2010), most of the students attending PFVE institutions are Latina women.

Each woman self-identified, either as Latina, Hispanic or by their place of birth or their family's country of origin. One woman identified as Hispanic and three as Latinas. Four women identified by their or their family's country of birth (e.g., Nicaraguan, Salvadoran and two women identified as Mexicanas). The majority of the women, six to be exact, are of Mexican origin.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the eight women participants in my study, as well as a table with demographic information about each Latina. A brief introduction to each Latina is presented per profile. I end the chapter with a demographic summary. In Chapter Five, I provide more context for each participants' educational experiences grounded in data from each plática.

# CHAPTER FIVE: "DRIVEN TO BE THE BEST WITH WHAT WE HAD"

I begin this chapter with a quote from Sonia, the elder of the group, to demonstrate how the Latina women did the best they could with the resources that were available to them. This powerful quote inspired the title of my dissertation. I begin by presenting the findings to the first research question that guide this study: What factors influenced Latinas to attend a Private For-Profit Vocational Education (PFVE) institution? The women in my study recounted facing challenges associated with (a) socioeconomic mobility; (b) support, information, and guidance; and (c) time and cost.

In section below, I elaborate on the factors and the specific challenges these Latinas faced. These are compounded challenges that sit atop existing challenges that first-generation college students must navigate in their pursuit of higher education. I culminate the chapter by discussing the college choice findings, followed by an analysis of how the experiences of the Latinas in this study align with the challenges first-generation college students face. I begin with socioeconomic mobility.

## Socioeconomic Mobility

Several women attended a PFVE because it offered a fast route to a better-paying career/job to financially support themselves and their families. According to Browman, Destin, Carswell, and Svoboda (2017), low-income students believe that educational attainment is a pathway to social and economic mobility and security. For some of the participants in this study, attending a PFVE was a fast route into a "profession" that would offer a sustainable living wage.

At 19 years old, Rocio met her husband and soon after became pregnant with her first child. That is when she thought about her son's future and her need for more income. Three of Rocio's female cousins, all sisters, were attending a PFVE at the time, and they encouraged her to enroll. She elaborated:

> They [her three cousins] would come by and be like, "You should go. Do something. Go, if you don't want to go to school, just do this." They were doing it, and they liked it, whatever they were learning. I have a two-month-old now, and I need to do something. I have this little kid that's going to depend on me. I need money. Of course, my parents were supporting me then, so that's why I decided to go.

Rocio's cousins would visit her and her newborn. They showed Rocio what they were learning in the medical assistant program. Rocio thought about it and decided to enroll to achieve a better-paying job to support her and her family financially. Sonia experienced something similar.

Sonia, who attended a PFVE 20 years prior to Rocio, was accepted into an out-of-state college after high school but thought about her family's situation at home. Sonia is the eldest of ten siblings and both her parents worked blue-collar jobs. She felt compelled to help her parents and siblings financially. Thus, going to a traditional college did not seem practical for her during that time. One day, Sonia saw an advertisement for a PFVE on television. She recalled in detail:

> I saw the commercial and thought, I can leave the [fast food restaurant] because I had been working there since I was 15 or 16 years old, then I can work at this professional environment. I would be able to make more money to provide and help my family because no matter [how much] I made my mom said, "Okay my daughter, this is how much you make, you give me $50.00 and the rest is yours." Fifty dollars went to my mom every paycheck. And also, in my mind I saw that it's like okay that's quick. I think I could do this, and I'll be able to help my family.

The commercial advertised a dental assistant program that took eight to nine months to complete, and she believed she would succeed in the program. Additionally, the opportunity to work in a

"professional environment" meant she would earn more money to help her family financially. Alondra thought attending a PFVE would lead to a good-paying job.

During Alondra's second semester at a community college, she heard about a short-term program at a local PFVE school. She felt intrigued when she saw a television advertisement for an eight-month medical assistant program with an employment placement component. She shared: "I thought it would be easier, and it was something fast and fast to get a job. I would have a career. I guess it was something easy for me to get in and out." After she attended community college and felt like it didn't work out, the option of going a PFVE felt real, and she felt ready to have a good-paying career.

For Rocio, Sonia, and Alondra, the option of going to a PFVE for a short-term certificate program was accessible and attainable. They each shared similar experiences when they visited the PFVE. The PFVE staff members told them what the television commercial advertised: the program was nine months with an externship, the tuition cost and financial aid process, and the job placement component. These women viewed attending a PFVE as an opportunity to work in the dental or medical field—an honorable "career" and earn a sustainable living wage to support themselves and their families.

Gloria's experience speaks to the first and second factor. She was accepted to CSUN after high school, but declined the offer because she did not know the financial aid process. Then, she attended community college and had to withdraw because she did not know about financial aid.

In 2006, 19-year-old Gloria and her friend were walking past a PFVE "and [she] said let's get some information, let's go in here." The PFVE staff member was attentive, answered all of her questions, explained the financial aid process, and made her feel important. Gloria left the

PFVE that day having enrolled in the medical assistant certificate program. She explained her reasoning for attending a PFVE:

> At a [PFVE], you get to finish in eight months. I couldn't afford the CSUN where I was accepted. [PFVE] gets to the point. So, I decided to go there even though it was more expensive. As a matter of fact, it didn't sound expensive to me because the [PFVE] staff explained that a loan would cover the tuition, so I thought, medical assistant, let's try it out; it has to work out.

At that moment in time, attending a PFVE sounded attainable to Gloria. The PFVE staff member explained the financial aid process, and Gloria saw the opportunity to attend a PFVE to secure a better-paying job. In turn, this leads to the next factor.

### Support, Information, and Guidance

The second factor that emerged from the pláticas was the lack of support, information, and guidance. This refers to the lack of information and guidance as it pertains to learning about the different sectors of higher educations, majors, career paths, college access, financial aid, and mentoring. Several Latinas shared their experiences with high school and community college counselors and highlighted the importance of mentorship.

With her high school counselor's guidance, Gloria applied to several local universities and received an offer to attend a California State University, Northridge. Unfortunately, because she did not understand the financial aid process and did not believe going to college was possible for her, she declined the offer:

> I said to myself, "Can you afford this? Can your parents support it?" No, they can't, so why are you thinking about it? Next, like is it possible? I didn't have somebody to tell me do this, do that, like somebody to guide me . . . . I'm trying to swim, and I don't get anywhere because I don't know how to swim.

She shared feeling frustrated and angry because she thought that she had to pay for college upfront. She did not understand how financial aid worked and would have liked to have received the appropriate guidance when it came to financial aid. Without the financial support from her parents and the motivation from a mentor, Gloria did not believe she belonged in college. In Dolores's case, she was misguided when she met with a community college counselor.

Dolores's husband had initially encouraged her to pursue college. She searched for dental assistant programs online because she "wanted to take a baby step" into the dental field before becoming a dentist. She proceeded to call the top two PFVEs that resulted from the online search. She also saw television commercials advertising short-term vocational programs. After visiting the PFVE, though, her husband discouraged her from enrolling due to the steep tuition costs, suggesting that she instead enroll at a community college. Her first visit to the community college was not a pleasant one. Dolores shared her experience with a community college counselor:

> I went to [community college] and went to see a counselor because I assumed the counselor was supposed to guide you, to tell you what to do but no. I was like, I want to become a dental assistant, "We don't have that here," so I'm not in the right place? How do I get there? I was so lost. I remember [the counselor] being so careless, looking at me like if I'm stupid, well at [the PFVE] they were so nice, they were like, "We'll help you; we'll do this, we'll do that" I was like cool. I felt like I was getting help.

Dolores met with a counselor seeking guidance on how to enter the dental field, but instead she left the meeting feeling "stupid." Her experience at a PFVE was the opposite—the staff was nice to her and she was receiving help. Unfortunately, the interaction with a community college counselor inclined her to attend a PFVE.

In Paloma's case, a counselor had encouraged her to attend college, but she did not know what major to pursue. Consequently, Paloma felt stuck and confused about what major or career to pursue. Additionally, she candidly shared her lack of self-confidence due to her Spanish accent. She reflected upon her educational experiences:

> I think I went with the flow, I started forgetting little by little of what I wanted to be, or I didn't really ask who I want to be. Well, I'm going to learn, because I like to learn, gain new experiences. I want to be successful; I think that I took the wrong path. I think that if I would've had somebody telling me more about, "Go to college, it's okay to go to community college and take this long. It's okay if you start at the bottom and it's going to take you three year or four years. It's going to pay off." Then I think it would be different. Maybe I would be in the medical field, maybe not. But it would definitely be a different path.

In her reflection, Paloma stated several key observations: (a) she "went with the flow" and she didn't think about her career options; (b) she likes to learn and gain new experiences; and (c) if she could have had the mentoring and guidance from someone who had been to college, perhaps she could have chosen and had a different route. It is telling in that Paloma likes to learn and she had thought that attending a PFVE would work out for her. Overall, her experience directly addresses the importance of mentoring.

Gloria, Dolores, and Paloma candidly shared their experiences with counselors who were doing their job meeting with students, however, the Latinas in this study did not receive the appropriate information for their particular situations. Gloria reflected on her educational journey, highlighting some of the challenges that first-generation college students experience:

> I wish I had someone in high school tell me the difference between a for-profit, like if I go to [PFVE], how much you're going to pay. But if you go to community college. I don't remember getting that guidance and information in high school. And then your parents are immigrants, like they don't know. They just say, "Go, go to school."

Gloria is talking about the realities of first-generation college students. She wished she had previous knowledge about the different educational sectors that exist in higher education; indeed, many do not know the difference between the for-profits and the community college system.

### Time and Cost

Time and Cost refers to the duration and financial expenses of the PFVE program. A point of concern for two Latinas was time efficiency. They are trying to be efficient with their time, and sought a program based on the duration of the program. They deliberately chose to attend a PFVE despite their expensive tuition.

Growing up, Silvia aspired to become a surgeon; her favorite subjects were math and science. The passion for the medical field grew after taking a first-responder class in high school. She enrolled at a University of California, Riverside close to home. Unfortunately, Silvia's mother got into a horrible car accident that left her immobile for six months. Eventually, going to school and working two jobs took a toll on Silvia, and she decided to withdraw from college during Spring quarter of her freshman year. After Silvia's mother made a full recovery, Silvia decided to return to school. She was encouraged to visit a PFVE by her sister-in-law, who was attending a PFVE at the time. According to Silvia, "She was learning more on the medical side. I'm like, I want to dip my toes into the medical field to see if I like it and see where I want to go from there." Silvia explained her reasoning for attending PFVE:

> I need to know what I want to do with my life before I start on a path because I don't want to go halfway into something and don't like it. I don't want to go into residency and

> be like this isn't for me. I've wasted all this time and money that goes into becoming a doctor. Since I did know I wanted to be in the medical field, but I was still unsure because when you are in the UC system, you're doing general eds. It's just like you're back in high school. You know its English, math, science, chemistry. For me, the trade school was like boom. You start learning right off the bat. It's very hands-on. You don't have to learn the English part or the math. That's what I liked about [the PFVE]. They got right to the point. You learned every skill that you have to do.

Silvia explained that at the UC, she had to take general education classes needed to graduate from college before applying to medical school. She wanted to test the water to see if she's sure she wants to become a surgeon. She further explained that she liked that the PFVE taught her the skills necessary for the job without taking the general education courses.

Julia is the youngest of three brothers; she and one of her brothers are the first in their family to go to college. She wanted to follow her brother's footsteps and major in psychology, however, after participating in a science program at University of Southern California (USC) one semester, she changed her major to science. At age 24, Julia took a leave of absence from her retail job to travel to Nebraska to care for her sick brother, who was fighting cancer. Tragically, he lost his battle four months after her arrival. Julia's inspiration to become a nurse came from her experience with the hospice care nurses who cared for her brother. Julia is thinking about how long it would take to earn her degree versus the cost:

> I'm still debating all of that. That's why I haven't made up my mind if I want to go back to [a PFVE] because that's a lot of money. But I can do what I originally thought, which was go through the community college. The one thing that I hesitate is that it's going to take time versus the appeal of saying, "Eighteen months and then you'll get it." Then you

> go to people, like my brother, who spend almost 12 years going to school, and they're in debt. No matter if you have a Ph.D., you're still paying what? You owe a quarter of a million dollars? So why am I crying over being in debt which is less than an actual car? And that's being invested into my education I mean; I don't know if I should go through private or for-profit or going through community college. I still don't know because if I'm worried about the debt that I'm going to accumulate going through for-profit, they're saving me time. It's whether I want to sacrifice my time taking the long route but being cheap? Or do I just want to sacrifice getting into debt and getting my license?

