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Santa Barbara

A Phenomenological Study of Psychological Thriving Associated with Participation in  
Chicanx Studies

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology

by

Daniel C. Meza

Committee in charge:

Professor Melissa Morgan Consoli, Chair

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September 2020

The dissertation of Daniel C Meza is approved.

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June 2020

A Phenomenological Study of Psychological Thriving Associated with Participation in  
Chicanx Studies

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by

Daniel C. Meza

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Daniel C. Meza

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- Group psychotherapy in managing anxiety, depression, and stress
- Providing ongoing outreach to Casa Joaquin Murrieta on toxic masculinity and basic mental health skills
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- Dissertation Defense: 9/13/2019

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Morgan Consoli, M.L., Noriega, E., Consoli, A. **Meza, D.** & Pavone, D. Exploring resilience in self-identified “Mixed” adult Latino/as. (Manuscript submitted for publication)

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- Unzueta, E., Morgan-Consoli, M. L., **Meza, D.**, Vázquez, M. D., & Sánchez, A. (2016). Case Studies of Unauthorized students and Resilience: Implications for Social Justice. Paper presentation at *National Latina/o Psychological Association Conference*, Orlando, FL.
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## ABSTRACT

### A Phenomenological Study of Psychological Thriving Associated with Participation in Chicanx Studies

by

Daniel C. Meza

The following study is a qualitative exploration of the phenomenon of psychological thriving associated with participation in Chicanx Studies academic programs. The study employed transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) as a methodology to understand textural (“what”) and structural (“how”) factors relating to psychological and, subsequent, academic gains. Seven participants engaged in a three-phase multi-method study. Data was collected through an initial semi-structured interview, a phase of text message exchanges during the marking period of a CS course, and a final exit interview. Results clustered around four textural themes (challenges, gains, support, and goals) and four structural themes (professors, curriculum, peers, and environment). These themes generated a basic conceptual model suggesting that students engaging with the CS environment experience positive academic adjustment built upon a foundation of psychological thriving. Limitations, future directions, and recommendations are also discussed.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The existence of Chicax Studies<sup>1</sup>(CS) programs have been politicized on college campuses in the U.S. Since the 1960s, Chicax <sup>2</sup>students have fought for their own spaces on college campuses, primarily in the form of Chicax Studies programs that promote representation of Chicax people in educational curriculum as well as in student and faculty populations. Activism supporting the existence of CS programs has changed the landscape for Chicax students in college but has also earned participating students labels such as extreme, racist, and even social justice terrorists (Urrieta, 2004). Politicization of CS now impacts public schools in U.S. states such as in Arizona and Texas and, in some cases, has been a catalyst for legal rulings over district bans on textbooks and the courses themselves (Planas, 2017; Planas, 2017). The experiences of being “othered” in educational settings for Chicax students that serves as precursor for a host of negative mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse among others (Flores, 2013, p. 9). CS programs were originally developed around positivity, with the concept of *chicanismo* being about a positive ethnic identity (Urrieta, 2004). However, decades of politicization and opposition to CS programs appears to have obscured many of the original aims and many of the discovered benefits; both psychological and social.

### **Background of Chicax Studies Programs**

*El Plan de Santa Barbara* was first written in 1969 by mostly Chicax undergraduate and graduate students in California to lay out the formation and expansion of Chicax

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<sup>1</sup> Chicax Studies is used synonymously with Chicana/o Studies, Mexican American Studies, Raza Studies, and other similar program titles to make referencing the term less confusing and be more gender inclusive ending.

<sup>2</sup> Chicax is also used synonymously with Mexican American.

Studies in U.S. colleges and universities. Reynaldo Macias, contributor to *El Plan* and a CS professor, recalls some of the original missions behind the document and the expansion of CS as institutional recognition, student visibility, and the voicing of Chicana aspirations. *El Plan* was designed to give information and direction to other Chicana students struggling for the formation of their own CS departments on campus. Macias recalls the impact of *El Plan* outside Santa Barbara and California, in places such as Texas, where there was much less broad support and momentum for CS. The author of *El Plan* offered perspective, guidance, CS curricular suggestions, and reports on how CS implementation was unfolding on California college campuses. *El Plan* help influence the expansion of Chicana students, faculty, and research on college campuses in the U.S. since the late 1960s (Rangel, 2007).

Authors of *El Plan de Santa Barbara* acknowledged the importance of higher learning to the social mobility of Chicana students and Chicana communities. The authors conceptualized the institutionalization of CS programs as the just realization of Chicano voice and power on college campuses. This power was defined in terms of self-determination and self-liberation was achieved through control, autonomy, flexibility, and participation. Students and educators behind *El Plan* saw colleges and universities as the primary space for transforming and liberating Chicana communities. CS programs were described as responsible for educating, researching, and public service to Chicana communities (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1971).

As far as curricular recommendations, the authors of *El Plan de Santa Barbara* sought to organize the Chicana experience, in both the past and present. The exploration of heritage is part of the aim to transform the personality and identity of Chicana students. The purpose of influencing experience and identity is to emphasize the diverse aspects of the Chicana heritage in the U.S., a heritage that is obscured and hidden for many Chicana

people. The idea is for students to gain understanding of the self, the community, and Chicano cultural traditions. While the curriculum should be open to all students on campus, according to the authors, the curriculum should be developed specifically for Chicano students with consideration given to their psychological, social, and intellectual needs. A deficient education system had acted as a barrier to Chicano social mobility, but the authors felt academic barriers and challenges could be overcome through participation in CS programs that emphasized personal transformation. The authors outlined needed courses in community development, politics and government, Spanish, history of racism and the U.S., culture and art, literature and drama, music, law, and psychology (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1971).

Other CS curricular goals included the provision of a coherent and socially-focused education that steers Chicano students toward a life of service to the Chicano community but also improves society more broadly. The authors envisioned the development of Chicano culture to also produce social action and change, resulting in a re-conquest of self and community. All students were supposed to come away from the CS experience with a new perspective on socio-political change. Chicano students were meant to develop the ability to influence institutional policy that impacts Chicano individuals and communities. This prowess for political action includes the development of political consciousness into mobilization and honing of specific political tactics (Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education, 1971).

In looking at the mission statements of current CS programs, the core of *El Plan* appears to remain intact. The CS program at University of California, Berkeley, for example, aims to produce a framework of “an increasingly interconnected world, broadening and deepening, beyond the limited provincialism of Eurocentric perspectives” by taking

“seriously the knowledges, epistemologies, and critical thinking produced by racially and sexually oppressed subjects” (Chicana/o and Latina/o Studies, 2018, p. 1). The CS department of California State University, Los Angeles “offers a dynamic, innovative program that emphasizes an interdisciplinary, comparative, and global approach to understanding the historical experiences and contemporary social status of Mexican-origin populations...in order to effectively pursue social change” (Mission, 2018, p. 1). At the University of California, Santa Barbara, site of the original *El Plan*, the CS program “seeks to undo colonizing approaches to all areas of life” by “reinventing into new combinations the liberatory aspects of cultures, languages, politics, and economies” (What does Chicana/o mean?, 2018, p. 1).

### **Issues Facing Chicax Students in the Academy**

As *El Plan de Santa Barbara* acknowledged in 1969, Chicax students face psychological, social, and academic challenges on college campuses in the U.S. Experiences of discrimination are a common psychological experience for Latinx and Chicax students (Cokely et al, 2017). These experiences of discrimination often result in barriers to academic achievement in college (Ong, Phinney, & Dennis, 2006), and earlier (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004). Latinx college students report experiences of depressive symptoms associated with their experiences of discrimination (Brittian et al, 2015). Latinx students also report increased alcohol use and trauma-related symptoms (Cheng & Mallinckrodt, 2015). For Chicax students, experiences of discrimination are negatively correlated with subjective well-being (Villegas-Gold & Chol Yoo, 2014). One common pattern of response includes disengagement characterized by social withdrawal, self-criticism, and problem avoidance. Chicax college students also experience high levels of acculturative stress, which results in higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptomology (Crockett et al., 2007).

In addition to discrimination, class status and economic challenges are also shown to impact academic achievement (Caldas & Bankston, 1997). Latinx and Chicanx students who experience psychological distress report that these experiences impact their academic performance and are linked to higher rates of dropout (Alva & de los Reyes, 1999). Latinx college students have also been found to experience significantly higher levels of psychological distress related to academic, financial, and personal concerns than their white peers (Quintana, Vogel, & Ibarra, 1991). Chicanx students are among the lowest achieving students according to demographics in undergraduate education (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004), and this problem is exacerbated by the fact the Chicanx people compose the largest Latinx subgroup and is the largest growing Latinx community in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). When compared to all other Latinx ethnic subgroups, Chicanx students are among the lowest achieving in academics (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). One problem plaguing Chicanx student achievement and degree attainment is student retention (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Urbina & Wright, 2015). While U.S. colleges and universities fail to adequately address these low levels of academic achievement and degree attainment, resources and spaces aimed at addressing these outcomes must be identified.

### **Gains Associated with Chicanx Studies**

Chicanx Studies programs, to some extent, are capable of, and have previously addressed these negative outcomes from Chicanx students. Among the many gains associated with CS programs, there are several psychological outcomes that stand out. For example, the development of critical consciousness has been shown to be important to the career commitment for urban youth (Diemer & Blustein, 2006) and intent to persist through college for both citizen and undocumented Latinx students (Cadenas, Bernstein, & Tracey, 2018). Critical consciousness and critical frameworks are an important feature of CS

programs (Acosta, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999; Camarotta, 2014), and some authors have noted the value of critical consciousness in all educational systems, not just CS programs (Yosso, 2002).