Julia is determined to become an LVN, but is thinking about where to go. Her reasoning holds that attending a PFVE will be expensive, but it will save her time.

Both Silvia and Julia attended a PFVE in 2015, they did not go to the same institution, but both completed the medical assisting program at a PFVE the same year. They also shared a similar reflection about the amount of time and money it would take them to earn a certificate to work in the medical field. They sought going to a PFVE as a time and monetary investment in their medical career.

I have elaborated on the specific challenges the women in my study faced as they relate to the three factors that led them to attend a PFVE. Now, I will discuss how these women's experiences converge with the experiences of first-generation college students.

## First-Generation College Students

All of the Latinas in this study are first-generation college students. This means that they are the first person in their immediately family to go to college, and neither of their parent/s have a college degree (Kim, Miller, Hwang, & Olson, 2021). Some of the challenges that first-generation college students face is lack of knowledge to navigate higher education, which includes: (a) not knowing how to pursue a specific career (Kim et al., 2021); (b) coming from a

working-class background or being low-income and work while attending school (Lim, Smith, & Kim, 2016); (c) lacking self-confidence (Orbe, 2008); and (d) having other family responsibilities besides focusing on school (Dawborn-Gundlach & Margetts, 2018).

More recent studies assert that female first-generation college students experience college differently compared to male first-generation college students (Kim et al., 2021). Female first-generation college students often have multiple identities or role expectations, such as being a wife, mother, single mother, caretaker to elders, and full-time employment to financially contribute to their household (Kim et al., 2021). Although the Latinas in this study are the first to go to college and their experiences might align with the challenges of first-generation college students, I assert that as Latinas, they experience schooling differently.

## College Choice Findings

As I hypothesized about the factors that influenced Latinas to attend PFVEs, I assumed that this dissertation would be a college choice study. However, that was not the case when examining Latinas in PFVEs. Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) traditional college choice model has three phases: the predisposition phase is when a student decides she wants to pursue higher education; the search phase is when the student begins collecting college information; and the choice phase is the final phase where the student chooses, applies to, and attends the college of her choice (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler & Stage, 1992). Yet the traditional college choice model does not account for the way Communities of Color experience college choice. Based on the findings of this study, the way Latina women who decided to attend a PFVE did not align with the traditional college choice model. Talavera-Bustillos (1998) informs us that Latinas and Chicanas experience college choice differently. They entered the predisposition phase in the tenth grade. The search phase took place in the twelfth grade and the choice phase

occurred two months after their high school graduation. Most of the Latinas enrolled at a community college.

Most recently, Iloh's (2018) model of college-going decisions and trajectories is a three-component ecological model based on the experiences of nontraditional, low-income, and Students of Color. According to her model, students' college choice decision is based on three intersecting dimensions based on information, time, and opportunity. Although Iloh (2018) is providing a new approach to for-profit college choice grounded in the experiences of nontraditional, low-income and Students of Color, it is not specific to Latinas and their lived experience. The Latinas in my dissertation study experienced college choice in a different way and therefore, their college choice process is not linear and does not align to any previous or resent college choice models. Based on their experience, attending a PFVE was not their first choice, but rather a forced choice. Some of them chose to attend a PFVE based on what was going on in their life at that particular time. For many, attending a PFVE was a necessity and not a choice.

## Analytical Summary

For the eight Latina women in this study, they are all first-generation college students. Their experiences vary and differ in some ways, but some shared similar educational experiences. For example, Silvia and Julia were familiar with the college process and the college lingo, and they both made informed decisions to attend a PFVE regardless of steep tuition. Some of the Latinas did not receive appropriate information, guidance, and support, however. Gloria shared that she did not know the difference between a for-profit and a community college. All the women in the study juggled intersectional identities and role expectations. Besides being college students, they were mothers, caretakers, and financial contributors for their families. Although the challenges and experiences of the eight women in my study align with that of first-

generation college students. I argue that the Latinas in this study not only faced challenges in their personal lives, they also faced structural and systemic barriers. For example, some of the Latinas shared that they were not told about college, financial aid, career paths, etc. in K-12 grades. Utilizing a Critical Race Theory in Education (CRTE) framework allows me to critically analyze the structural and systemic factors that contributed to the Latinas' schooling experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Although the women shared challenges similar to those of first-generation college students, we should analyze their experiences as women with intersectional identities—not only are they mothers, wives, financial providers, and college students, they are also Latinas. As racialized bodies, they experience schooling differently. History reminds us that the Chicana/o and Latina/o community was tracked into vocational education, denying them the opportunity to pursue higher education (see Chapter Two) (Delgado Bernal, 1999; Gonzalez, 1990, 1999; Oakes, 1985).

In the spirit of CRTE and Chicana Feminist Epistemology, I view the Latinas in this study as resilient women who were unafraid to take a risk and go to college, even if it was a PFVE. For them, attending an institution that offered an accessible and attainable vocational trade worked for them at that particular time in their lives. They sought that route because they value education.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the three most prominent factors that influenced eight Latinas to attend a PFVE. First, most women indicated that they had attended a PFVE to attain a better-paying job, thus seeking upward socioeconomic mobility. Second, some women attended a PFVE due to the lack of support, information, and guidance. And last, a couple of Latinas chose to attend a PFVE based on time efficiency. It is important to note that all of the women

experienced high levels of debt as a result of their PFVE experience. In the next chapter, I present the findings to the second research question guiding this study.

# CHAPTER SIX: COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH AND ACTUALIZATION CAPITAL GROUNDED IN THEORY IN THE FLESH

In this chapter, I present the findings to the second research question that guides this study: What impact did attending a PFVE have on the Latinas career goals? In the previous chapter, I showed that while the women were challenged in their commitment to their educational aspirations, they persisted as they strove for socioeconomic mobility, navigated through drawbacks that resulted from a lack of support and guidance, and sought to make the most of their time. One extremely salient theme in terms of impact was that many of the Latinas' commitments to fulfilling their aspirations were tested in ways that would compel others to quit—yet they persisted.

A CRT lens that helped ground how the women in this study persisted is Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). Yosso (2005) defines CCW as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77) and is informed by six forms of capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational and resistant. CCW highlights the "array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities" that Students of Color bring with them into educational spaces (p. 69). In addition to the list provided by Yosso, I demonstrate in this chapter how the Latinas also bring with them ganas, or drive and passion as they work towards accomplishing their goals. For most of the Latina women in the study, their experience overlaps with more than one capital. It is important to underscore that all eight women have career aspirations and four of them are currently working towards a degree higher than a PFVE certificate. Two of the Latinas are comfortable where they are; Rocio is comfortable working in the pediatrics office that she's been employed at for the past 20 years and hopes her children will pursue higher education. Sonia, the

eldest woman of the group, graduated with a Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN) and a Public Health degree and currently works as a registered nurse (RN) consultant. She hopes her grandchildren will go to college like she and her son did as she plans to retire soon.

In this chapter, I elaborate on how the Latinas in this study drew from their CCW as they worked to reach their desired career paths. I focus and highlight two Latinas' experience for each of the six CCW capitals. I end the chapter by introducing actualizational capital to the CCW framework. The analytical summary is dedicated to describing how actualizational capital, grounded in theory in the flesh (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981), emerged from the analysis of my pláticas with the Latina women in this study.

## Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital is "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). This capital highlights the aspirations parents/guardians have for their children and future generation to pursue and accomplish their goals. I want to highlight that all the eight women shared aspirations they have for themselves and their family members and most have persisted through many personal and educational barriers. I present Julia and Paloma's experience as examples of aspirational capital.

Julia is determined to achieve the career she seeks in the medical field. She knows she wants to become a Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN), but has not decided if she wants to take the PFVE or the community college route. Julia explained:

> I don't know if I should go through private or for-profit or going through community college. I still don't know because if I'm worried about the debt that I'm going to accumulate going through for-profit, they're saving me time. It's whether I want to sacrifice my time taking the long route but being cheap? Or do I just want to sacrifice getting into debt and getting my license?"

Julia's reasoning holds that attending a PFVE will be expensive, but it will save her time. She is determined to realize their medical career aspirations regardless of the cost. In other words, despite the "real barrier" of high tuition cost, Julia's "hopes and dreams" of attaining a LVN is an aspiration she plans to fulfill, this is an example of aspiration capital (Yosso, 2005, p. 77).

Paloma has been working in the medical field since the completion of her PFVE certificate program and has extensive experience working in several clinics, explaining:

> I've worked in a general practitioner's office, general doctor and medical. My first job after earning my certificate was to cover a woman who was going on maternity leave. I was there for two years. Then I went to the OB/GYN department, and I was there for eight years. Now, I've been working in an eye care clinic for three years.

Although Paloma has broad experience working in the medical field, she aspires to leave the medical field and pursue a different career. She shared a conversation she had with her son about her aspirations and the importance of a college degree:

> When I was young, I didn't have that opportunity to think about what I really wanted to do, I just went with it. Now, I'm at the stage where I've thought about my ideal career, but I feel confused. I have a lot of experience in the medical field. But I also feel that I need to pursue something I like. I like make-up, I like hair. I think I'm very good at socializing with people. I talk to my son and encourage him to go to college, I tell him that nobody is going to take that away from him. And that he should pursue any degree he wants and be whatever he wants to be. I see the importance of a college education, and I don't want anybody to step on him because I see it. I constantly see it and live it.

Paloma has worked in different sectors within the medical field but has aspirations to pursue cosmetology, an entirely different career. Although she aspires for a career change, she's

contemplating the change because of her extensive medical experience. Given her lived experience, she encourages her son to go to college and pursue a career he likes. While Paloma's aspirations seem to be on hold, for her son she "maintain(s) hopes and dreams for the future" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77)—Paloma encourages him to seek a college education so that he will not experience mistreatment like she has in her field. This serves as an example of how aspirational capital is intergenerational, Paloma has aspirations to pursue a different career path and hopes her son will earn a college degree.

## Linguistic Capital

Yosso (2005) defines linguistic capital as "the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (p. 78). This capital celebrates and validates the importance of knowing more than one language. All eight Latinas have immigrant parents and identified Spanish as their first language; many of them code switched between English and Spanish during our plática Five women were placed in English as Second Language (ESL) in elementary school. Some of them stayed on the ESL path throughout their K-12 trajectory and some eventually placed out of ESL. To demonstrate how the Latinas exemplified linguistic capital, I share Julia and Sonia's experiences.

Julia's mother did not want Julia to take Spanish in school; rather, Julia shared how she had learned Spanish from her mother:

> I remember my mom didn't want me in [Spanish] class. Because she said she'd teach me Spanish. And she did. She taught me Spanish and I'm very fluent because of her. So, I was always a little bit ahead with my English vocabulary and grammar than the rest of the students.

When I asked Julia how her mother taught her Spanish, she explained that her mother worked for the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) as a campus aide and she and her mother traveled to Mexico during their summer and winter breaks:

> She would take me to Mexico because she worked for LAUSD. So, keep in mind that her vacation was also my vacation. So, we would go to Mexico at least two times a year. One during summer and then one in December. But I hang out with my cousins, so I was forced to speak Spanish. I went to school with them during the summer while my mom visited her sisters. That's how I learned Spanish. I also learned how to write in cursive. I stopped visiting when I was ten. So, my vacation was going to school in Mexico.

Julia is confident in herself and in her Spanish language ability. She was fortunate enough to travel to Mexico twice a year to learn and practice Spanish. Relatedly, Yosso (2005) states, "Linguistic capital reflects the idea that Students of Color arrive at school with multiple language and communication skills." In Julia's case, after summer and winter breaks, she returned to school feeling confident about the language and skills she attained while studying and vacationing in Mexico. Skills and abilities that contribute to her academic and self-confidence. Therefore, exemplifying linguistic capital.

Sonia, on the other hand, remembers her own educational struggles with English and comprehension. She talked about her educational experiences and the lack of support for Spanish-speaking children:

> I went to kindergarten at Eastman Avenue School, and I remember not knowing anything because it was just English. I didn't know English. My parents were Spanish speaking. I was struggling. I distinctly remember this, being taken out of the classroom, sitting outside with a book, and the teacher put the book in front of me and she had me read it,

> and I was reading, and I read it. I don't know how I read it, she says, "So, now tell me what you read." I couldn't tell her what I read. The comprehension wasn't there. I was just reading. No teacher spoke the Spanish. To me, cultural sensitivity was out the door because they didn't know what cultural sensitivity was. I went to junior high, and all my teachers, I know they saw something in me, but they couldn't help me. I don't think they could help me because one, they couldn't change how it was at home. They had to change something, but they couldn't do it.

Sonia talked about the lack of cultural sensitivity she experienced when she was a student, more specifically the lack of Spanish-speaking teachers and resources for Spanish-speaking children.

Currently, Sonia works as a RN consultant and credited her experiences and perspective as a bilingual Latina to why she can connect with the population she serves:

> My title right now is RN Consultant. I have been consulting for Head Start for the past 15 years. Head Start is a federal and state funded program for low-income families, which are basically made up of 85% Latinos. So, my main job is to make sure children are entering the programs with the correct immunizations and dentals. I work with parents to ensure that they advocate for their child. I also work with teachers and staff. I work with three agencies, one is a nonprofit, and the other two are districts. Because I'm a Latina and I speak Spanish, I'm bilingual, I'm able to interact to 85% of the people, a lot of people know my name because of what I do.

Although Sonia struggled with the English language, she persevered and learned English while not losing her native Spanish language. Today, she is a bilingual Latina who works with the Latina/o/x community. Her lived experience as an immigrant child who did not know English—combined with her formal academic degree—makes her the ideal person for her career. She

brings with her an antideficit approach and understanding to the way she interacts with the community she serves. Sonia's "intellectual and social skills attained through" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78) daily communication in two languages is a great example of linguistic capital.

## Familial Capital

Familial capital "refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry as sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition. This form of cultural wealth engages a commitment to community well being and expands the concept of family to include a more broad understanding of kinship . . . . From these kinship ties, we learn the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to our community and its resources" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). This capital also encompasses the support and encouragement from family and extended family members. Here are Rocio and Sonia's experience with this capital.

Rocio became pregnant with her first son at 19 years old. That is when she thought about her son's future and her need for more income. Three of Rocio's female cousins were attending a PFVE at the time, and they encouraged her to enroll in the medical assistant certificate program. She shared:

> They [her three cousins] would come by and be like, "You should go. Do something. Go, if you don't want to go to school, just do this." They were doing it, and they liked what they were learning. I have a two-month-old baby now, and I need to do something. I have this little kid who is going to depend on me. I need money. Of course, my parents were supporting me then, that's why I decided to go.

Rocio's cousins encouraged her to attend a PFVE and she trusted their enthusiasm about what they were learning in the program. As family members who care about Rocio and her growing family, her cousins helped by connecting her to the school that they were attending. Influenced heavily by her cousin's encouragement and experience in the program, Rocio felt comfortable

attending the school. Additionally, Rocio emphasized that her parents supported her financially, which led her to attend the program. This demonstrates the influence family plays in a decision such as going to school and being financially cared for. This is also part of what familial capital entails.

In Sonia's case, she wants to leave her grandchildren the legacy of hard work that was instilled in her by her parents. This speaks to the role of her family in her own drive and determination to reach her career goals. It took Sonia five years to finish the BSN program and she has worked in the medical field for the past 15 years. Sonia described her plans to retire:

> I want to live the best that I can, meaning I want to travel. If I want to take my grandchild here or there, I can. No more education for me because it took me 15 years. The legacy I want to leave my grandchildren is two main things; one, they have great family support and two, they can do and accomplish anything that they want.

Sonia helps pay for her grandchildrens' education and plans to help fund their college education. She wants her grandchildren to know that they have the family and financial support to help them accomplish their goals. Her ability to help her grandchildren financially is an example of familial capital.

Additionally, there is more to say about Sonia's foundation and upbringing in terms of familial capital. During our plática, she talked about what she learned from her parents. She stated, "I was a good student. I was a disciplined student. I was always on time. I want to say, I think the foundation of that came from my family being hard working." Here, Sonia is describing the "cultural knowledges" from her family's teachings of hard work, which she will pass down to her grandchildren. That is also an example of familial capital.

## Social Capital

According to Yosso (2005), "social capital can be understood as networks of people and community resources. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions" (p. 79). To demonstrate how the women exemplified social capital, I share Rocio and Julia's experience.

Rocio shared an experience she had had with a young woman who began to work in the pediatrics office with her. According to Rocio, this young woman described her own plan to return to school and Rocio encouraged her to pursue that goal:

> We had a young girl that started working with us and she was a quick learner. You could tell she was a smart girl. She was fast. She was 19 when she started. She's my daughter's age. She told me, "I want to eventually go back to school." I said, "Do it. Don't think about it. Do it, because if you think about it too long then you're going to be stuck like me. I was thinking about it and never did it." I kept pushing her, and she did. She left and got hired somewhere else. It's closer to her house. She's earning $2 more than what she was getting here with us. I told her, "Go for it. You're young. You still have time. Do it. Don't stop. Don't get comfortable because the minute you get comfortable, you screw yourself."

During our plática, Rocio shared that she would have liked to return to school and become a registered nurse but felt comfortable and got stuck. Having experienced feeling stuck, Rocio severed as a mentor by providing this young woman with "both instrumental and emotional support" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79) as she begins her medical career. In this case, Rocio served as the voice of reason, providing guidance, encouragement, and support to a young woman beginning her career in the medical field. Perhaps Rocio saw herself in this young lady and gave her younger self the push to pursue her career goal.

When it came to Julia's high school experience, she benefitted from her family's knowledge of how to navigate the different type of schools and programs. She recounted her experience and explained how her older brother, who was a teacher at the time, helped her get into AP/Honors classes at Jefferson High school:

> I got a letter from Manual Arts [high school] because I lived in the area. I also got a letter from Jefferson [High School]. But my mom and brothers filled out the application to go to Francisco Bravo Medical Magnet. But I didn't get in the first raffle. So, I began going to Jefferson. At that time, my brother was teaching special education at Jefferson, so he changed my classes. I don't know how he did it, but I know he did it. My mom was working at Jefferson as a campus aide too. So, when I was there, they changed most of my classes to AP classes.

Julia received acceptance letters from two of her neighborhood's schools, but her family applied to a local magnet school. Although she didn't get into the magnet school the first time, her family used their social capital to get her into the AP classes at Jefferson High School. During that time, Julia's mother worked as a campus aide and her older brother was a teacher at Jefferson High School. There are several capitals at play here—her older brother used his work community within the school to get her sister into the AP classes, and this also is part of navigational capital. Her brother knew where to go and who to talk to in order to get Julia into the appropriate classes. This leads me into the next capital.

### Navigational Capital

Navigational capital "refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions . . . this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). To demonstrate how this capital was exemplified, I present Rocio and Dolores's experience.

Although Rocio is comfortable working as a medical assistant in a pediatrician's office, she regrets not going to college. She wished she could have become a registered nurse but now her priorities are her three children. While Rocio does not have plans to pursue a college degree, she expects her three children to go to college, but not a PFVE:

> Being a medical assistant is not bad. I just wouldn't recommend it because I'm afraid they would get comfortable like me. I know there's bigger and better out there. That's why I tell my kids, don't do it. My daughter didn't want to go to college. She wanted to pursue an ultrasound tech program at a [PFVE]. I'm like no, just go to community college because if not you'll get comfortable with a certificate. That's why I push my children so hard to go to college. I said believe me, you're going to thank me later.

Rocio fears that if a young adult seeks to attend a PFVE and find a job in the medical field, that they might get comfortable like she did and that complacency may hinder them from advancing their education.

Rocio's experience at a PFVE has exposed her to know the difference between a for-profit and a nonprofit college. She understands that a short-term program can be used as a steppingstone into a career, but fears that her daughter might get comfortable like she did and that might deter her from pursuing a college degree. Rocio's ability to navigate and know the difference between programs and school types is important information that will subsequently help Rocio's children make informed educational choices. This is an example of familial, social, and navigational capital.

Dolores also exemplifies navigational capital as she distinguished between a for-profit and nonprofit college. After being single for six years, Dolores fell in love and moved in with her boyfriend. She became pregnant and decided to relocate to Connecticut, where he is from.

Dolores, her two daughters from a previous marriage, and her boyfriend moved closer to his family for support with their baby girl. He also landed a job that paid a healthy salary. As soon as she got to Connecticut, Dolores began looking for schools that offered dental hygiene as a career option; when she found a private college that offered the program, she did her research because she did not want to attend a PFVE:

> I ended up going to Goodwin College, which has the dental hygienist [program] and graduate within three years. I was so scared to fall into something like the [PFVE]. So, I was like, I need to know if my credits are going to transfer. It was a legit private school. I did my research. I made calls to make sure it was legit. Financially they covered all my classes. I didn't have to pay anything out of pocket, it wasn't like [PFVE]. So, I was there for a year after I had my baby. I was supposed to graduate this June.

Dolores attended a dental hygienist program at a private nonprofit college in Connecticut for about two years. Unfortunately, the relationship with her boyfriend did not work out, and she moved back to California with her three daughters without finishing the program.

Given Dolores's experience at a PFVE and community college, she gained the experience and knowledge necessary to navigate through the different educational sectors, understanding the accreditation and financial aid process in precise detail. She made sure her school credits were transferable to and from that college. She drew from her navigational capital by her ability, determination, and commitment to seek answers as she maneuvers through the different sectors of higher education.

### Resistant Capital

Resistant capital "refers those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Overall, the Latinas in this study have demonstrated their spirit of resistance and resiliency by completing the PFVE program, working

in the medical field and for some—not giving up on their career goals. To showcase how two Latinas embodied resistant capital, I focus on Alondra and Gloria's experience:

Alondra persevere in spite of having a learning disability, she graduated from high school and completed the PFVE program. Although Alondra did not enter the medical field after completing the medical assistant program. She sought a job as an assistant aide for LA's Best, an after-school program. A program Alondra participated in when she was a child. Currently, she works full-time for a delivery service company and on her days off she volunteers at LA's Best. Working at that after-school program inspired Alondra to work with children, she shares:

> I didn't pursue the medical field because I was not passionate about it, it was just not my thing. I started to find out my passion when I started working at the summer camp that I used to go to as a kid. I was working as an assistant aide, helping the staff with the kids at the camp. We prepare different activities like cooking class, sports and arts and crafts. And that's when I realized, "This is what I want to be, I love helping kids." I want to help them with their education and encourage them. Until this day, I work with the LA's Best program on my days off and when I have more time.

Although Alondra was unsuccessful in securing a job in the medical field, she did not let that experience discourage her from pursuing another career. Her goal is to work with young children and plans to become a preschool or kindergarten teacher. Alondra embodies resistant capital in the simple fact that she has not given up on herself and her career goals. Others in her position might have given up when they did not land a job in the medical field or used their disability as an "excuse, "approaching the situation in a self-defeating or conformist way. Instead, Alondra embodies resistant capital in her ability to approach her situation in a transformative matter in seeking other career options (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Similarly, Gloria is another resistant woman who is determined to meet her career goals despite of her current challenges. Throughout the 12 years that she has been working in the medical field, she has attended community college part-time taking the science classes necessary to apply to the nursing program in the evenings. She decided to focus on her goal and attend community college full-time. She's met with several community college counselors who have advised her to seek other majors besides nursing. Gloria described her experience with two community college counselors and a college staff member, stating:

> I came to talk to a counselor, and he says, "Why don't you think of doing something else because you haven't passed anatomy four times. The RN program here is not going to take you. You can go talk to them, but they're not going to take you" and he takes out a book and asks me to pick another major. I told him that I don't want to look at another major, that I want to be a registered nurse. He kept repeating that the program would not take me—I left that meeting crying. The second time I met with a female counselor, she said the same thing, "You already took anatomy four times." And at first her tone was harsh. She suggested I try the LVN or psychology degree. I told her that I want to do the RN program. She said, "You can talk to them but they're not going to accept you because of your classes." And said, "But life happens." I was holding back tears. "I want to be an RN and I'm going to go here and wherever I need to go until everyone tells me no, that's what I'm going to do." When I told her that, her tone changed. "Well, if that's what you want to do, you're doing good by coming here and not giving up." Now that I have the chance to come to school in the daytime, I visit a counselor and they tell me to major in something else. I don't want to go back and see them. And then I went to pay my school fees. The lady at the counter saw my units and said, "You would have a master's or a

doctorate with the number of units you have." And I was like well, "I don't, and life happens. I don't have it that easy." I was so upset. So, my plan is if this school doesn't want to take me, there's a nursing school in front of USC that takes students. Yeah, I'm going to have to pay, but I'm going to be an RN if nobody else wants to take me.