Positive ethnic identity is another psychological gain associated with CS programs (Urrieta, 2004; Carbrera, Meza, Romero, & Rodriguez, 2013; O'Leary & Romero, 2011). Positive ethnic identity has been associated with higher levels of academic achievement for Latinx and Chicanx students (Ong, Phinney, & Dennis, 2006), while a negative ethnic identity attitude has been associated with lower levels of achievement and retention (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). For some Chicanx students, a positive ethnic identity serves as a protective factor (Iturbide, Raffaelli, & Carlo, 2009).

A sense of belonging is also linked to CS participation, and a lack of belonging was reported as a barrier by Latinx college students (Hernandez, 2002). Erosion of a sense of belonging for Chicanx people has made them more vulnerable to mental disorders and emotional distress (Flores, 2013). For Latinx college students, a sense of belonging facilitates positive psychological adjustment to the college environment (Nunez, 2009). Chicanx students' social class position impacts their sense of belonging in college (Schwartz, Donovan & Guido-Brito, 2009), but conveying a sense of belonging to other students and future generations has the impact of fostering broader belonging (Benmayor, 2002). CS programs and courses promote a sense of belonging for participating students (Cabrera, Meza, Romero, & Rodriguez, 2013; Espinoza-Gonzalez et al., 2013; O'Leary & Romero, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999; Vasquez, 2005). Ethnic studies programs in general have been shown to foster increased agency and motivation (Sleeter, 2001), and participation in CS has been shown to increase graduation rates as well as high passing rates on the



comprehensive state exam (Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx, 2014). Similarly, it has been found to facilitate cognitive growth (Acosta, 2007; Dee & Penner, 2016).

While psychological distress and mental health challenges are specific issues for Latinx and Chicanx college students, the gains associated with and facilitated by social justice activism also appear to play an important role in addressing those specific mental health concerns. Social justice activism appears in some ways to address the psychological issues facing Latinx and Chicanx students in the U.S, also acting as a protective factor (Hope et al, 2018). Activism also appears to play a large psychological role in ethnic studies programs (Acosta, 2013), increasing participating students' hope, reducing risky behaviors, and helping some students replace their aggression in response to oppression with more positive and constructive approaches (Ginwright & Camarotta, 2007).

### **Current Study**

This dissertation study was meant to explore the phenomena of participating in CS training, which includes, but is not limited to, academic courses, campus and social organizations, and activism. Research exists around the history, mission, and struggle for broader inclusion of gender-oppressed people associated with CS, but researchers have yet to understand the phenomena of positive psychological and academic functioning that appears to come along with CS. In fact, very little is even known about how students describe their own experiences in CS. Exploration of how students are describing their experience and any gains must first be considered before any formalization or modeling of results can occur.

Qualitative methodologies are consistent with exploration of constructs, experiences, and phenomena in their natural settings, while maintaining consideration of the participants themselves and their environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This dissertation study draws

upon qualitative methodologies to seek the Chicax college student perspective on what CS means to them through semi-structured interviews, taking into account participants' current campus environment. Maintaining the integrity of the participant words is a focus of this study because one of the aims to understand the phenomena of majoring in CS from the perspective of the students themselves. The results of student interviews will be considered in terms of changes to higher academic institutions.

Within the qualitative paradigm, the specific approach of transcendental phenomenology was employed in this dissertation study. Transcendental phenomenology attempts to describe the essence of phenomena through examining the textural and structural dimensions, or more simply, the "what" and "how" of a phenomenon, through a process called horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). Central to this proposed study will be understanding the voices of participants as they highlight the "essence" of experiencing CS as a major. By emphasizing what students describe as their experience, an analysis of structural and contextual factors in those experiences follows.

### **Research Questions**

The dissertation study explored the following research questions related to participation in CS:

1. How do undergraduate students describe the psychological process of Chicax Studies training?
2. How have students been impacted by their participation in CS?
3. What contextual and structural factors facilitated these impacts?

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter encompasses a review of literature around psychological gains that have been associated with Chicana Studies programs, such as critical consciousness, sense of belonging, ethnic identity, activism, and academic achievement. The history of these constructs within applied psychology will first be outlined. These constructs will then be reviewed in terms of their relevance to Chicana and Latina communities, and specifically Chicana and Latina undergraduate students. Finally, literature detailing how CS programs have facilitated these gains for participating Chicana and Latina students will be examined and research on thriving as a conceptual framework to explain the process of psychological gain for CS participants will be described.

#### **Critical Consciousness**

Participation in Chicana Studies appears to facilitate students' abilities to critically examine their own positions in society with respect to their race, class, gender, and other aspects of identity (Acosta, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999). The development of a critical consciousness, or the ability to examine the social and political factors relevant to one's social position (Brenner, 2009), has been identified by researchers as one of the significant gains that students participating in the ethnic studies CS studies experience. Critical consciousness is rooted in the urban sociology of the Chicago School (Brenner, 2009), critical theory of the Frankfurt school (Guess, 1981; Kumagai & Lyson, 2009), and the teachings of Brazilian philosopher Paulo Freire (2018). Chicago School sociologists posited that urban space is politically and culturally contested, as well as malleable and ripe for reconstruction by those with a critical perspective (Brenner, 2009). The Frankfurt school contended that consciousness should not be ideological at all, that a

critical consciousness frees one from the dangers of predominately false ideals and beliefs (Guess, 1981). Freire argued that the model of education in the colonized world emphasizes a dehumanization that perpetuates oppression and should be replaced with a more conscientious shaping of individuals and communities (Freire, 2018). Freire's concept of praxis, or informed actions against oppression, form an important theoretical connection to the activism emphasized in Chicana Studies that will be discussed later as well.

The Watts five-stage model of sociopolitical development emphasizes critical consciousness as a central component in fomenting change and desired outcomes in a social system riddled with oppression and sociopolitical barriers (Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999). The five stages (Acritical, Adaptive, Precritical, Critical, and Liberation) comprise a developmental process in which an individual reaches liberation of consciousness through critical analysis of the structures in one's social environment. This model is also clearly rooted in the earlier schools' focus on critical thought, analysis, and consciousness. Critical consciousness also has been linked to greater commitment and clarity regarding future careers for urban youth (Diemer, & Blustein, 2006), and has been emphasized in preservice teacher training as a capacity necessary to serve students from underrepresented communities (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). For Latinx students specifically, critical consciousness has been important to career development in that it has been found to play a role in students' intent to persist through college, including Latinx students and students enrolled in Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), (Cadenas, Bernstein, & Tracey, 2018).

One CS educator incorporated four dimensions into his classroom culture to achieve "critical consciousness" as its central goal: *Tezkatlipoka* (self-reflection), *Queztzalkoatl* (knowledge), *Huitzilopochtli* (the will to act), and *Xipe Totek* (transformation). This model

resembles the Watts model in that it conceptualizes a critical consciousness as a developmental process. Acosta's CS program began with developing the ability for students to critically examine their own lives to understand their own goals and obstacles. Students then built knowledge upon their self-reflection, coming to an understanding of their culture's origins and where it is now situated. Another important psychological dimension for students was developing a will to act—to become an active agent in the environment around them. Lastly, students embraced the idea of transformation, seeing themselves as a being capable of being transformed and being capable of positively transforming the environment around them (Acosta, 2007).

Critical consciousness and critical epistemologies in CS courses appeared to facilitate Chicana students exploring their own cultural histories, as well as their own identities (Delgado Bernal, 2002). In some cases, students identified CS as a significant space for developing and nurturing critical consciousness. Other CS programs also intentionally incorporated Critical Race Theory, a framework originating in legal scholarship to challenge the dominant framework on race relations in the U.S. (Yosso, 2005). The critical race framework afforded students the opportunity to examine how racism functions in their lives inside and outside of the classroom (Valenzuela, 1999). CS programs infuse Paulo Freire's notions when conceptualizing their students' own development. For example, some instructors have attempted to draw upon the intellect and experiences of their students and veered away from viewing them as empty vessels to be filled. Thus, critical consciousness appears in this context to be an intentional cultivation of an academic environment to encourage the development of critical thinking, particularly around race and identity. In fact, some scholars not only note the importance of critical consciousness in CS

but recommend that critical consciousness pedagogy and scholarship be applied to the racism inherent in larger educational systems (Yosso, 2002).

Authors of *El Plan de Santa Barbara* outlined CS as being a platform to address educational inequality, and one specific aspect of critical consciousness that seems to be important to CS programs is the challenging of the notion of colorblindness (Camarotta, 2014). Chicana students in Arizona, like many Latinx students in the U.S., faced conditions similar to segregated schooling, deemed illegal by courts about 60 years ago, in that they are often placed in classrooms of predominantly Latinx students, and report alienation and isolation. Camarotta theorizes that colorblindness unwittingly feels like an acceptable cognition for dominant groups because their experiences are not framed by racial oppression and discrimination. For example, the occurrence of a CS ban in Arizona made it clear to student activists that systemic racism pervaded their school system and left many with the burden to shed light on this. Students expressed recognition of the development of their critical consciousness while participating in CS. Challenging powerful, pervasive, and ultimately false notions of colorblindness appeared to facilitate students' development of critical consciousness (Camarotta, 2014). It is important to note that critical consciousness does not appear to be a happenstance gain resulting from the participation in CS programs, but rather an intentional curricular choice.