Unfortunately, Gloria has not passed anatomy, a class needed to get into the nursing program at the community college she is currently attending. Now that she is a full-time student, she sought guidance and experienced microaggressions from two counselors and staff member (Solorzano et al., 2000). In spite of experiencing these microaggressions, Gloria remains determined to achieve her goal of becoming a nurse and will seek other schools if the community college rejects her application. Her ability to maintain hopeful and determined despite being told that she will not get accepted into a nursing program is an example of how Gloria exemplifies resistant capital.

After analyzing how the eight Latinas embodied the six capitals of the CCW framework, a new capital emerged based on their life and educational journeys, embodying what Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981) call theory in the flesh. In the next section, the analytical summary is dedicated to defining and describing the theorizing of actualizational capital.

### Analytical Summary and a Move Towards Actualizational Capital

Informed by critical race theory, community cultural wealth (CCW) is used to demonstrate how the eight women in this study exemplified each capital through their personal and educational experiences, and how that impacted their career goals (Yosso, 2005). I see these Latinas as strong women who have persisted through life challenges and have not given up on their goals. I refuse to blame the Latina women for attending a PFVE or view them as victims of PFVEs. That deficit outlook would imply that it's the women's "fault" for attending a PFVE. To the contrary, I view them as resilient women who believed that attending a PFVE would give them access into a well-paying profession to provide for themselves and their families. These

women are risk takers and go-getters, willing to take on debt to invest in themselves and their family's future.

Yosso (2005) describes the knowledge that Students of Color bring with them into educational spaces – knowledges they inherent from their home, communities, and their lived experience (Yosso, 2005). As presented in his chapter these women have also brought with them *ganas*. The most salient capital was aspirational capital. During our pláticas, all the women shared the aspirations they have for themselves and their children. More specifically six out of eight women are currently working towards accomplishing their career goal, by either attending community college or a for-profit university.

An overarching theme for many of the Latinas is that they have not given up on their goals. All of the Latinas shared their career aspirations, but several emphasized how they are currently working towards accomplishing those goals—they theorized as they talked about their lived experience. Therefore, grounded in Moraga and Anzaldúa's (1981) theory in the flesh, a new capital surfaced from my pláticas with each Latina. That is the essence of actualizational capital.

## Actualizational Capital

Grounded in Chicana feminisms and in Moraga and Anzaldúa's (1981) theory in the flesh, actualizational capital is the action of working toward making a goal a reality. Its root word is actualize, which means to make actual or real; turn into action or fact (Dictionary.com, 2021). There needs to be an aspiration to make actual; without an aspiration there would not be the action of actualization. Yosso (2005) defines aspirational capital as "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. This resiliency is evidenced in those who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals" (pp. 77–78).

In other words, aspirational capital is the hope of accomplishing a goal while actualizational capital is the action of working toward making that goal tangible and real. Below, I present Figure 1 to illustrate how I understand actualizational capital.

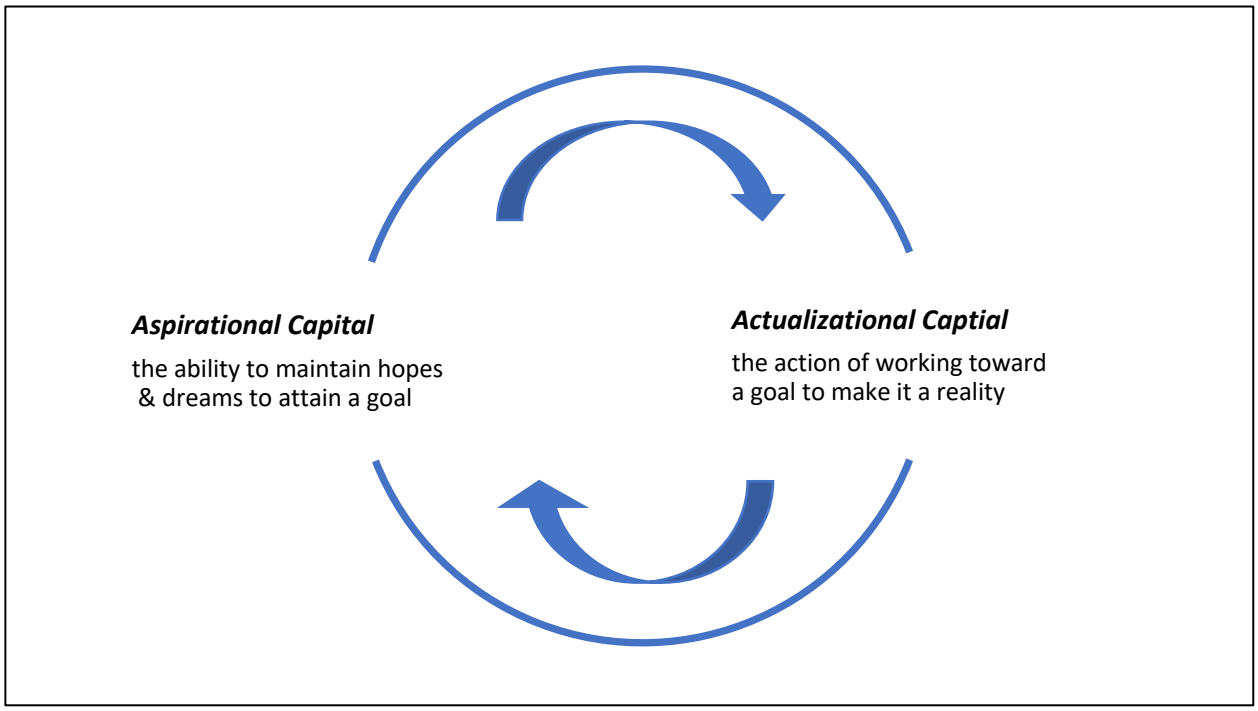


*Figure 5*. Aspirational capital is the ability to maintain hopes and dreams to attain a goal while Actualizational capital refers to the action of working toward a goal to make it real, therefore turning an aspiration into a reality.

The model (Figure 5) shows how actualizational capital turns the aspiration of pursuing a goal into reality. The outcomes of that actualization further compel someone to continue to aspire. While aspirational capital is the ability to maintain hopes and dreams to attain a goal, actualizational capital, grounded in Chicana feminisms and theory in the flesh (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981) is the action of working toward a goal to make it a reality and is fueled by *ganas*, determination and drive. The person exercising their actualizational capital will continue to work towards completing that goal in spite of any perceived setbacks, detours, or barriers placed by any person/s, institution or life events. The experience of four women inspired the

birth of actualizational capital. In what follows, I present how four Latinas; Silvia, Alondra, Gloria and Dolores exemplify the action of moving toward actualizational capital.

**Silvia**

I present Silvia's lived experience as an especially salient illustration as she moves toward actualization capital. As previously mentioned in the aspirational capital section of this chapter. Silvia has aspirations of pursuing a BSN and becoming a nurse practitioner. She is currently enrolled in a for-profit university working on her BSN degree. She recalls taking a first responder and medical terminology class in high school, and, according to her:

> That's when I fell in love. I took a first responders' class, and then the medical terminology the second semester. The material came easy to me, and when I was asked what I wanted to be when I grew up, I said, "I think I can be a surgeon." You know when you're in high school, you have these ***high hopes***, and you think the world is your oyster. I aimed high and I got good grades. I had a 3.8 GPA. Then, my sophomore year, that's when we lost our house, due to foreclosure. My parents were trying to figure things out, and we were homeless for three months.

During Silvia's junior year, she and her family relocated from Los Angeles to Lake Elsinore. That's where she graduated from high school. She applied to 32 universities and decided to attend University of California, Riverside (UCR) because it was close to her home. Unfortunately, Silvia withdrew from UCR during because her mother got into a car accident which left her immobile for six months. Silvia explained:

> I was working full-time in L.A and I was going to school at UCR and had another job on the weekends. Eventually, it took a toll on me, and I wasn't doing so good in school. I withdrew my third quarter . . . . That's when my sister-in-law at the time, was attending a medical assisting program at [PFVE]. She was getting hands-on medical training. I

> thought, I want to dip my toes in the medical field to see if I like it. Let's see where I go from there.

She withdrew from UCR to take care of her mother, and after her mother made a full recovery from her injuries. She decided to attend a PFVE:

> When I visited the [PFVE], I was intrigued, because you learn how to take a blood pressure, pulse, respiration, EKGs, basically what a EMT does. The selling point was that the program was seven months, the last class is an externship, where they will hire youth off the bat. They told me that they would help me prep for an interview and assist with my resume and get placed in a job. If I didn't like it, I could always come back. So, I thought, I hope this is worth it.

After completing the medical assistant program, Silvia immediately started working in the medical field. There she met a nurse practitioner who told her about his position:

> A nurse practitioner influenced my career path. His name is Brian. I asked him to tell me about his position as a nurse practitioner. He told me he was married and has a little girl. He works four days out of the week and makes decent amount of money, where his wife can stay at home and take care of their daughter. So, I thought, this is what I want to be because, although doctors make more money, they don't spend a lot of quality time with their family. And, eventually, I want to have kids and start my own family. Another thing was the schooling. I don't want to do my bachelor's, and then it's medical school, and then residency. I feel like it's too much for me.

After nine months of working in the Urgent Care center she felt burnt out and decided to quit her job and return to school. That's when she had started attending a community college. When she got to the community college she met with a counselor:

> I talked to a counselor, and I was told that I was a couple of credits away from getting my associates in three degrees in nutrition, kinesiology, and natural science. So I applied to the Cal States, and I got into the Cal States, but didn't get into their nursing program. The reason why is because I withdrew from UCR. But if it wasn't for that, I wouldn't have the work experience, and I wouldn't have known what I wanted to do. Now, I'm super motivated. Every time I think a class is hard or I have to study for a test, I tell myself, "This is what I have to do in order to achieve my goal, which is to become a nurse practitioner."

Although Silvia did not get accepted into any of the nursing programs in the California State University system, she applied to a private for-profit university. Silvia got accepted into the BSN program at a private for-profit university. Although the annual tuition is $55,000, she is willing to pay it to accomplish her goal.

After she earns her BSN, Silvia plans to apply to the nurse practitioner program at Azusa Pacific or USC. She would like to work in the emergency room and/or in plastic surgery. From a young age, Silvia knew she wanted to work in the medical field. She specifically said that she wanted to be surgeon, however, after working in the medical field and getting to know other medical professionals, she has decided that the role of nurse practitioner best fits her plan of having a family.

This is a brief summary of how Silvia moved toward actualizational capital. In high school, Silvia was introduced to the medical field when she took a first responder and medical terminology class. This path inspired her to pursue a career as a surgeon. To move toward her aspiration to enter the medical field, she maintained good grades with the goal to get admitted to college. Unfortunately, she and her family experienced homelessness, which caused them to

relocate from Los Angeles to Lake Elsinore. This entire process was a stressful and traumatic life event for Silvia and her family. Despite experiencing homelessness and moving to a new high school, Silvia embodied actualization capital by the action of earning excellent grades and getting admitted to UCR.

During her sophomore year at UCR, Silvia's mother got into a car accident which left her unable to care for herself. Silvia decided to withdraw from UCR to take care of her mother. Others in this situation might have given up on their aspiration of entering the medical field, not Silvia. As soon as her mother got better, Silvia enrolled in a medical assistant program at a PFVE. Silvia embodied actualizational capital by the action of enrolling in a PFVE program despite the high tuition fee.

While working at an Urgent Care clinic, Silvia met a colleague who influenced her to pursue a career as a nurse practitioner. Motivated by her goal to become a nurse practitioner, she quit her job at the clinic and enrolled at community college. At the community college, she was advised to graduate and apply to nursing programs at the California State University system. Although she did not get accepted into any nursing programs in the California State University system, that did not deter Silvia from her goal. She applied and got accepted into a BSN program at a private for-profit university despite the high tuition cost. Silvia exemplifies actualizational capital by the action of enrolling and attending a private for-profit university to earn a BSN to later become a nurse practitioner. Therefore, she is working on making her aspiration a reality.

Silvia is a driven and determined Latina focused on achieving her career goal, despite facing several life events that might have discouraged her from pursuing entering the medical field. She's managed to stay focused and work toward making her aspiration a reality.

**Alondra**

I present Alondra's lived experience as she moves toward actualization capital. Alondra did not work in the medical field after completing the medical assistant program at a PFVE; she currently works full-time and takes two classes a semester at her local community college. She plans to transfer to a four-year university, earn a B.A. in child development and become a kindergarten teacher.

Alondra was placed in special education classes when she was in elementary school and stayed on that path until she graduated from high school. She shared:

> I was placed in special education to help with my disability. I was in special ed. from elementary to high school. Although I struggled, I never gave up and tried to maintain good grades. Learning as much as I could. I mean I wasn't a straight A student, but I tried my best in school.

She also shared that she was bullied in school and got in trouble when she started defending herself:

> They made fun of my name. I tried to stay away from them, but you can only take so much. I had to defend myself. And yes, I got detention. But besides that, I was learning, I was maintaining good grades. I didn't give up and I graduated from high school in 2008.

Although Alondra was also bullied, she did not give up and graduated from high school. With the help of her high school counselor, she enrolled at a community college. During her second semester, she heard about the PFVE through a television ad and decided to explore the program. She recalled:

> And then I saw it. They were like, "Get your degree or whatever in an eight-month course." My mom told me stay at the community college. But I wanted to go to [a PFVE]. It was an eight-month course, and you get a certificate. I thought, why not? So

> that's why I looked into it, *it felt so real*. The staff was very nice and helpful with everything especially with financial aid. But my financial aid went to loans.

After she completed the medical assistant certificate program, she was placed at a clinic to finish the 120 externship hours. Unfortunately, she did not get hired, and Alondra decided not to pursue the medical field after that. She began working as a campus aide at an afterschool program, and that's where she found her calling of working with children. Alondra has decided to pursue a teaching career. Although she holds a full-time job, she's enrolled at the community college taking a couple of classes a semester. She shared:

> I'm going to enroll in school in the Spring, so I'll be taking two classes. My focus is to get Math out of the way. I got an A in English, and it was an eight-week course, it was a fast-paced class. I'm very happy that I made it. I didn't think I could do it, but I had to push myself and tell myself, you can do it. I'm very happy I got an A. I want to be a preschool teacher or kindergarten teacher. I'm going to major in Child Development and then transfer and take the classes needed go to graduate school.

Alondra talks about plans of enrolling in the Spring semester. She got an A in her English class and is motivated to take the classes necessary to transfer to a four-year university and earn a Child Development degree. She also talked about how she had to push herself to do well in her class demonstrating her drive to do well in school:

> I'm pushing myself to go to school. I gave myself an opportunity, I want to make a difference in children's lives. That's how I see it. *I must keep pushing and working hard*.
>
> I have to do something to better my life. Because nobody's going do it for me, nobody.

Alondra's spirit of perseverance and resiliency is inspirational, even though she had been placed in special education classes and was bullied in school. These life circumstances did not prevent

her from working hard in school and graduating from high school. She embodies actualizational capital by the action of graduating from high school, despite having a disability and being bullied.

Additionally, Alondra exemplifies actualizational capital, as she had the drive and courage to enroll in a PFVE program that felt like a promising career opportunity. Although a career in the medical field did not work out for Alondra, she did not let that discourage her from seeking other career opportunities. After realizing her passion to work with young children, she returned to the community college and is currently enrolled in a few classes a semester to transfer to a four-year university. Although it didn't work out, she was not discouraged but instead sought other careers. Despite struggling with the loan debt, she is taking action by currently being enrolled at the community college and pushing herself as she works toward her goal of becoming a teacher.

**Gloria**

I focus on Gloria's lived experience as she moves toward actualization capital. Gloria is a single mother of two boys who also cares for her elderly mother. She graduated from a PFVE with a medical assistant certificate and is currently a full-time community college student. Gloria is taking the prerequisites to enter a nursing program, while simultaneously working several part-time jobs. Her goal is to become a certified nurse-midwife after graduating with a BSN from a four-year university.

Gloria was born in Los Angeles but lived in Mexico on two different occasions. She remembers going to kindergarten in Mexico but does not remember how long she lived there. Her father, mother, and brother returned to Los Angeles when she started elementary school. Gloria was inspired by her teacher and had aspirations of becoming a teacher: "In sixth grade, I wanted to be a teacher like Mr. Casasola. I had him the first time in the third grade. And then I

had him again in the sixth grade." Gloria, her mother, and brother traveled to Mexico when she was in the ninth grade, but she returned to Los Angeles after living there for a year. According to Gloria, her father was building a house in Mexico and wanted his family to live in Mexico while their house was being built. This life event impacted Gloria. She shared:

> My mom, brother, and I moved to Mexico when I was around thirteen. Every weekend my dad called us from LA, I cried to him, "I don't want to be here." He was so tired of me crying to him that he sent for me, and I moved back to LA without my mom and brother. I moved in with my aunt. My mom and brother stayed in Mexico. I had to learn how to take care of myself. They came to visit when I turned fifteen and then they permanently move back when I was 16. So, for a few years, I was under my aunt's care, basically I had to take care of myself. I was like 15 when I started working with my aunt. She worked in a clothing factory. So, I would go and help her and her boss on the weekends. Her boss paid me to place the tags on the clothes and place them in boxes. I learned to work and take care of myself.

At 13, Gloria returned to live in Los Angeles without her mother and brother. She lived with her aunt and remembers learning to work to financially take care of herself. Although her father visited her on the weekends, she didn't live with him, and she shared that she missed her family. When Gloria returned from Mexico, she had to repeat the ninth grade, which she elaborated upon:

> The only reason why I repeated the ninth grade, was because I went to Mexico. Other than that, I don't think I would have repeat it. I didn't go to school in Mexico. When I returned, I went to Belmont [high school] but, they sent me to Locke High School. I took the bus from Belmont to Locke every morning. I didn't want to graduate from Locke high

> school because back then it wasn't the best school and that bothered me. So, I returned to Belmont to graduate with all my friends.

Gloria used her navigational capital as she maneuvered through the two high schools knowing very well what high school she wanted to graduate from. At Belmont, she met with a counselor who helped her apply to college. She got accepted to California State University, Northridge (CSUN), but she didn't understand the financial aid process and declined the offer. Gloria went to community college, but again, she did not know about financial aid and did not have her parents' financial help. Consequently, she stopped going to school when she couldn't pay for school tuition.

Gloria started working at fast food restaurants and retail stores. One day, she was walking pass by a PFVE with a friend and went inside to ask for information. She explained:

> At a [PFVE], you get to finish in eight months. I couldn't afford CSUN where I was accepted. [PFVE] gets to the point. So, I decided to go there even though it was more expensive. As a matter of fact, it didn't sound expensive to me because the [PFVE] staff explained that a loan would cover the tuition, so I thought, medical assistant, *let's try it out; it has to work out*.

Seeking a career to earn a sustainable living wage earning a medical assistant certificate at a PFVE sounded like a good option. According to Gloria, the program didn't sound expensive to her. After she completed the program, she was sent to a clinic to complete her externship hours:

> So, I went to my externship, and they helped me. Whatever they said they were going to do, they did. But I also learned to be pushy. I went to their office asking where to apply and what to do after applying to each job. I was pushy with them, that's how I got my first externship and they had me organizing a room of boxes and filing. So, I called [the

> PFVE] and told them that I was not learning anything. The clinic manager, had me fixing folders and filing. I know how to do that. I told them that I was not applying my skills. So, they removed me from that office.

After that, she was placed as a medical assistant at an OB/GYN office, and she worked there for 12 years. She said that she loved working there, but she felt burnt out and left when she got pregnant with her second son. Working in that office inspired her to become a midwife:

> I loved working in the OB/GYN office. That's when I found my passion for OB/GYN and becoming a midwife. I worked with midwives, and I learned a lot. There was a midwife, Terry. She was very grumpy and strict. But when I moved to another clinic, I thanked her because I understood why she was so strict. She wanted me to learn.

Gloria's long-term goal is to become a midwife, but unfortunately as a single mother and breadwinner, it has been difficult for her to take the necessary classes to finish the nursing program classes. It also does not help that she's in debt. She explained:

> I'm still stuck with the loan from the PFVE, but that's been my personal choice because in 2007 I had my son, and my sons comes before my loans. I believe that I'll die, and my loan is still going to be there. So, I'm not going to let it kill me. My boys come first. I don't qualify for financial aid here because of that loan. So, I'm trying to figure it out. Right now, I come to school every day, Monday through Friday. I'm in between jobs right now because I can't find a stable job that will work with my school schedule. So, I work at Ross—go in at 4:45 a.m. and get off at 7 a.m. I come home, pick up my kids, take them to school. Then I return home to eat because obviously I don't want to eat out because that's money that I can use for gas or something else. So, then I come to school.

As described above, Gloria's day-to-day schedule is busy. She has been applying to several jobs but hasn't found a job that will accommodate her school schedule. Unfortunately, she does not qualify for any financial aid because of the PFVE loan.

Despite this setback, Gloria is determined to get accepted into a nursing program to then meet her career goal of becoming a midwife. She asserted:

> I am going to be a midwife. I say that if I can't become a midwife here in the U.S. I may have to travel to Mexico to be a midwife, but I am going to be a midwife. I say Mexico because I assume it'll be much easier there to pursue my goal. Here is my plan, I want to have my associates for sure. Realistically, it might take me five years to earn my RN and my bachelors. I see myself reaching my goal because I know I'm capable of reaching it.

Gloria's ganas is an example of actualizational capital. At age 13, she moved back to Los Angeles without her mother causing her to learn how to take care of herself. And yet—she persevered. She got good grades in high school, got admitted to college but unfortunately, it did not work out for her. But she did not give up. She sought a career in the medical field and although attending a PFVE caused her to be in debt, that has not stopped her from working toward accomplishing her goal of becoming a midwife. Gloria is a single mother who cares for her mother and her two boys, and although she has struggled to find a job that will accommodate her school schedule, she's committed and determined to reach her goal. The fact that she quit her job of 12 years to focus on making her goal a reality is an example of actualizational capital.

Presently, Gloria is at the community college working toward getting into the nursing program. If she is not admitted into any of the RN programs at the community college, she plans to pursue the RN at a Los Angeles County Department of Health Services College of Nursing

and Allied Health[12] or LAC+USC how the school is known. She would rather attend an RN program at the community college because the tuition is less than LAC+USC's tuition. She is committed to earning a Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN) and Master's of Science in Nursing (MSN) degrees to become a certified nurse-midwife (CNM).

**Dolores**

I focus on Dolores's lived experience as she moves toward actualization capital. Dolores is a single mother of three girls. She earned a dental assistant certificate from a PFVE. She is a full-time student at the community college, completing the prerequisites to enter a dental hygienist program. Her career goal is to become a dentist and orthodontist.

Dolores was a junior in high school when she and her boyfriend got married and had their first daughter. After she graduated from high school, her husband encouraged her to go to college. He had attended community college, but was undocumented and felt he could not transfer to a university due to his status. She told her husband she wanted to be a dentist and orthodontist. Dolores recounted:

> I had braces when I was twelve and every time, I went to the orthodontist's office it felt good to enter his practice because he had the million-dollar view. So, I asked the dentist, how much money he made. The doctor liked that I was asking these questions and encouraged me; he said that I could be whatever I wanted to be. That's how I got my inspiration to become an orthodontist.

But before she becomes an orthodontist, she wants to begin her dental career by working as a dental assistant and then a dental hygienist. After Dolores graduated from high school, she did an

[12] The Los Angeles County College of Nursing and Allied health is a public community college that is owned and operated by the County of Los Angeles. The College supports the educational needs of the Los Angeles County + University of Southern California (LAC+USC).

internet search for dental assistant programs and two PFVEs institutions came up on the screen. She contacted both and visited the one with the friendly receptionist. She visited the PFVE, but she did not sign any paperwork because she needed a co-signer for her school loans. When she told her husband about the PFVE and the $12,000 program, he encouraged her to visit a community college instead. Dolores visited a community college and met with a counselor:

> I met with a counselor to guide me, to tell me what to do. But the counselor didn't help me. I told him that I wanted to become a dental assistant. And he responded with a "We don't have that here." I looked at him and said, "Am I not at the right place? How do I become a dental assistant?" I was so lost. He didn't help me. So, I told my husband about my experience with the college counselor, and I ended up going to [the PFVE].

Dolores and her husband revisited the PFVE and signed a contract to an 8-month dental assistant certificate program. She didn't work after completing the program, but she did take some time off to welcome another daughter.

After a few years, Dolores was ready to work and began to work as a dental assistant. After working in a dental office for some time, she relocated cities and moved closer to her mother to help her with her daughters. She started searching for a job at different dental offices and began to work as a dental assistant to the office manager. She felt very confident and even negotiated her salary. A few months later, the office manager left the company and Dolores was asked to take over the position. She described her experience:

> I was scared. It's a lot of responsibility but I was up for the challenge. I said, "Let's do it." I was doing so much for that office. I was advertising, I was a floater around the office because they needed an assistant in the back. I took X-rays. We had a good dentist. I told the dentist, "Listen, I don't know how to do this or that." He said, "Whatever you

need, I'll teach you." But after five years I got tired of it. It was so stressful; it was a big commitment and now I was a single mom. So, I quit, I had had enough. I left in 2014.