### **Sense of Belonging**

A sense of belonging has also been found to be an important component of Chicana Studies programs. Tinto's model of student persistence (1993) established the essential psychological conditions necessary for students to function and thrive in academic settings, including engagement and involvement in one's academic community. However, the model was modified several times due to legitimate criticisms, including the absence of how

engagement and involvement in an academic setting is impacted by race or other identity characteristics that might make one more vulnerable to not feeling as if they belong (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Social class position has also been linked to a sense of belonging and has been found to mediate the relationship between class background and adjustment to college (Ostrove & Long, 2007). Furthermore, a sense of belonging for college students has been generally linked to student efficacy, motivation, and sense of social acceptance (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007).

A sense of belonging is another significant psychological gain that has been associated with participation in CS programs. For Latinx college students, participating in social-community organization heightens their sense of belonging (Hurtado & Cater, 1997), aspects of which appear to resemble CS programs and related activism. That sense of belonging was lowered when Latinx students faced perceptions of a hostile racial climate. Research building upon Hurtado and Carter's work found that ethnic minorities, including Latinx, Blacks, and Asian Americans, collectively held less of a sense of belonging than their white peers (Johnson et al., 2007). Research into Latinx students' sense of belonging in college has revealed the difficulty in measuring this construct (Kraemer, 1997), and particularly in Latinx and Chicanx populations, because of the subjective nature of what it means to be integrated or belong to a college campus. Latinx students' sense of belonging in college is conceptually paradoxical in that a hostile racial climate can also be associated with an increased sense of belonging if students are engaged in the campus community and have positive diversity experiences (Nuñez, 2009).

Latino first-year college students have previously identified feeling as if they do not belong on a college campus as specific barrier to their educational attainment (Hernandez, 2002). Research has also established the importance of belonging to Chicanx students'

enrollment and achievement at the college level. A sense of belonging is not entirely individual either. Communities and future generations feel as though they also belong on college campuses when they see others from their community complete their degrees (Benmayor, 2002). Aspects such as social class positioning impacts Chicana college students' sense of belonging (Schwartz, Donovan & Guido-Brito, 2009), forcing them to reconcile their disadvantages and academic success. Barriers to belonging necessitate Chicana students cultivating a sense of belonging within their ethnic communities and families (Kiyama, 2011), and, thus, must seek to somehow recreate it on campus.

The coalition of high school and college students enrolled in CS, college professors and public educators instructing these courses, as well as local activists reported being driven by a sense of belonging to a community (Cabrera, Meza, Romero, & Rodriguez, 2013; Espinoza-Gonzalez et al., 2013; O'Leary & Romero, 2011). Some CS programs relied on research into "authentic caring" (Valenzuela, 1999), which involved educators looking to complement consciousness building with support for students' physical, psychological, and other needs, and letting those needs guide the educational process. Authentic caring promoted a sense of belonging for students enrolled in CS. This sense of belonging appears to draw students to CS and deepen their connection to the community around CS (Valenzuela, 1999).

A sense of belong has occurred for Latinx students in CS course environments (Vasquez, 2005) and in community, activist-oriented environments as well (Cabrera, Meza, Romero, & Rodriguez, 2013). Latinx students expressed that Chicana literature resonated with their own experiences and that produced a sense of belonging to larger experience and heritage. The CS environment also occurs outside of the classroom, mostly in the form of community engagement and activism (Urrieta, 2004) and a sense of belonging is important



to these environments as well. The School of Ethnic Studies, a weekend space for CS curriculum, discussion, and organizing that took place outside of public schools after the ban on ethnic studies in Arizona (Cabrera, Meza, Romero, & Rodriguez, 2013) also produced a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging was necessary to create a community-led educational institution that provided the essential elements of CS when it was banned from students.

### **Ethnic Identity**

Ethnic identity plays an important role in the functioning and achievement of Chicana students in college, and Chicana studies programs help facilitate positive ethnic identity. Erikson (1968) long ago established the importance of identity and a sense of self for an individual's psychological makeup. Phinney (1990) then brought attention to the significance that ethnic identity has for some minority populations, including Chicana. Three major components to ethnic identity emerged from Phinney's conceptualization: self-identification, attitudes, and ethnic belonging<sup>3</sup>. Self-identification refers to the essential act of identifying with an ethnic background. Attitude is distinct from self-identification and describes how an individual feels about the ethnic group of which they are a part. Belonging is the degree to which an individual feels they are part of the socio-cultural identity of their ethnicity. More recent research on ethnic identity for minority populations reveals that much within-group diversity exists within ethnic labels, but that generally a positive ethnic identity acts to protect mental health (Umaña-Taylor, 2011).

The small body of extant literature aimed at understanding the potential for ethnic identity development in ethnic studies and CS began with program evaluation of an ethnic

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<sup>3</sup> Belonging in Phinney's model refers specifically to ethnicity, where in this proposed study belonging is defined more generally to include ethnic belonging, as well as campus, community, or social belonging as well.

studies program (Funkand, Peterson, & Trent, 1973) that was groundbreaking for its time. While there is little on college students, this study compared 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students enrolled in an ethnic studies course with 10<sup>th</sup> graders not enrolled on measurements of the School Sentiment Index. This course included black, white, Chicax, and American Indian student participants. This study found that students enrolled in the ethnic studies course held more positive attitudes towards students belonging to an ethnic minority group, as well as more positive attitude towards school. These results, though outdated, seem consistent with the other research presented in this literature review. Thus, this study served as an early indication of the positive affect associated with ethnic studies participation. Strong ethnic identity has more recently been linked to numerous positive psychological and academic outcomes (Sleeter, 2011). Higher levels of ethnic identity have been associated with high regard for racial or ethnic background, which in turn have been linked to high levels of achievement when moving from middle to high school.

Ethnic identity for Chicax college students has been found to be associated with acculturation levels; specifically, to be highest for first-generation and those less acculturated, and to diminish with behavioral conformity to the majority culture (Cuéllar, Nyberg, Maldonado, & Roberts, 1997). Furthermore, a positive ethnic identity has been associated with higher academic achievement for Latinx and Chicax students (Ong, Phinney, & Dennis, 2006) while, conversely, internalization of a negative ethnic identity and a lack of a sense of belonging negatively impact Latinx and Chicax student achievement and retention (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). A positive ethnic identity has played an important role for some Chicax college students promoting psychological well-being by acting in some instances as a protective factor (Iturbide, Raffaelli, & Carlo, 2009).

CS programs themselves have contributed to the promotion of *chicanismo*, an ideology that centers upon a positive ethnic identity (Urrieta, 2004). Chicax professors and students report the importance of ethnic identity to their experiences in CS (Cabrera, Meza, Romero, Rodriguez, 2013; O’Leary & Romero, 2011). College students also explain how participating in activism related to the ethnic studies ban in Arizona demonstrated how ethnic identity potentially influences these pursuits (O’Leary & Romero, 2011). Chicax students in CS programs experienced low self-esteem and depression, ethnic identity served as a protective factor. CS appears to strengthen positive ethnic identity and thus supports psychological benefits and gains.

### **Activism**

Social justice activism has been historically linked to Chicax Studies programs as a form of engagement that has supported the existence and expansion of CS programs themselves (Urrieta, 2004). Szymanski (2012) defined social justice activism as intentional actions made towards fomenting social and political change. Activism for the college age population has been previously conceptualized as consistent with transition into adulthood (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Students at this age are beginning to see the interaction of varying value systems and how this might impact their future. Social justice activism, thus, reflects a desire to enact change that appears consistent with personal and collective value systems. Activism by Chicax college students has led to positive developments in Chicax communities in terms of access to higher education, segregation at the public-school level, labor, immigration, and, later, gender equity (Urrieta, 2004).

Chicax activism possesses important roots from the pre- and post-World War II U.S. socio-cultural context, in which educational segregation was addressed by George Sanchez and others when some Chicax students benefited from the G.I. bill and access to

higher education (Johnson & Martinez, 1999). The Chicano Movement in the 1960s was aimed at gaining civil rights for Chicana communities and provided one of the more significant impacts on Chicana activism (Urrieta, 2004), with some seeing university-level CS programs themselves as the primary vestige for activism in the Chicano movement (Johnson & Martinez, 1999). Julian Samora, seen by some as the pioneer of CS, was recognized for his efforts as a scholar-activist in working with oppressed Chicana communities in Arizona while also influencing educational policy around CS (Johnson & Martinez, 1999). Following the 1960s Chicano Movement, issues of gender exclusion necessitated a reworking of the *Chicanismo* to encapsulate feminist and alternative perspectives (Urrieta, 2004).

Activism itself has been associated with psychological benefit. Research in psychology has addressed both the benefits and drawbacks to general participation in activism. Participation in activism appears to increase hope, empowerment, and healing (Rolland & Perry, 1999). Participation in activism has been shown to buffer against elements of the dominant culture such as individualism, materialism, violence, and despair. Participation in activism provided psychological and social benefits for immigrant women in Canada (MacDonnell et al. 2015), activist communities in Chicago (Glister, 2012), and for college students (Klar & Kasser). For college students, activist students were at times more likely to be flourishing than students not participating in activism (Klar & Kasser, 2009).