Dolores and her husband tried to stay married, but it didn't work out. As a single mother of two young girls, juggling motherhood while having a full-time job was hard on her, but she did not lose sight of what her family's future. Dolores shared her thoughts:

> After working for so long, I started thinking about our future. I don't want to work for anyone. I want more. *I need to be more; I've always wanted to do more*. My girls are a little older now, so maybe I could do more now that they're in school. *I can go to college*. And so, *I visited a community college* that offered the dental hygienist program.

Determined to pursue her aspirations to do more, Dolores visited a local community college that offered a dental hygienist program. Initially, the meeting with the counselor did not start well, she explained:

> The counselor asked me, how many units I wanted to take, and I responded with, "What the hell are units?" I don't know what units are, I don't know what a credit is. Tell me, explain to me because I don't know . . . . You're talking to me in another language right now. I'm here because I want to be here, and I want to succeed. She responded with an "Oh, I didn't know." I made her feel bad.

After Dolores spoke with the counselor, she was informed that she needed to take a few general education classes to apply to the dental hygienist program. Unfortunately, she struggled financially as a parenting student. While attending community college, she did not know about the programs and resources available to parenting students, causing her to withdraw from school to worked and take care of your family.

Dolores fell in love and moved to Connecticut with her boyfriend and daughters and welcomed another baby girl. She attended Goodwin College, a private nonprofit school that offered a three-year dental hygienist program. But unfortunately, just one year into the program, the relationship with her boyfriend did not work out. So, she packed her car and drove to Los Angeles with her daughters. When she returned from Connecticut, she began looking for a job as a dental assistant:

> I was looking for work again, but they did not want to pay me what I'm worth. Being a dental assistant is such a hard job. We do everything the dentist doesn't do. We don't deserve to get underpaid. That's not okay.

She did not want to get underpaid, so she decided to return to school and focus on getting into the dental hygienist program:

> I said, "No more. I'm just going to go back to school." I've always wanted to become a dentist or a hygienist. So, I'm going back to college. But first, I enrolled my daughters in school and then I visited this community college, and I was told that as a single mother there are all these programs and resources like CalWORKs. I looked into it and I'm a full-time student now. I also got a job on campus, so it works out. My older daughters go to school and my little girl goes to the child development center here on campus. It works out perfectly.

This time around, Dolores is receiving the resources available for parenting students and has time to focus on school and on her daughters. While Dolores is working on accomplishing her goal of becoming a dental hygienist, she is willing to put her plans on hold to solely focus on her daughters' academic success. Dolores reflected on her experience:

> I've been through so much, so I want to accomplish my goals otherwise life would be boring. It's not just about having kids and having a family and just going to work every day. You must love what you do and do more. There's always more. I can't wait to be that dentist and orthodontist. I can visualize it. That's why I have to continue with school.

Dolores has aspirations for her daughters to go to college and pursue a career they like. As for Dolores, she is holding onto her goal of becoming a dentist and orthodontist. Although that goal might take some time to be accomplished, she is currently working on making that goal a reality. thus, exemplifying actualizational capital. As Dolores expressed above, she has been through so much and can't wait to become a dentist and orthodontist. Her determination led her to look up dental assistant programs online when she was 18. She visited the community college and PFVE Dolores. She attended a PFVE and worked in the field for several years. She quit her job to focus on becoming a dental hygienist and enrolled at the community college. Throughout her life Dolores, experienced several setbacks, but that has not stopped her from actively moving toward accomplishing her goals. That is how Dolores embodies actualizational capital.

**Analytical Summary**

As demonstrated in the section above, Silvia, Alondra, Gloria and Dolores each have exemplified their actualization capital. In spite of experiencing any setbacks, detours, or barriers, they have persevered, each actively working toward making their aspirations a reality. They no longer aspire to pursue their career goals, but are working towards actualizing them.

In this chapter, I used CCW to frame the Latinas' experience at a PFVE that impacted their career goals. CCW helped illustrate the women's embodiment of aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital as they moved through the different sectors of higher education. Additionally, a new capital emerged from the experiences of four women in

this study. Actualizational capital refers to the action of working toward a goal to make it a reality and if fueled by ganas.

As demonstrated in this chapter, the answer is two-sided and complicated. Here are some of the positive impacts. For most of the Latinas, attending a PFVE had a positive impact as they gained self-confidence, transferable skills and work experience in their designated fields. They have made a living working in the medical or dental field with the PFVE certificate. Many used the PFVE certificate as a way to get into the medical field. For several women, working in the medical or dental field have inspired them to return to school and earn a degree at a four-year university and think about graduate school. Some Latinas have sought guidance and mentorship from the medical professionals they work with and have learned about alternative careers within the medical field. A negative impact has to do with the steep cost of the program causing some of the women to accumulate debt. However, in spite of being in debt, many Latinas have exercised their actualizational capital as they work toward accomplishing their career goals.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented how the Latinas in this study drew from their CCW as they navigated through the PFVE and how their experience at a PFVE impacted their determination to pursue their career goals. Additionally, grounded in theory in the flesh (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 1981) the women's theorization of their lived experiences led to the birth of actualizational capital. The following chapter is the conclusion to this project.

# CHAPTER SEVEN: FROM PFVE TO PHD

In this chapter, I present the findings to the two research questions guiding this study. Additionally, I address how this study informs policy, practice, and research. To conclude, I share how my work contributes to the field by demonstrating how I exercised actualizational capital. I begin with an overview of my findings.

## Relation to Research Questions

This dissertation provided a critical examination of Latinas' experiences at a Private For-Profit Vocational Education (PFVE). The first question guiding this study is: *What factors influence Latinas to attend a Private For-Profit Vocational Education institution?* I hypothesized that some of the factors that may have influenced Latinas to attend a PFVE may have included: (a) tracking; (b) not knowing the system of higher education; (c) family and financial obligations; and (d) the persuasive television, radio, and billboard advertisements (Osegura & Malagon, 2010). Factors that emerged from the data spanned socioeconomic mobility, support, information and guidance, and time and cost. The most salient factor was socioeconomic mobility. Several women indicated that they attended a PFVE because it offered a fast route to a better-paying career/job to financially support themselves and their families, thus seeking upward socioeconomic mobility. In Sonia's case, she thought that attending a PFVE would grant her access into a good "profession" where she would be making a sustainable living wage to financially care for her family. That was the same reason Rocio decided to attend a PFVE too, she and her husband had just had a newborn and she needed a job where she could contribute to the household. Alondra regarded attending a PFVE as a pathway to finding a career. For Rocio, Sonia, and Alondra, the option of going to a PFVE for a short-term certificate program was accessible and attainable. Gloria's experience speaks to the first and second factor. While she had been accepted to CSUN after high school, she had declined the offer because she did not

know the financial aid process. Years later Gloria saw the opportunity of attending a PFVE as a way to secure a better-paying job.

Some women attended a PFVE due to the lack of support, information, and guidance that might have led to a different postsecondary choice. More specifically, this refers to the lack of information and guidance as it pertains to learning about the different sectors of higher educations, majors, career paths, college access, financial aid, and mentoring. Gloria applied to several local universities with the help of a high school counselor and got admitted to CSUN. Unfortunately, she declined the offer because she did not understand the financial aid process and believed that she and her family could not afford college. In Dolores's case, when she met with a counselor seeking guidance on how to enter the dental field, she left the meeting feeling "stupid." Her experience at a PFVE was the opposite—the staff was nice to her and she was receiving help. Unfortunately, the interaction with a community college counselor inclined her to attend a PFVE. In Paloma's case, a counselor had encouraged her to attend college, but she did not know what major to pursue. Consequently, Paloma felt stuck and confused about what major or career to pursue. Gloria, Dolores, and Paloma candidly shared their experiences with counselors who were doing their job meeting with students, however, the Latinas in this study did not receive the appropriate information for their particular situations.

And lastly, a couple of Latinas chose to attend a PFVE based time and cost this means the duration and financial expenses of the PFVE program. For two Latinas, time efficiency was more important that the cost of the program. They are trying to be efficient with their time, and sought a program based on the duration of the program. In other words, they deliberately chose to attend a PFVE despite their expensive tuition. In Silvia's experience, she explained that while attending UCR, she had to take general education classes necessary to graduate from college before

applying to medical school. She wanted to test the water to see if she's sure she wants to become a surgeon. She further explained that she liked that the PFVE taught her the skills necessary for the job without taking the general education courses. Julia is determined to become an LVN, but is thinking about where to go. Her reasoning holds that attending a PFVE will be expensive.

In the case of the eight Latina women in this study, they are all first-generation college students and all of them experienced high levels of debt as a result of their PFVE attendance. All the women in the study juggled intersectional identities and role expectations. Besides being college students, they were mothers, caretakers, and financial contributors for their families. Although the challenges and experiences of the eight women in my study align with that of first-generation college students.

Additionally, the Latinas in this study experienced college choice in a different way and their college choice process did not fit any of the college choice models. Based on their experience, attending a PFVE was not their first choice it was a forced choice. Some of them chose to attend a PFVE based on what was going on in their life at that particular time. For many attending a PFVE was a necessity not a choice.

The second question is: *What impact did attending a PFVE have on their career goals?* I utilized Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) to highlight how the Latinas in this study drew from all the capitals of the framework. CCW highlights the "array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities" that Students of Color bring with them into educational spaces (Yosso, 2005, p. 69). Six capitals inform CCW they are: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant (Yosso, 2005). The most salient capital was aspirational capital. During our pláticas, all the women shared the aspirations they have for themselves and their

children. More specifically six out of eight women are currently working towards accomplishing their career goal, by either attending community college or a for-profit university.

Inspired by the lived experiences of four Latina women in this study a new CCW capital emerged. Grounded in Chicana feminisms and by their lived experience—their theory in the flesh (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981) actualizational capital is the action of working toward a goal to make it a reality and is fueled by *ganas*, or determination and drive. The person exercising their actualizational capital will continue to work towards completing that goal in spite of any perceived setbacks, detours, or barriers placed by any person/s, institution, or life events.

For instance, here is how Silvia moved toward actualizational capital. With aspirations to enter the medical field, she maintained good grades in high school with the goal to gain admission to college after high school. Unfortunately, she and her family experienced homelessness that caused them to relocate to Lake Elsinore. Despite enduring homelessness and abruptly moving to a new high school, Silvia embodied actualization capital by the action of earning excellent grades and gaining admission to UCR.

During her sophomore year at UCR, though, Silvia's mother got into a car accident which left her unable to care for herself. Silvia decided to withdraw from UCR to take care of her mother. Anyone else in this situation might have given up on their long-term aspiration of entering the medical field, but not Silvia. As soon as her mother recovered, Silvia enrolled in a medical assistant program at a PFVE. Silvia embodied actualizational capital by the action of enrolling in a PFVE program despite the high tuition fee.

While working at an Urgent Care clinic, Silvia met a colleague who influenced her to pursue a career as a nurse practitioner. Motivated by her goal to become a nurse practitioner, she quit her job at the clinic and enrolled at community college. At the community college, she was

advised to graduate and apply to nursing programs at the California State University (CSU) system. Although she did not get accepted into any nursing programs in the CSU system, that did not deter Silvia from her goal. She applied and was accepted into a BSN program at a private for-profit university despite the high tuition cost. Silvia exemplifies actualizational capital by the action of enrolling and attending a private for-profit university to earn a BSN to later become a nurse practitioner. Therefore, she is working on making her aspiration a reality. In spite of facing several life events that might have discouraged her from pursuing entering the medical field, she's managed to stay focused and work toward making her aspiration a reality.

Alondra's spirit of perseverance and resiliency is inspirational. Although Alondra was placed in special education classes and was bullied in school. These life circumstances did not prevent her from working hard in school and graduating from high school. She embodies actualizational capital by the action of graduating from high school, despite having a disability and being bullied. Additionally, Alondra exemplifies actualizational capital, as she had the drive and courage to enroll in a PFVE program that felt like a promising career opportunity. Although a career in the medical field did not work out for Alondra, she did not let that discourage her from seeking other career opportunities. After realizing her passion to work with young children, she returned to the community college and is currently enrolled in a few classes each semester to transfer to a four-year university. Although it did not work out, she was not discouraged but instead sought other careers. Despite struggling with the loan debt, she is taking action by currently remaining enrolled at the community college and pushing herself as she works toward her goal of becoming a teacher.

Gloria's ganas to accomplish her goals despite having experienced several life-changing events is an example of actualizational capital. At age 13, she moved back to Los Angeles

without her mother, prompting her to learn how to take care of herself. And yet, she persevered. She earned good grades in high school and gained admission to college, but unfortunately, it did not work out for her. She did not give up, though. Gloria sought a career in the medical field and although attending a PFVE caused her to be in debt, that has not stopped her from working toward accomplishing her goal of becoming a midwife. Gloria is a single mother who cares for her mother and her two boys, and although she has struggled to find a job that will accommodate her school schedule, she's committed and determined to reach her goal. The fact that she quit her job of 12 years to focus on making her goal a reality is an example of actualizational capital.

Presently, Gloria is at the community college working toward getting into the nursing program. If she is not admitted into any of the RN programs at the community college, she plans to pursue the RN at a Los Angeles County Department of Health Services College of Nursing and Allied Health, also known as LAC+USC. She would rather attend an RN program at the community college because the tuition is less than LAC+USC's tuition. She is committed to earning a Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN) and Master's of Science in Nursing (MSN) degrees to become a certified nurse-midwife (CNM).

Dolores has aspirations for her daughters to go to college and pursue careers they like. As for Dolores, she is holding onto her goal of becoming a dentist and orthodontist. Although that goal might take some time to accomplish, she is currently working on making that goal a reality. In the process, Dolores exemplifies actualizational capital. Gloria reflected on her life journey and according to her, she can't wait to become a dentist and orthodontist. Her determination led her to look up dental assistant programs online when she was 18. She visited the community college and PFVE seeking information about the program. She attended a PFVE and worked directly in the field for several years. She quit her job to focus on becoming a dental hygienist

and enrolled at the community college. Throughout her life, Dolores experienced several setbacks, but that has not stopped her from actively moving toward accomplishing her goals. That is how Dolores embodies actualizational capital. Silvia, Alondra, Gloria, and Dolores each have exemplified their actualization capital. In spite of experiencing numerous setbacks, detours, or barriers, they have persevered, each actively working toward making their aspiration a reality. They no longer aspire to pursue their career goals, but are working towards actualizing them.

The impact had several outcomes. For most Latinas, attending a PFVE had a positive impact as they gained self-confidence, work experience, and transferable skills in their designated fields. For several women, working in the medical or dental field inspired them to return to community college to transfer and pursue a degree at a four-year university and graduate school. A negative outcome is the amount of debt some Latinas have accumulated. However, in spite of being in debt, many Latinas are attending community college and actively working toward pursuing their career goals.

## Implications for Policy

In this section I discuss key policy implications and recommendations based on the analysis of this study. As noted in Chapter Two, the students who attend PFVEs are predominantly women, single parents, low-income, independent, non-traditional students, and are more likely to be African American and Latina/os (Chung, 2008; Hentschke et al., 2010; Iloh, 2014; Iloh & Toldson, 2013; McMillan Cotton, 2017; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). More specifically, women of color, especially Latinas, are PFVE's target population (Chung, 2008; Hentschke et al., 2010; Iloh, 2014; Iloh & Toldson, 2013; McMillan Cotton, 2017; Oseguera & Malagon, 2010; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). Therefore, this underscores the need to implement race, ethnicity, and gender-specific educational policies to protect these populations from the predatory tactics of PFVEs (Contreras, 2011; Harper et al., 2009).

With the help of a CRT and CCW lens, we can closely examine the lived experiences of the Latinas in this study to implement ethnicity and gender-specific policy (Contreras, 2011; Harper et al., 2009). For example, all the Latinas in this study are first-generation college students who did not know how financial aid worked. Therefore, a financial aid policy should be implemented in elementary, middle, high schools, and community colleges where all schools should be mandated to provide information about financial aid, educational loans, and debt. The term financial aid is utilized in schools; however, many low-income, first-generation college students and their families don't necessarily know or understand the different types of aid that umbrella term includes. A policy that mandates schools to provide a financial literacy curriculum for students and their families should cover the differences between grants, scholarships, loans, debt, as well as how to apply to financial aid. This should also include information for undocumented and DACAmented students. The information should also be available in different languages and distributed to all students and their families.

Regarding the student loan debt that many PFVE students have accumulated, especially the Latinas in this study, I call for a mandated loan forgiveness policy for all students who attended or graduated from a PFVE. Some of the women in this study who have returned to the community college do not know how to qualify for financial aid, which makes it more difficult for them to financially care for themselves and their families.

During the present COVID-19 pandemic, we have witnessed how the medical field has been tested by this deadly virus. The for-profit colleges are taking advantage of the current situation by advertising short-term medical assisting and nursing programs through television and radio commercials. Consequently, these for-profit programs are becoming widely available to low-income, first-generation college students and other marginalized communities who do

now know the differences between a for-profit and traditional college. My concern is that this population might fall into the predatory tactics of PFVEs. Additionally, as some of the Latinas in this study shared, many chose to attend a PFVE because of the competitiveness of getting accepted into a nursing program and dental hygienist program at the community college and other universities. Unfortunately, a handful of nursing and dental hygienist programs are offered at certain community colleges, and universities make it challenging and competitive to get into. Given these two developments, a policy must be implemented to increase the number of nursing and dental hygienist programs at the community college and university so that students are not forced to attend a for-profit and risk becoming enslaved into debt.

## Implications for Practice

Building on the findings of this study, in this section I discuss several implications for practice. First, this study strongly indicates that high schools and community colleges should implement a College and Career Readiness curriculum in their counseling classes. Where high school and community college counselors, teachers, and staff should introduce the different sectors of higher education, their missions, and tuition costs. Specifically, we must distinguish the differences between for-profit and nonprofit institutions. School administrators and staff should host a series of workshops presenting various topics such as the differences among for-profit institutions, community colleges, four-year universities, and private colleges. A specific presentation should focus on the financial aid process, detailing how to apply to financial aid, discussing the different types of aid, such as grants, scholarships, and loans. Financial aid information and resources for undocumented students and their families should also be presented. High school and community college counselors should not assume that students know the college lingo; rather, they should define college terms such as a unit, quarter, and semester system. Another workshop should focus on introducing different careers and career paths. For

example, a presentation can focus on the different careers within the medical field such as doctors, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, midwives, etc. and the career path toward accomplishing these respective goals. These workshops and presentations should be offered in various formats, either in-person, via Zoom, and informational materials in various languages to make the information accessible to everyone, including students' families and community.

Another practice should be to destigmatize vocational education and vocational careers. Historically, vocational education used to target and track communities of color into the workforce especially, Latina/o youth (Ainsworth & Roscigno, 2005; Delgado Bernal, 1999; Gonzalez, 1990, 1999; Lazerson & Grubb, 1974; Oakes, 1985; Pincus, 1980). However, it is time to change the narrative around vocational education, especially now that we are experiencing COVID-19 and its impact on communities of color. Given the Latinas' experiences in this study, attending a PFVE was not their first college choice. For many Latinas, attending a PFVE was a forced choice based on their life circumstance. Most of the women in this study attended a PFVE to get a good paying job. For many, attending a PFVE gave them the self-confidence and transferable skills to want to pursue a degree higher than a certificate. Therefore, vocational education should be presented in an equitable way and train high school and community college counselors by presenting the history of vocational education and their impact on communities of color to come up with an antideficit approach to vocational education. If students want to pursue vocational education, high school, and/or community colleges should present the programs offered at the community college to deter students from attending an expensive PFVE. Students who decide to attend a vocational or certificate program at the community college are required to take a transferable English and Math class. This is important

for students who may decide to return to the community college and transfer to a four-year university later in life.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected countless working-class people, causing many of them to be displaced from their place of employment. I believe that our "essential workers" will want and need to return to the community college to upgrade their skills and/or seek vocational/ certificate program to return to the workforce. This is a great opportunity to reevaluate our current educational system and reintroduce vocational education as a viable option.

Overall, we need a more transparent and intentional approach to college and career readiness, especially for first-generation college students. Students and their families should be informed about the different types of colleges and universities and career options so that they can be better equipped to make well-informed college and career decisions. If students choose not to go to traditional college after high school and want to enroll in a vocational program, they should do so, and if and when they choose to return to the community college they can use the information they received from their counselors so that they know how to navigate through higher education.

## Implications for Research

The scholarship that was available when I began this project focused on the rise of degree granting for-profit schools, the amount of money they spend on marketing, and the student population they target (Chung, 2008; Hentschke et al., 2010; McMillan Cotton, 2017; Mettler, 2014; Ruch, 2001; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007; Zamani-Gallaher, 2004). Limited research was done documenting the experiences of students in the PFVEs. There continues to be a gap in the literature that focuses on short-term for-profits that offer vocational programs. Most importantly, there's a lack of current scholarship on vocational education. Historically, vocational education and tracking worked together to socially and racially stratify communities of color, especially

Latina/os and Chicana/os students (Ainsworth & Roscigno, 2005; Delgado Bernal, 1999; Gonzalez, 1990, 1999; Lazerson & Grubb, 1974; Oakes, 1985; Pincus, 1980). But the reality is that vocational education continues to be an option for many Latina/o, Chicana/o, and Students of Color. Therefore, more research examining vocational education is necessary for several reasons.

First, there is value in vocational education; it can lead into blue collar jobs and/or science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM)-related careers. This study informed us that for many Latinas, completing a PFVE program gave them the self-confidence, the exposure and the skill sets to return to school to pursue careers in the medical field that require a graduate degree. Research can be used to demystify vocational education and come up with a way to approach it as an educational pathway in an equitable way.

Second, further research examining the narratives and impact PFVEs have on African Americans, Black women, veterans, and other communities is critical to learn how higher education can better serve the needs of these students. Overall, research on vocational education is necessary so that students and their families can make well-informed college choices and career decisions.

Additionally, more research on the number of nursing programs available at the community colleges and universities is necessary to learn how to make the nursing program pathway less competitive and more accessible to communities of color. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the world and the medical field. PFVEs are capitalizing on the current situation by advertising and recruiting communities of color who don't know the difference between a PFVE and two- and four-year colleges and universities. This is the time for community colleges and four-year universities to use the current health situation to increase the

number of nursing programs available to students seeking to enter the medical field. If not, students will be led to attend a for-profit.

As this research progresses, I would like to conduct a longitudinal study and follow up with the eight Latina women in a few years to examine if they were successful in pursuing their career goals. One of the limitations of this study was not expanding the recruitment to include Latinas from across the state and the country. However, this is something that I can continue to work toward as future research. Additionally, scholarship specifically examining how Latinas experience college choice into PFVEs is necessary to learn how institutions of higher education can serve their needs to succeed. Documenting and learning from the lived experiences of Latina/os and other communities of color in PFVES are a huge contribution to the field of education.

## Contributions to the Field of Education

This study makes at least two significant contributions to the field of education. First, while most of the scholarship on for-profits focuses on the degree granting for-profit institutions (Dexter, 1904; Hentschke et al., 2010; Ruch, 2001; Tierney & Hentschke, 2007). And although McMillan Cotton (2017) published a book based on her insider perspective having worked in a two for-profits with students' composite stories. This investigation is unique in that it critically examined Latinas' experiences in short-term vocational certificate granting PFVEs, grounded in CRT and Chicana Feminist Epistemology.

Additionally, Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) was used to demonstrate how the Latinas in this study drew from the six capitals of CCW as they worked to reach their desired career paths. The second contribution to the field of education is the additional capital to the CCW framework. The experiences of the Latinas in this study led to the birth of actualizational capital. Grounded in Chicana feminism and in Moraga and Anzaldúa's (1981) theory in the flesh,

actualizational capital is the action of working toward a goal to make it a reality and is fueled by ganas, or determination and drive. The Latina women exercised their actualizational capital by actively working towards completing that goal, in spite of any perceived setbacks, detours, or barriers placed by any person/s, institutions, or life events. Another way that these women exercised their actualization capital was when they reflected on their own PFVE experience. When I asked if they recommend going to a PFVE, most of them shared the similar response—they do not recommend students go the PFVE route. Next, I share my own journey toward actualizational capital.

## From PFVE to Ph.D.: My Journey toward Actualization Capital

My goals in writing this dissertation were twofold. First, I wanted to understand why I attended a PFVE after high school. Second, I wanted to learn more about for-profits and their impact on my community. But when I began my graduate studies, the research on the topic was limited. As an immigrant, low-income, and first-generation college student, I felt compelled to investigate PFVEs and the students' experience at the PFVEs.