Some public school educators have framed infusion of activism into ethnic studies curricula with Youth Participatory Action Research (PAR) to emphasize the importance of youth engagement, which has resulted in positive psychological benefits (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). One group of students participated in a youth employment program in an Oakland-area Latina community and another in an Oakland-area African American youth

organization. Students involved in the youth employment agency used their education about the marginalization of Latinx communities to address the issues of economic hardship, domestic violence, and employment issues related to immigration. The African American youth organization focused on providing community and political education to local youth, drawing on creative resources such as spoken-word performance and hip-hop. Students reported the development of critical consciousness and social networking as gains from their activist participation in PAR. Participants also reported a reduction in risky behaviors such as drug dealing and violence. A particularly interesting gain mentioned by several students was a movement away from aggression in the response to oppressive adversities (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2007). This study highlighted some interesting dimensions that can be addressed through infusing activism into an ethnic studies curriculum.

Activism has been shown to promote positive psychological gains for participating Latinx and Chicanx students. For some Latinx college students, political activism acted as a protective factor against experiences of racial and ethnic discrimination (Hope et al., 2018). For some Latinx college students, their participation in the recent Black Lives Matter and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals movements was predicted by experiences of discrimination (Hope, Keels, & Durkee, 2016). Activism has historically been linked to CS programs, in support of educational and other social justice issues (Urrieta, 2004). Chicanx students participating in social justice activism, report psychological gains in the areas of positive ethnic identity and a sense of belonging (Meza & Morgan Consoli, unpublished manuscript). This is significant not only as student activism can potentially promote psychological gains in ethnic identity and belonging, which are significant in academic terms, but significant also in that Latinx and Chicanx students are among the largest participant groups responsible for recent all-time highs in student activism on college

campuses in the U.S. (New, 2016). In fact, Latinx and Chicanx student activism has been increasing for several years (Powers, 2006), and is, thus, of great consequence to the psychological and academic thriving of these students.

Of particular interest when discussing the intersection of CS with activism is Acosta's notion of "Huitzilopochtli" or the will to act (Acosta, 2013). Many of his high school students saw the act of meeting as a class on Sundays, after the ethnic studies ban prevented them from meeting during public school hours, as their first moment of activism. Students experienced a sense of achievement and hope when the official assigned to the desegregation plan acknowledged the importance of their input. Students interviewed saw how the desegregation plan was implemented in subsequent years, however, reported disillusionment and detachment. Despite the obstacles and hopelessness, these same students also reported that the CS programs inspired them to persevere, a testament to their resilience (Acosta, 2013).

Invoking the four principles of critical consciousness, or *Tezkatlipoka* (Acosta, 2007), college students and faculty used critical personal narratives to explain their experiences of advocating for banned CS programs (Espinoza-Gonzalez et al., 2013). Participants emphasized the importance of community created by activists, a community that was inspiring and sustaining. Students participating in activism again reported development of critical consciousness (Espinoza-Gonzalez et al., 2013). These activist students and faculty also referred to critical consciousness as an ongoing, dynamic process and not a static attribute or skill to attain. Some participants mentioned that this process involves confronting difficult historical truths and a willingness to maintain critical engagement. The participants also developed "critical hope," not simply a blind hope that

systemic oppression can be overcome, but a hope that the necessary changes required to bring about social justice to underrepresented peoples will occur.

Longitudinal research brings the process and relationship between ethnic identification, well-being, and activism together (Cronin, Levin, Branscombe, van Laar, & Tropp, 2012). In this study, researchers took measurements during Year 1 and 4 of Latino college students, theorizing that ethnic identification would act as a mediator of the impact that discrimination would have on well-being and willingness to participate in activism on behalf of one's ethnic group. This theory draws from the rejection-identification model, which attempts to understand how ethnic identification protects against the negative effects of discrimination. This study found that measurements of activism during Year 1 and ethnic identification during Year 4 sequentially mediated the impact of perceived ethnic discrimination during Year 1 and well-being and activism during Year 4. Thus, it appears that participating in activism in Year 1 is associated with higher ethnic identification in Year 4 and helps explain how perceived discrimination can lead to high levels of reported well-being, and a drive to engage in activism. This study helps identify some of the psychological processes that might be operating in CS programs. Activism appears to have a relationship with ethnic identification that could be further understood by additional research in this area.

### **Academic Achievement**

Achievement in the face of academic challenges for Chicanx college student populations is significant to their achievement and there is emerging evidence that CS programs are promoting academic gains. Researchers have long established a link between socioeconomic status (SES) and academic achievement (Caldas & Bankston, 1997). Only 6% of the Mexican American and Chicanx population in the U. S. complete a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004), despite being the largest Latinx subgroup, as well as the

subgroup with the swiftest growth (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). While social mobility is most strongly associated with educational attainment, the Chicana populations faces the lowest rates of educational attainment, at all levels, among all Hispanic subgroups (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). Retention of Latinx and Chicana students also persists as a significant issue in higher education (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Urbina & Wright, 2015). The disproportionately low rates of educational attainment for such a large ethnic minority population constitute a clear social justice issue.

In addition to the psychological gains identified by participation, gains in academic achievement have also been associated with ethnic studies, including CS programs. Ethnic studies generally had positive impacts on the academic achievement, academic engagement, and personal empowerment of participating students (Sleeter, 2011). Achieving these positive impacts was the result of culturally-relevant literacy, bilingual programs, as well as culturally-responsive math and science programs. For example, A multi-ethnic studies program developed in collaboration with San Francisco State University's College of Ethnic Studies (Dee & Penner, 2016) was implemented in schools serving marginalized communities. These programs incorporated critical consciousness and authentic caring, which were also central to the previously described Tucson programs. The positive impact on students' cognitive development was seen through increased GPAs and credits earned in school, and positive affect with respect to school was seen in increased attendance. Students participating in the San Francisco ethnic studies program experienced higher GPAs with an average increase of 1.4 points per student, essentially a grade-and-a-half. Attendance for these students increased by 21% and credits earned increased by an average of 23%, roughly equivalent to four full courses completed (Dee & Penner, 2016).



The measurable impact of CS on student achievement has also been found to be positive (Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx, 2014) at the high school level students. While this might not be evidence of college students, it does establish a link between academic achievement and CS. For example, CS programs in Tucson were implemented in underperforming and underserved schools within the city's largest district, TUSD, where students involved in the programs typically earned lower GPAs than their non-CS student peers. After completing the CS programs, these students experienced higher graduation rates and scores on the comprehensive state exam (AIMS), which is required for graduation, than their non-CS peers. This increase in graduation rates and test scores contrasts years of data for Latino/a students in Tucson, whose typically lower GPAs have been associated with lower rates of graduation when compared to non-Latino/a students (Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx, 2014). Clearly, the approaches used by the CS programs in Tucson positively impacted the lives of these students and signal the potential benefits of CS for Chicanx students in our educational system.

### **Thriving**

Thriving is a process that signifies reaching a state of being better-off after encountering an adversity, as opposed to returning to a previous level of functioning, such as with resilience (Carver, 1998). Thriving has been defined by some as a process of making meaning of an adverse experience (Parry & Chesler, 2005) and has been previously defined by some students in terms of their academic success. For some, thriving can potentially occur in one domain in their life, even when not experiencing thriving in others (Benson & Scales, 2009). The importance of psychological well-being to the thriving of undergraduate students has been previously established (Gerson & Fernandez, 2013; Dunn, 1997). An under-researched construct for Latinx and Chicanx communities, some studies have

indicated the importance of thriving to Latinx college students (Morgan Consoli, et al, 2014; Perez & Saenz, 2017). Students reported overcoming familial and cultural adversities through methods such as social support and perseverance. Some of the reported gains, such as increase knowledge, as well as improved self-concept and relationships, appear to be similar to gains associated with CS programs (i.e. critical consciousness, improved ethnic identity, and belonging). Along with the academic gains also linked to CS, students appear to be thriving in some domains supported by participation in CS.

Thriving may be an overarching framework that helps explain the series of gains reported with respect to participation in CS. Outcomes such as critical consciousness, a sense of belonging, positive ethnic identity, and even academic achievement, point to a broader sense of psychological thriving for participating students. Scholars of thriving do not suppose that it is a construct that can be explained by a single conceptual model, but is in fact multidimensional (Benson & Scales, 2009). Thus, attempting to understand the phenomena of psychological gains associated with CS participation may potentially be best explained by a more dynamic and complex framework such as thriving.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

This chapter will detail the methodology and design used for this qualitative, three-phase study. Phenomenological methodologies supported the multi-method design in understanding the essence of the lived experience for a student in Chicana student (Creswell, & Poth, 2018). Transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), a sub-type of qualitative phenomenology that emphasizes the importance of a lived experience and its associated structural factors, was used for this inquiry. A monomethod multistrand design was used (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003), drawing upon data from two semi-structured interviews and data collected from responses to text-messaged questions. Capturing the process through a partially longitudinal design helps us understand how thriving might explain the multiple psychological gains associated with CS. The combination of centering participant voices and experiences with the exploration of structural factors facilitating the phenomenon, both important elements of transcendental phenomenology, made this design a good fit for this study.

#### **Design**

##### **Qualitative Research**

At its foundation, qualitative research is an approach which seeks to explore and inquire in natural settings while maintaining sensitivity to participants and their environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach is especially appropriate for this study due to the noted historic obstacles for CS programs on high school and college campuses. Qualitative research also employs both deductive and inductive reasoning, basing conclusions on the data but also allowing theoretical explanations to emerge from the data itself (Thomas, 2006). This study stems from a framework of CS and aspects of psychological thriving as seen in previous studies but does not presuppose a formal

relationship between these constructs. This study is driven by research questions and not formal hypotheses, as per transcendental phenomenology. Qualitative research underscores the importance of exploring researcher biases, describing and interpreting the problem, and connecting the results to potential for change (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study adhered to these noted qualities by carefully examining and presenting participants' words and employing a rigorous analytical process, which was connected to the current sociocultural context related to the topic.

Qualitative research is an emic endeavor (Ponterotto, 2005), emphasizing unique individual and contextual factors within data that is constructed between researcher and participant. Inquiry from an emic perspective does not produce generalizable findings to all other individuals but contextualizes findings in individual and sociocultural experiences. This study adopted an emic perspective in that the CS students, as participants, shared an insider perspective of the experience of participating in CS, as well as any noticeable impacts or gains and the factors that facilitated them. Findings are meant to be a description and interpretation of the CS experience in the CS sociocultural context. The emic perspective endemic to qualitative research fit this study as it emphasized unique individual and sociocultural features of the data that are important to highlight in the early stages of exploring this line of research (Ponterotto, 2005).

Qualitative inquiry also addresses fundamental ontological, epistemological, and axiological considerations for formulating questions, gathering data, and acknowledging research preconceptions and interactions with the data and analysis (Ponterotto, 2005). Ontological considerations relate to the nature of being and reality. Questions about CS and thriving that assume multiple, constructed realities and critical frameworks were explored through this proposed study. These assumptions are based on CS' embodiment of a reality

not shared within mainstream education and that possesses an inherently critical-race framework. Epistemological concerns refer to how knowledge is exchanged and learned. This study was based in the co-construction of data between the researcher and participants (Ponterotto, 2005), acknowledging the transactional nature of participant interviews and underlining the importance of empowerment and emancipation of participants. Attention to axiology relates to how a researcher and their own ideas and positions interact with a study, which is addressing directly through bracketing.

Researchers have also identified qualitative design as appropriate for investigating social justice concerns and diverse populations (Cauce, 2011; Lyons et al., 2013). For example, qualitative research often works within populations and cultures historically neglected within American applied psychology (Cauce, 2011). Some have seen qualitative approaches as freeing research from the restrictive bonds of traditional science; an essential characteristic for culturally-oriented inquiry (Teddlie & Tashakorri, 2003). Social justice goals in qualitative research have been categorized by Lyons (2013) into four aspirations: equity, access, participation, and harmony. The methodology of this study also worked towards these aspirations. Equity is addressed in that CS itself raises questions about equity in the education system, both in terms of ethnic representation in historical narratives and space for socioculturally-bound intellectual perspectives and frameworks. Access is also addressed by CS in similar ways. One goal of this study was understanding how access to education relates to CS majors' experiences. This study addressed participation by directly focusing on the words of CS participants themselves. Harmony will be achieved throughout this study by emphasizing the communal and collective gains more than any gains associated with the research or researcher.

### **Transcendental Phenomenology**

German philosopher Immanuel Kant first invoked the term “phenomenology,” borrowing from the Greek meaning of “to appear” (Priest, 2002), demonstrating the inductive leanings of this research philosophy and design. German mathematician Edmund Husserl expanded the use of phenomenology to methodological inquiry and began designing the formal parameters of this research paradigm. The philosophical basis of phenomenological inquiry seeks to discover to the essence of a lived experience and, in modern phenomenological practices, reduces that essence to an analytical description. Van Manen and Moustakas later formalized the phenomenology of practice in social science and psychological methodology. Throughout this line of philosophers and researchers exists an acknowledgement of the limitations inherent to classic scientific empiricism, namely the strict subject-object dichotomy. Phenomenologists subscribe to a wider view of consciousness in that objects are always linked to the human consciousness and perception of it, a view that holds simultaneously a dynamic of both objectivity and subjectivity. Phenomenology resists hypothesizing before outlining research questions and gathering data, instead favoring a focus on process of wisdom’s emergence (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenological studies always feature an inquiry into experiential phenomena with a group of individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon in question, and researchers have recommended participant pools of 3 to 15 individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Studies often include researchers conducting a process called bracketing in which they explore their own familiarity with the phenomenon. Bracketing helps researchers in understanding their own experiences in hopes of setting those experiences aside, thereby reducing interference with the data. Like many other qualitative methods, participant interviews are the primary source of data, but other documents and observations can be used. In this study, text messaging will also be a source of data through responses to

questions about what is happening in the concurrently-attended CS courses and what structural factors are facilitating it. Data analysis employs systematic procedures that develop statements identified as significant into broader, thematic understandings. A multimethod or mixed methods design allows for more complex and faceted questions not possible in traditional monomethod designs (Teddlie & Tashakorri, 2003). In this study, that entails capturing previous, although somewhat recent experiences in CS, along with experiences in the concurrent CS course.

Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology (1994) is detailed in its methodology and provides a detailed procedural path. Moustakas recommends exploring if phenomenology is a good fit by determining if you have a group of individuals who shared an experience. The next step is a detailed description of the phenomenon in question, before any data collection. Data was collected from multiple participants through two in-depth interviews, often comprised of open-ended questions, and a phase of text message exchanges regarding the concurrent CS course. The two central channels of exploration addressing the original research questions were around what was experienced and how contextual factors impacted these experiences.

Data analysis of these interviews was then conducted through "horizontalization," or the identification of significant statements. These statements were grouped by meaning into thematic groups or "clusters." The data from the horizontalization and clustering processes was then used to generate textural and structural descriptions. The textural descriptions focused on what participants experienced and the structural description examined how setting and context influenced these experiences. The researcher then produced a composite description that explains the essence of the phenomenon and, finally, presented the findings in writing (see Results chapter).

## **Sequential Monomethod Approach**

This study's configuration and attempts to capture the fullest and freshest descriptions of the CS phenomenon called for a sequential monomethod multistrand design (Teddlie & Tashakorri, 2003). Mixed designs, such as a multistrand design, answer research questions or series of questions that other approaches cannot. Mixed designs also allow for triangulation of multiple data sources to build a fuller understanding of the subject being researched. Capturing concerns from diverse groups is another strength of mixed designs, as varying data collection approaches can be more adaptable and intentional around the populations involved. A mixed design also refrains the imposition of a single approach that can at times reify stereotypical or racist perspectives held by one culture towards another.

A sequential monomethod multistrand design entails a chain of non-concurrent approaches, either quantitative or qualitative (Teddlie & Tashakorri, 2003). In this study, three phases of qualitative data collection were sequenced together to form monomethod multistrand. The first piece of the strand was an initial semi-structured interview with participants meeting recruitment criteria. Exchanging text messages during a grading period in which participants are enrolled in a CS course comprised the second phase of the strand, offering a fresher look at the CS experience if not as full and comprehensive as the initial interview. Use of text messages is also potentially more adaptable to the college student population, and certainly allows for an alternate approach for those who are less comfortable sharing their personal experiences in CS to someone they just met or had met once before at the initial interview. The final phase of the strand was an exit interview with each participant to collect their reflections on the meaning of the CS and if any new realizations emerged.

## **Bracketing and Researcher Reflexivity**



The researcher in this study had previous personal experience with Chicana studies courses and social justice activism related to issues typically discussed in CS courses, such as citizenship rights, student debt, and Chicana student representation on campus. The researcher completed courses in CS, although not as a major, and characterized this as a time when critical consciousness, positive ethnic identity, a sense of belonging, and a tendency towards social justice activism were developed and supported in the CS environment. He also acknowledged the level of privilege he experienced in college that is not shared by other CS college students, such as being white-passing and having some scholarship support. This privilege may have impacted how the lead researcher experienced CS. He also worked as a teaching assistant in CS courses as a graduate student and has observed students experiencing what appeared to be similar outcomes as him and noted in the research literature.

The lead researcher also had a unique vantage point during a ban on ethnic studies in Arizona during the 2010 academic year (Planas, 2017). The ethnic studies ban was aimed primarily at CS programs in Tucson, Arizona public high schools that found themselves in opposition to school board members and local legislators. The educator most visible in his opposition to the ban, who even appeared on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, was also an educator at the lead researcher's own high school, although never his direct teacher. The researcher took on this proposed study in large part because of the positive experiences he had in CS courses and because of the threat he observed to this type of pedagogy and learning. These experiences, and their potential to create bias in the context of this study, were considered, processed, and routinely managed during data collection and analysis. Managing potential bias involved active reflection on whether researcher experiences obscured participant voice.

## **Participants**

Seven undergraduate students, who had previously taken at least one Chicana Studies course and intended to take at least one additional course during the academic period of the initial interview, participated in this study. This experiential criterion of requiring students to have taken CS courses and taking another during the period of participation in this proposed study was created to preserve a deep and fresh understanding of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). While being a CS major was not a requirement of participation, all participants ended up being CS majors. Other participant criteria included students indicating that CS has had a significant impact on their educational journey thus far, being Chicana-identified, and at least 18-years-old.

Recruitment began with emails requesting participation in a study about experiences as a Chicana Studies student. Requests were sent from an undergraduate listserv in a CS department at a west coast university. This email included information about the study, how to participate, incentives offered, and rights of the participant. The researcher also used snowball recruitment procedures, which have been recommended for diverse sub-populations and populations with several specific demographic criteria such as in this proposed study (Sadler, Lee, Lim, & Fullerton, 2010). Researchers requested that participants provide information about the study and how to participate to other potentially interested students who meet criteria. Students who responded to the email were screened with a short questionnaire to see that they met participant criteria.