As I engaged in pláticas with the eight extraordinary women who agreed to share their narratives with me, I realized that these women and I shared many similarities. We had all attended a PFVE, most of us had heard about PFVE by a television commercial, and in despite of the debt we have accumulated by attending a PFVE, we're all driven and working toward fulfilling our career goals. Here is how I have embodied actualizational capital.

To channel the mother of Chicana feminisms, I use Gloria Anzaldúa's term of *autohistoria-teoría* as it (a) refers to the action of one's autobiography to create theory, and (b) is based on life story and self-reflection (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2009). I feel inspired and empowered by the courage of all the women in this study, and feel that it's important for me and them to share my own journey from a PFVE to a Ph.D. It's only fair for me to honor them as

knowledge producers and knowledge holders that I, too, share my lived experience. After holding space with the women in my study, I was amazing by their honesty, courage, and resiliency. They spoke about their lived experiences so candidly and without hesitation. Actualizational capital emerged from the lived experiences of four Latinas embodying theory in the flesh (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981).

After graduating from the PFVE, I began to work in corporate America, reporting to work Monday through Friday from 8am to 5pm. As a young Latina without a college degree, I felt that I had to work twice as hard to prove my skills, talents, and ability to get the work done. I felt insecure and shy, basing my worth and intellect on the fact that I did not have a college degree. That insecurity encouraged me to attend community college in the evenings, I took one to two classes a semester with the hope of earning enough credits to eventually transfer for a four-year university. Sadly, that didn't work out. There were days that I was too busy or tired from working an eight-hour shift that I could not do my homework or study for a final. I also experienced many microaggressions, receiving comments about my Spanish accent and questions about my ethnicity. On those days, I was too emotionally exhausted to go to school. However, my insecurity started to fade away when I began to train recent college graduates. That's when I realized that I was just as smart as they were, even a little smarter because I was an expert in my position. That boosted my self-confidence and I started to feel more comfortable in my own skin.

After a few years in that company, I hit the glass ceiling. I could not get promoted to a senior position because I did not have a bachelor's degree. I did not like my job and felt that there was more to life. I knew I could do more, be more, and yet that job was not going to give me that self-gratification I was looking for. I've always dreamt of going to college and earning a

college degree, which is something that my mother and grandmothers did not have the opportunity to do. Therefore I decided to quit my job and return to school full-time. I exercised my actualization capital by not feeling discouraged by hitting the glass ceiling; rather, I quit my full-time job and enrolled at the community college to pursue my goal of earning a bachelor's degree.

I attended West Los Angeles College (WLAC) and as the confident Latina, I visited all the student services departments and passed out my résumé. I had only saved enough money to get through the fall semester, so I needed a job. Everyone was so impressed by my confidence and my resume that I got hired as a student worker at the student services department. I only worked there for a few weeks when I was recruited to work for the Workforce Development Center where the TRIO programs were housed. Working for the Trio programs was great because I made the most of the opportunity to work with school administrators and students. I applied all my skills from working in corporate America and the staff was so impressed with my skills and work experience. Being a full-time student and working on campus was so much fun—I met a lot of amazing instructors who believed in me and encouraged me to apply to the UCs. Reflecting on my experience at WLAC, I also experienced many microaggressions and labor exploitation. However, that did not stop me from doing well in my classes. I sought supportive instructors and allies. I applied to the UCs and gained admission to UCLA. This was a great accomplishment for my family and me, as I became the first in my family to go to college! I exercised my actualizational capital by continuing to move forward in spite of experiencing the injustice of labor exploitation. I decided to push forward in spite of any perceived setbacks, detours, or barriers.

At UCLA, I started to learn about so many theories and concepts. I started to learn that what I had experienced in high school and the PFVE had a name and a discourse. It was amazing. I felt so empowered by the Chicana/o Studies and Education coursed I was taking. I wanted to learn more. By chance I heard about the McNair Scholars program and was encouraged to apply. I did. As a McNair Scholar, I felt more confident than ever to use my experience and voice to conduct research, which changed when I entered my graduate program. Although I struggled to complete this PhD, I didn't lose sight of my career goal and kept pushing. It was not easy, but I did it, and therefore embodied and reached my actualizational capital.

**My Reflection**

I recognize that higher education is not meant for people like me—immigrant, woman, Latina, first-generation college student, and a mother. But as a Latina with these intersecting identities, I am willing to work hard until I earn this Ph.D. Early in graduate school, I learned that the institution of higher education is not meant for me. I have struggled in this graduate program, feeling insecure about my identity as a scholar, feeling self-conscious about my writing, and doubting my intelligence. I have experienced a number of macro and microaggressions in the classroom, by professors and outside the classroom. Always having to prove myself, prove why I deserve to be in graduate school pursuing this degree. I might not be the strongest and most eloquent writer, but I am here, taking space, and making my mark. Although my graduate school experience has dimmed my light, I will not allow it to burn out or extinguish my light. I am determined to push through, and even though graduate school has been taxing on my bodymindspirit (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981), I am reminded by the courage and resiliency of the eight women in this study to not give up on my career goal.

I experienced a microaggression in front of lots of people during graduation day. The woman at the podium mispronounced my name as I walked across the stage. As I went back to my seat, my friends who were seated next to me congratulated me for yelling the correct pronunciation of my full name. A male colleague said to me, "We're so proud of you for checking her, we heard you." I couldn't comprehend what had just happened. But I immediately thought about the Latina students and the women in my research study.

There are many Latinas who experienced racism and discrimination in schools, their names Americanized, changed or mispronounced and yet, they resist. The Latinas in my study are beyond amazing and fierce; they shared their most intimate secrets with me, expressing some of the most hurtful experiences they experienced inside and outside of the classroom and yet they stand strong. I want to share, honor, and valorize the resiliency of these women because despite the hurdles and obstacles they face, and the racial and gender microaggressions they have experienced, they have been able to pushed through and push forward. Similar to the experiences of the Latinas in my study, I, too, have experienced gender and racial microaggressions, and it's the same *coraje* I feel that keeps me to pushing through. Each one of them has experienced many life challenges and barriers that have deterred them from reaching their career goals, but in spite of that, they have not given up on themselves and their goals. I found strength and courage in them at that moment.

A few days after graduation day, I received two gifts from a special co-worker and friend. She gifted me a picture frame and an microaffirmation (Solórzano et al., 2020) frame that states, "Don't Let Anyone Dull Your Sparkle." I placed a photo of Jonathan, Xavier, and me next to a huge "UCLA" sign at Pauley Pavilion we took at Raza Grad graduation, where my name was pronounced correctly, where I was hooded by my advisor, and where I was able to walk across

the stage with my son. It was a beautiful moment. I felt accomplished. So in the spirit of honoring my mother, grandmothers, nieces, the Latinas in my study, and all the women of color who have experienced racial and gendered microaggressions, my message and my microaffirmation (Solórzano et al., 2020) to you is, "Don't Let Anyone Dull Your Sparkle"—continue to draw from your actualizational capital and don't let go of your *ganas*, determination and drive. You can do this!

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT FLYER

Research Study on Latinas in For-profit Vocational Schools


***Are you a Latina who is attending, have attended from a for-profit school? For-profit schools are institutions that offer less-than 2-year certificate programs designed to prepare people for jobs as dental, administrative, and medical assistants***

To participate in this study, women must meet the following criteria:

- self-identify as Latina, Chicana and/or Hispanic
- Be low-income and/or from a working-class family
- Be in the ages between 18-40+
- must be currently attending, have attended, or graduated from a for-profit & participated in the dental, admin or medical assistant program

The goal of this research study is to learn and understand what factors influenced Latinas to attend a For-Profit vocational school and what impact did attending a for-profit have on their future academic and career goals.

***Interested in participating in this study? Have questions? Contact me!***
***All inquires are confidential.***

*Contact:*
**Iris Lucero**
***UCLA School of Education***

***Email*: ilucero@ucla.edu** ***cell:* (323) XXX-XXX**

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

University of California, Los Angeles

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

*Latinas in Private For-profit Vocational Education*

*Iris Lucero*, from the Education department at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you meet the criteria of this study. You stated that you are a self-identified Latina, ages 18-40+, low income or from a working-class family and you are attending, have attended or have attended a for-profit school. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

**Why is this study being done?**

*The goal of this research study is to learn and understand what factors influenced Latinas to attend a for-profit school and what impact did attending a for-profit have on their future academic goals. In other words, the goal is to understand their choice of attending a for-profit institution.*

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

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

- *Participate in a 60 to 90 miniute interview*
- *The interview can be held at UCLA, a local library or the participant's home*
- *Interview questions will focus on your experience at a for-profit insitution*

**How long will I be in the research study?**

*Participation will take a total of about 60-90 minutes for the individual interview.*

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

*There are no anticipated risks or discomforts.*

**Are there any potential benefits if I participate?**

*You may benefit from the study by meeting with a Latina who has experience in higher education, who is willing to mentor you if you would like information about graduate school.*

*The results of the research study will contribute to the literature on the for-profit sector of education. It will provide transparency towards for-profit institutions and their role in the higher education arena, along with increased visibility of the population they are targeting, most of who are Latinas and lastly, understand the educational pathways Latinas take from kindergarten to post high school.*

**Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?**

*Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of assigning pseudonyms to the participants in the final reporting of the data. The codes for assigned pseudonyms will be kept confidential by the principal investigator. This information will be kept private in a file cabinet in a secure office that only she has access to.*

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

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

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

- **The research team:**
  If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the researcher and/or her Faculty Sponsor. Please contact:

  Iris Lucero at ilucero@ucla.edu and/or (323) 376-9338
  Dr. Daniel Solorzano at solorzano@gseis.ucla.edu and/or (310) 206-7855

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

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

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

**SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT**

_____
Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

**SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT**

_____ _____
Name of Person Obtaining Consent Contact Number

_____ _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Individual Plática Guiding Questions**

Interview Protocol

Thanks for agreeing to participate in the study. Your participation is voluntary, and you may decide to withdraw from the study at any time. Your responses will be kept anonymous.

May I tape record your responses, to get a more accurate account of your responses?

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

The goal of this research study is to learn and understand what factors influenced Latinas to attend a Private For-Profit Vocational Education (PFVE) institution and what impact did attending a PFVE have on their career goals. In other words, the goal is to understand the reasons for choosing to attend a PFVE. I am interested in learning about your personal experience at a PFVE. Throughout our conversation, I too will share my experience with attending a for-profit.

1. ***Theme 1:*** **Focused life history**. I will ask open ended questions about your K-12 educational experiences, family history, and more specifically, what led you to attend a PFVE.
    a. *What is your full name?*
        i. *Where are you from?*
        ii. *What do you do?*
        iii. *Where do you live?*
    b. *Please tell me about your family?*
        i. *Where are they from?*
        ii. *Please share your family's educational history.*
            1. *Did they go to school? How far along did they get?*
    c. *Now please tell me about your K-12 educational experience*
        i. *Where did you go to Kindergarten, elementary, middle school, and high school?*

2. ***Theme 2:*** **Details of their experience**. I will ask you to describe when you began to think about college (predisposition phase), when you began to gather college information (search phase) and what made you choose to attend a PFVE (choice phase)
    a. *Please share when you first heard about college*
        i. *Do you remember hearing about college?*
        ii. *What do you hear? Please be as detailed as possible.*
    b. *When did you begin thinking about college?*
        i. *Did you want to go to college?*
        ii. *Please tell me your thought process about college or going to college, or not going to college. Please be as detailed as possible*
        iii. *How did you feel about college, tell me about that?*

c. *When did you hear about the for-profit school?*
    i. *Do you remember how you heard about the school? Please describe how, when, and where you heard about that for-profit school*
    ii. *Did you visit the for-profit?*
        1. *Describe your experience when you visited the campus*
        2. *Where is the school located?*
        3. *Do you remember the visit? Describe it to me*
    iii. *What compelled you to attend a for-profit?*
        1. *Please share your thought process*
    iv. *What institution did you attend?*
    *v.* *What program did you do?*
    *vi.* *How long was the program?*
    *vii.* *Describe your experience in that school*
        *1.* *How were the classes?*
        *2.* *When were your classes scheduled?*
        *3.* *Did you work while going to school?*
        *4.* *Did you receive financial aid?*
        *5.* *Describe your experience at the for-profit*

***3.*** ***Theme 3:*** **Reflection on the meaning of their experience**. The final theme of the three-part interview allows the "participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences".
a. *Please reflect on your educational experiences*
    i. *Please share how it feels to talk about your K-12 experiences*
    ii. *Please share how it feels to talk about attending a for-profit*
    iii. *Please share how it feels to talk about your educational journey and your career goals*

**Thank you so much for participating and sharing your experiences with me.**