Bianca was 19 years old during the period of her interviews and text message reports. She identified as a “sophomore” in college, as female, and as Hispanic in response to the demographic question of race and ethnicity. She was born in the U.S. as a second-generation immigrant, as her parents made the journey from Mexico to the U.S. She

identified as a first-generation college student. She explained on her demographic questionnaire that her parents completed “some” high school and never took any CS courses. Bianca indicated that she was part of a Latina sorority and the organization Hermanas Unidas. She had taken four CS courses prior to the first interview and was enrolled in two during the academic period of the interviews and text reports. She wrote in response to how CS impacted her journey as a student, “they [CS courses] balance out the hard workload with Chemistry. The CS courses help me to enjoy each quarter with fun, exciting, and informative classes.”

Elisa was 22 years old while participating in the interviews and text message reports. She identified as Latina and Chicana, female, and a first-year transfer student in her third year of post-secondary education. She was born in the U.S. to parents who made the immigration journey from Mexico, making her a second-generation immigrant. She reported that her parents completed “some” high school in Mexico and did not ever take CS classes. Elisa identified as being part of the Equal Opportunity Program at her current university, a program dedicated to support services of first-generation college students and students from backgrounds underrepresented in the academy. She had taken five CS courses prior to the first interview and two during the academic period of the interviews and text messages. She answered that she did experience significant impact on her educational journey through CS but did not elaborate on the demographic questionnaire.

Isabel was 20 years old at the time of interviews and text message reports. She identifies as Latinx, female, and as a third-year college student. She was born in the U.S. to parents who emigrated to the U.S. from Mexico, making her a second-generation immigrant. She explained on the demographic questionnaire that her father completed his GED in U.S. and that her mother completed high school in Mexico, which makes her a first-generation

college student. Isabel indicated that she was part of the Student Commission on Racial Equality at her university. She had taken five CS courses prior to the first interview and was enrolled in two at the time of the first interview. She indicated that “yes” CS had significantly impacted her educational journey but did not provide any further explanation on the demographic questionnaire.

Emilia was 33 years old at the time of interviews and text message reports, giving her a designation by her university campus of “non-traditional student.” She identified as Mexican American, a cis-female, and “junior” transfer student. She indicated that she is a first-generation college student and second-generation immigrant, her parents making the immigration journey to the U.S. She also indicated that her mother completed junior high school and her father completed elementary school. She reported not being part of any campus organizations or ethnic-affinity organizations. She had taken seven CS courses prior to the first interview and was taking one course at the time of the same interview. She responded “yes” to the question about whether or not CS had an impact on her journey as student but did not offer further details of that impact on her demographic questionnaire.

Alejandra was 20 years old at the time of interviews and text message reports. They identified as Latinx, gender non-conforming, and a third-year college student. They indicated being a first-generation college student, their father completing elementary school and their mother taking some courses at a community college for occupational accreditation. They indicated being part of the resource center for sexual and gender diversity on her university’s campus. They had enrolled in six CS courses prior to the first interview and two during the academic period of interviews and text reports. Alejandra responded to the question of CS impacting their journey as a student, “I actually decided to change my major after my first Chicana Studies course.”

Sandra was 22 years old at the time of the interviews and text message reports. She identified as Mexican, undocumented, female, and as a third-year transfer student. She indicated that she is a first-generation college student and immigrant, making the journey from Mexico with parents to the U.S. She wrote on the questionnaire that both of her parents completed “some” high school but did not complete their diplomas. Sandra reported being part of her campus’ undocumented student coalition as well as La Escuelita, an organization offering tutoring and other services to Latinx and other underserved communities before college. She completed three CS courses prior to the first interview and was enrolled in three courses during the period of interviews and text message reports. In responding to the question of whether CS significantly impacted her educational journey, Sandra explained, “I feel like I am learning so much that I did know before.”

Daniella was 23 years old at the time of interviews and text message reports. She identified as Mexican, undocumented, female, and as a “senior” transfer student. She indicated that she is both a first-generation college student and immigrant, making the journey with her parents from Mexico. She reported that her mother completed some high school in Mexico. Daniella indicated that she was part of any campus organizations and owed that to her status as a commuter-student, previously travelling from a city about 40 miles away to campus for classes. Daniella had completed nine courses in CS at the time of the first interview and was taking two more during the period of interviews and text message reports. When she responded to the question of whether CS had impacted her significantly as a student in her educational journey, she explained “I think I’ve learned a lot about Latinos in higher education and they’ve also motivated me to do more. I think if it wasn’t for that, I would have majored in sociology.”

## **Procedures**

Those meeting criteria were invited for the first face-to-face interview with the researcher in a convenient location for the participant such as a research office on the university campus. These interviews represented the first of three phases for the study, the second being a phase of text message exchanges capturing experiences while enrolled in a CS course. At the initial interview, participants were first given a demographic questionnaire to gather contextual information including age, gender identification, ethnicity, whether or not first-generation college student, and their generation in family's immigration history (See Appendix C). Before beginning the interview, the researcher reviewed informed consent forms with participants (See Appendix D), outlining their rights as a participant, the balance of inherent risks and benefits, and relevant psychological resource, and answering any questions. All interviews were audio recorded with participant consent. Each initial interview lasted 1 to 2 hours. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and were then analyzed using the formal steps in transcendental phenomenology. The audio files and interview transcripts were stored on a password-protected computer in the locked office of the researcher. Audio files of the interviews will be destroyed after completion of the study. This study consisted of three phases and students were be offered \$50 incentives in the form of Amazon gift cards, given in increments of \$15 and \$35 at both the completion of the first interview and completion of the final interview respectively.

The second phase of the study included interactions via text message while students concurrently took CS courses. The first set of text questions and prompts were sent to them by the researcher 2-3 weeks into their current course and then again two weeks later. Participants were invited to respond as soon as possible, while not interfering with their studies or interrupting their classroom experiences. These text questions and prompts were aimed at collecting participant experiences while participants concurrently experienced the

phenomena, promoting “fresh access” to the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). After the text prompts, students engaged in a final semi-structured interview with the researcher in the final two weeks or shortly after the end of their last CS course of the year to understand how students described the process of being in CS and its influence on their educational journey and goals. These interviews lasted between 25 and 60 minutes.

### **Instruments**

**Semi-structured interview protocols.** Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data on participants’ lived experiences and processes of engaging in Chicana Studies training as called for by phenomenological methodology (deMarrias & Lapan, 2003). The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed for the asking of follow-up questions not in the original interview protocol. This became especially important in the axial, or relating to the researcher’s own related experiences, co-construction of data between interviewer and interviewee, as both researcher and participants tried to understand their lived experience of CS. Questions from the first semi-structured interview protocol included those which established how CS has already impacted students, including: “what was CS been like for you?” and “how has CS impacted you outside class?” The second semi-structured interview protocol involved questions such as “has anything changed since our first interview?” and “what have you learned about CS?” (See Appendix A for Semi-Structured Interview Protocols).

**Text message protocol.** The text message interactions were centered upon experiences while participants were concurrently enrolled in CS. Prompts included questions such as: “What have your CS courses been like?” and “How would you describe the environment around CS?” These protocols were piloted with a CS student before overall

administration to participants to address any confusion in the protocol questions and hone their effectiveness with full participants.

### **Analysis**

Phenomenological research was chosen as the most appropriate methodological approach to answer the question of what is essential to the experience of being a CS major. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology (1994) was the design base for this study. The researcher sought to understand the "essence" (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of the lived CS major phenomenon. The transcendental phenomenological approach was appropriate for the research questions and participants because this study looked at a group of individuals sharing a specific sociocultural context that produces a lived phenomenon only experienced by this group. The researcher engaged in bracketing, which involves exploring personal position and experiences around the phenomenon to be explored. The researcher engaged in written reflection as to how his own experiences with CS and activism inspired by participation in CS relate to the questions being asked of a current undergraduate population. This exploration is an active dialogue entailing the processing and setting aside of researcher experiences that may influence the researcher's contributions to co-construction and their analysis of the data. After the bracketing process, interviews were conducted and transcribed before beginning the analytical process.

The researcher engaged in horizontalization, looking at statements made by CS students from interview and text message data around their experiences in CS and the influencing factors they observed. These statements were analyzed in terms of their significance in relation to the research questions. Significant statements were grouped by thematic meaning and analyzed in terms of their textural or structural qualities. Statements with textural properties were used to describe the reported experiences, or "what" it is to



experience living as a CS major (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Structural statements were used to compose a description of contextual factors, explaining “how” these experiences happened as they did. The researcher then developed a composite statement that outlines the essence of the lived experience of being a CS major. This statement will describe the essence of the CS experience for these participants.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The results for this study first entailed significant statements, identified by the researcher after thorough and repeated consultation with the text from qualitative interviews and text message exchanges. Those significant statements were labeled as either textural or structural statements, as per the methodology (Moustakas, 1994). Textural statements were those which explained “what” phenomena occurred in students’ experiences in CS, and structural statements explained “how” these phenomena came to happen. The textural statements were eventually grouped into four thematic areas: challenges, gains, support, and goals. *Challenges* were psychological or situational barriers experienced by participants, including transitioning from high school or community college to a university or not performing well in academic courses other than CS. *Gains* were either elements of psychological or academic thriving as described by students and involved, as examples, outcomes such as improved academic performance or motivation, a sense of community or belonging, critical consciousness. The theme of *Support* included forms of assistance that often involved friends and family encouraging their participation in CS and persistence in college. The *goals* were career aspirations beyond college as described by participants and ranged from immigration lawyer to academic advisor for underrepresented students. Structural statements made by participants landed in four thematic areas: professors, curriculum, peers, and environment. The theme of *Professors* included significant student and CS faculty interactions, which featured a large range of factors in students’ thriving throughout the data, such as motivation and personal guidance. Likewise, numerous aspects of *Curriculum*, or assignments and activities in CS classes, were identified by students and included the personal and reflective nature of class discussions. Connections to *peers* in

significant relationships over experiences or ethnic identity often emerged in the structural statements. Aspects of *Environment* in CS included Spanish language and music, as well as inclusivity. Results of the qualitative interviews, both initial and exit, are presented first, followed by the text message data, organized first by participant and then sequenced first by significant textural and then structural statements. The data is also presented in participants' words when possible to preserve the complex psychological process they underwent for more accurate and useful analysis.

### **Bianca**

Bianca's interview data included *Challenges* in the form of transitioning to college, homesickness, and impostor feelings relating to ethnicity. She reported *Gains* of improved academic performance, increased academic motivation, and diminished impostor feelings. She received *Support* mainly from family around feelings of homesickness. She identified the *Goal* of becoming a pediatrician who serves oppressed communities, particularly Chicanx and Latinx communities.

Bianca's interactions with *Professors* featured their relatability, when compared to Chemistry professors, and feelings of connection that helped address homesickness. Her interactions with *Curriculum* included personalized discussions, social justices focus, and encountering previously inaccessible material. Bianca noticed that she felt connected to *Peers* over ethnic identity and shared experiences. She identified Spanish language, music, and inclusivity as other aspects of *Environment* that helped her feel connected.

### **Textural Statements**

#### *Challenges*

Bianca described a series of experiences in college and in Chicanx Studies, the first being her early challenges in college:

Well, I know for the first year it was really rough...it was a very bumpy road and I started to question if college is good for me, but I felt like it was the right thing to do because I felt like I'm coming here and giving my money but my grades aren't really reflecting what I want them to be. Like going from high school and getting 4.0 all the time and then coming here and getting Bs, Cs and then having to retake some of the classes...I felt like maybe college isn't for me

Part of her challenges in college was expressing these experiences to friends and family. She stated, "...and it was kind of hard just trying to explain that to my family for them to understand like what I'm trying to feel."

Being a second-generation immigrant, Bianca also described the experience of ethnic or cultural identity challenges while being in Chicana Studies:

Just being born here in the United States, I felt like there's one side of me where I am American but then with my parents' background and just always having that Mexican household, I'm like half Mexican. Then I feel like it also is hard for an American and a Mexican just to be able to communicate. So, that's where I feel like the barrier is, and that's where it's hard to be able to feel included in any American thing basically. And I feel like it does have to do a lot with language, like it's hard for us to really understand and communicate with one another if we aren't allowing that to happen.

When asked if Chicana Studies helped her feel more included, Bianca explained:

Because I feel like because I am partly American and partly Mexican that I feel like I am the bridge to be able to help unite the two. I've been reading about the Chicana movement and I've noticed one of the writers said the Chicana movement is now in the hands of the youth, so that would be like my generation and he talks about how

communication is really the key to be able to help both sides to understand one another instead of just seeing one side. Like American is the land of the privileged and the Mexican are just the poor. Like we really need to evolve from that and see that we're more than that on both sides and be able to explain that to both sides.

Bianca alluded to being connected to CS course material or curriculum in this part of the interview, which is a structural statement on how CS addresses the ethnic and cultural identity challenges. She later expanded upon her explanations of the phenomenon of being in Chicax Studies. Regardless of any role CS played in the dealing with these challenges, Bianca described them as ongoing:

Well I knew in high school when they would ask what your ethnicity and your race is I would always say Hispanic and I still sometimes write Hispanic [she did write Hispanic on demographic form], but I know there is more to it than just one single label. I'm still trying to figure out what each label represents and means so that I can find my own label for myself so that I can find which one I want to choose.

### *Gains*

Bianca did, however, describe subsequent improved academic performance, “it wasn't until last year winter quarter where I took one of the Chicax Studies courses, it was Chicax Studies [name of course], and that was the first class where I actually got an A.” After successfully completing the course, she described having the experience of choosing CS as a major, “I decided I wanted to double major in Chicax Studies and chemistry...and a lot of people were saying ‘that’s a lot to handle, doing chemistry and like Chicax Studies.’ Bianca explained that being in Chicax Studies actually positioned her to do well as a double-major and gave her increased academic motivation, “but I felt like Chicano studies kind of helped balance out like the tough classes, and not necessarily saying Chicano

studies are easy classes but for me I can somewhat relate to it, I can enjoy it, and that's why I feel like it's easier for me." She further explained the phenomenon of increased academic motivation while simultaneously increasing workload:

It's just really easy to be able to read these stories [in CS], even if they are really lengthy like a 500 page book...I can read it like nothing in two, three days. Where if it's a chemistry class and I have to read a chapter that's maybe 20-30 pages, I can't do that.

Again, Bianca explained the gain of increased academic motivation, "really just going into the [Chemistry] courses I notice that when I do take a Chicax Studies course [at the same time], my grades are higher than if I don't take it."

Later in the semi-structured interview, Bianca synthesized her ideas on this increased academic motivation:

Even the readings, they're easier to understand and we are learning at the same time about something new that I didn't know before but it sticks more to me than it would if it were a chemistry textbook. The chemistry is mainly what I'm here for and that's what should be taking over most of my time, but sometimes I feel like it's the Chicax Studies courses because if there's reading that we have to do I'll focus more on those and finish those before I have to start working on chemistry just because I feel like, this is me studying at the same time but I'm just learning and it's more enjoyable. And it builds up your ability to study and then do the actual work of chemistry.

Again, she returned to experiencing this gain of increased academic motivation:

It really does balance out my classes and it makes it easier and motivating to be able to just come to a course like that one quarter where I didn't have a Chicax Studies

course, I just like wasn't ready for school to start. I didn't even want to go back to school, I kept on telling my parents 'just take me once I absolutely have to be back.' Like let's say I have a class at Monday noon, I didn't want to come back Sunday night. Maybe you could drop me off Monday morning and then I'll be back. But then with the Chicax Studies course when I had it spring break, having that transition I felt ready for this quarter to start.

She added, "Like I said, I feel like that's what really motivates me to go to class. And that's what makes me want a quarter to start so I can go to these classes that I've been wanting to go too for a while now."

### *Support*

Bianca was asked about any support she experienced while being in Chicax Studies and she identified support from friends or family as important sources of support, "just kind of with my family because if I do have questions about some of the topics I feel like I can talk to like my dad because he's Mexican and he'll understand the stories and the background and be able to help me understand what I'm missing from a character." Bianca often spoke about the experience of staying connected to family as *Support*:

Well, trying to explain chemistry courses they don't really like how would they understand it really. I mean I don't really understand it a lot of the time so it's hard to explain it to them. Then with the Chicax Studies courses I feel like I have some sort of backfall, so if I don't really know how to express myself with a topic I can ask my dad 'how do you feel about this?' and he'll give his perspective so even on my papers I feel like some of it is my writing and my words but after getting my dad's perspective.

She added, “I feel like it was easier just to explain and just have more connection with them [family] and even with topics that they don't know I can explain it to them...on characters, where the movement is, and where we're at.” She also connected to her experiences with family around CS to preserving her identity and culture, “because I know that after certain generations you'll start losing your parents heritage but I don't want my kids to lose that so I want to inform myself and have my parent's information so I can still pass on that to the next generation.”

When discussing her support and connection to family, Bianca described the experience of homesickness while in college:

Being homesick, that has really affected me. I have never really been away from home but I felt like this is a good experience to feel like I know I'm strongest with my family than apart. This is where I'm like somewhat independent from my family but I still know after college I want to return back home and figure myself out before I leave again.

### *Goals*

When asked about how being a student in Chicana Studies influenced or impacted any future goals, Bianca described her desire to one day work as a doctor:

Well, I always knew that I wanted to work with children, becoming a pediatrician and all that. But I liked knowing I can communicate well with Mexican kids.

Obviously, I can talk in Spanish and just being able to know all of this background even when I grow up and have children I'll be able to explain that to them and have that familiarity.

She further explained:



I remember at one point it was so clear that I wanted to be a pediatrician and lead to that goal but having stumbled with chemistry a couple of times and just seeing that it is difficult. Then, if I can't really do it well here and grad school or medical school is going to be a lot more workload, then how would that work out? But then taking the [Chicanx Studies] courses and just trying to find myself it's leading me to, maybe I still want to work with children so maybe I can find a career where I'm helping out my community but also wanting to work in the medical field and helping out children. So I was thinking maybe if the pediatrician route doesn't work out then maybe I can go into becoming a school nurse and going into communities where it's mostly Chicanx and help them out in the little bit I can.

### **Structural Statements**

#### *Professors*

Bianca also described in statements (labeled as structural) about how Chicanx Studies came to be for her. Professors were discussed by Bianca several times and were classified as structural experiences and observations:

It's more relatable and just "homie" where I felt like even the professors...because like they we Chicanx Studies professors or they were Mexican American or they identified as some aspect close to being Mexican I felt like that helped being able to relate with one of these teachers. Some of these teachers I felt could be like one of my uncles or my aunt.

She described the environment created by professors:

The professors that almost always usually talk Spanish like they have that ability to talk Spanish and they're always joking around because they can with us because we're so laid back. As a chemistry student we're always so uptight in a way and

we're just like 'teach me so I can get out as fast as I can' and then in the Chicana Studies course it's like 'oh no more time for catching up. I'm sorry you guys, we can't keep talking like this. I actually have to teach now.'

Bianca described how professors were instrumental in her development of as a student and, specifically, "thinking outside the box":

I feel like the professors are really supportive and they also help us by telling us that 'you don't have to be this, or you don't have to be that. You can be what you want and even with these labels you don't have to accept any, you can make your own as long as that's how you want to identify yourself and you feel comfortable with it.'

So, I feel like the professors help me to think out of the box in a sense.

She also identified a specific professor as a source of motivation and belief that she could "do it" in college, "yeah, and right now I'm taking one of her courses again. Yeah, so it wasn't until I took one of her courses that I felt like I could actually do it here. As long as I focus and I enjoy the courses, I feel like I can get great grades and start building from there."

Bianca also emphasized the feeling of connection to her professor in a series of statements labeled as structural:

I think it also just comes back to being able to relate to the professors and just having that really close comfort of being able to talk to them and even being able to talk to them in Spanish. Like, my other professors I can't really talk to them, like it's hard to ask them for questions for like chemistry, one of my professors I would go to her office hours and ask her 'how do I solve this problem or ask to explain this to me' and she would respond 'it's in the book, you can find the answer in the book.'

Bianca continued to allude to the connection she had with a CS professor and again brought up the feeling of professors seeming like family members to her:

I just come and sit down and the professor really just talks to you and out of nowhere she's like 'how's your day?' or stuff like that. I feel like just being able to talk about your day sometimes, even if the day barely started its really nice just being able to have someone older to talk to so you can feel like she can be like my aunt and I can pretend that's my aunt and can have that comfort of talking with my aunt.

Bianca made a statement intersecting structural (professors) and textural qualities around homesickness, explain how professors interacted with her experience of homesickness:

When I'm at home in [hometown], I don't really go out because I would rather be at home, safe, with my family and enjoying my family for the time that I have there. So when I go home on weekends my friends are like "why don't we hangout" but I just want to spend this time with my family. But when I come here I don't have anyone really family related but I feel like with the professors I can really relate to them and its more "homey."

She later continued her comparison of CS professors to an experience with a Chemistry professor:

For the Chicax Studies course, I feel so easy and open for me to go talk to them.

Whereas the chemistry professors I think, 'I'm just not going to go in because they are going to tell me that it's in the book.' So what's the point of going in their office hours if they are just going to tell me it's in the book, figure it out from there?

Bianca explained that a CS professor was influential in her choice to double-major in CS and Chemistry, as well as being able to ask for support in her student development:

With Chicax Studies I feel like, because of the professors are what lead me to want to double major and that has also lead me to want to do research with them, and I know that if I need a letter of recommendation, I can go to them and ask them for

that. I know that if I wanted a letter of recommendation from a chemistry department it's kind of hard just because I don't have a relationship with them.

She also recounted an experience of being acknowledged by a professor:

She was like 'who is [name of interviewee]' and I stood up and said 'oh, that's me' and she was like 'thank you for emailing me and taking an interest in this course.'

Then everyone in the class was like 'what kind of teacher would actually acknowledge a student like that?' So then again, it was just having that connection with the teacher and being able to interact with them as easy as it is with a family member.

Tied to this same experience was an expression of the emotional connection Bianca felt with the professor in this moment, "it was really heartwarming and I felt joy just felling that I was pleasing and making a professor feel like what they're doing for us is actually impacting us and we want to take more of their courses."

### *Curriculum*

Bianca also discussed aspects of the CS curriculum that she identified as playing a role in some of her experiences, specifically in this case another textural experience of increased academic motivation:

I felt like each quarter, like that one quarter where I didn't take a Chicax Studies course I just went in and didn't feel as motivated just because I felt like, okay this is just, you got to learn the topic like for the bio classes, I have to memorize the topics and just go into the final. Whereas with the Chicax Studies courses, I always feel like there's so much space for you to identify yourself and just try and find where you fit in.

Bianca also made several statements that addressed the types of reflection, interaction, and discussion present in CS courses, best described as statements addressing curriculum for CS. Bianca again compared CS courses to other courses, in this case chemistry and biology:

With the chemistry and biology classes it's really just multiple choice and the answer is right there. But with Chicana Studies courses there's no real correct answer and that's why they always make it free response. And even when it's not that, it's an essay where you can still express yourself and you're not really wrong, as long as you can persuade the reader.

Bianca then continued to express the personal connection between her experiences and CS curriculum, and how it is potentially tied to motivation and performance for her:

Every time I go to the classroom, I feel like it's an open environment where I can really express myself. And based on the readings, I can also read and say to myself 'that has happened to me' or I can relate to this story...the stories and the readings really connect with me and I feel like that's what helps me to really know the readings and remember them later on.

Part of this connection between CS curriculum and the personal, Bianca described the importance of exploring her own ethnic identity through CS:

I felt like it [CS courses] just helps really identify who I am. And even though all of these labels that everyone throws around in Chicana Studies courses in general, it's kind of really hard to identify yourself and even with taking all these courses. I'm going to try and identify what a Hispanic is, what a Chicana is, I feel like I'm a blend of all of them. So it's kind of really helping identify who I am and I don't really need to put a label on myself.

She later continued along this thread of exploring her identity through curriculum:

One of the courses I'm taking now, the writing one, we're talking about identity and how it's not really easy for someone just to identify as something. But when it comes to two ethnicities fighting with one another then that when it's easier for you to just say 'I'm a Chicana.' But when it just comes down to you 'Are you a Chicana?' I don't know, I'm a bit of this and that...it's harder to define who you really are and how you really feel. You identify when someone asks you like, 'are you Hispanic? Are you Latina? Chicana? Mexican American?'

The ethnic and cultural identity challenges that Bianca described before appeared to interact with the CS curriculum facilitating her identity exploration:

Sometimes, I'm taking a course that focuses on Chicanx and then at one point it redirects "maybe I'm more Chicanx" but then I take another course and it's focusing on Latinx and Hispanics. And then I'm like wait, and then I just go back and it keeps bouncing me back and forth on the identity and it's just hard for me to really find what I am.

Ultimately, Bianca expressed, "I think just knowing that's where my heritage is [CS] and I really just want to learn more about it."

Another aspect of CS curriculum that Bianca spoke to was the focus on social justice issues, particularly issues around gender and misogyny for Chicanx-identified students, "lately I've been focusing on gender and sexuality and just really seeing the imbalance between Chicano and Chicana writers. Like I don't really want to focus on racism between these two but really to see the conflicts within our own ethnicity." Bianca reported that one of her courses addressed aspects of gender in the history of Mexican and Chicanx culture:

I took that class it was really talking about the colonial and conquest era and it was

talking mostly about the Chicana heroes we would always talk about as kids like Sor Juana or La Malinche.... Growing up I always knew who La Malinche was and I knew she was like the bad person, like you should not imitate her but then taking that course instead of hearing the male perspective on La Malinche we finally were given the female or Chicana's version...and it was completely opposite, it was the positives of what she did and everything like that and I really enjoyed just seeing another view instead of just someone else just telling me how I should view her.

A class focusing on Chicana writers as part of its curriculum was influential for her:

Now we're actually focusing on just Chicana writers and then in my writing class we're deciding on a topic and I really want to talk about the different perspectives that we can be given, but we can choose which side we want to listen to. Instead of just saying the male told us how we should view the female, this is what the female thinks we should view on the female.

Bianca also identified previous inaccessibility to course material such as she encountered in CS as a stand-out feature of CS curriculum:

I really want to learn more about my past and just know what my parents and their parents have gone through. And just to see why we are where we are right now because of our past. So in the Chicana Studies course with [name of professor] last year, she said 'we can't really understand the present know if we don't understand the past.'

### *Peers*

Bianca also described how her peers were an important feature of her experiences in CS, and again compared the experience to that in other course environments:

Most of us that are Mexican, that's where I see them most. Like in my chemistry class its scattered within everyone, you can't really pinpoint us out. But then with the Chicax Studies course you can see who we are as a whole, and we bring all of our ideas out. So, like when I said the Chicax Movement is really now on us, I feel like that's where we really voice our opinions out and really help each other out and understand what it means to be Chicax.

Specific to the distinction she made between CS and Chemistry, Bianca explained how those differing environments affected the nature of her relationship to another Chicana-identified student:

One specific friend, I always knew her through the chemistry courses and we always saw each other but it wasn't until we got into the Chicax Studies courses where we became really close because we were actually expressing our ideas other than on factual evidence from Chemistry. But now this is more of a Humanities course so really for us to be able to express ourselves and that where we were able to really become close in that like, she's my best friend here in the university.

Bianca described the size of the CS community and aspects of Mexican culture as being part of interacting with her *peers*:

Like I said with the Chemistry students, we're in our second year so we're starting to see familiar faces but still just walk past one another. But with Chicax Studies courses because they're smaller courses and it's not 200 in a classroom but it's now 20 in the classroom, we'll see familiar faces but we'll actually say hi and wave at one another even if we don't know each other that well and I feel like thats just because that's how we were kind of raised. Even if you don't know someone, like my dad will



ask another Mexican person ‘oh where are you from?’ and if they're from the same area they'll be like ‘oh, i know your aunt.’

Bianca also described feeling a connection to her *Peers*, primarily over aspects of identity and experience:

They feel this type of connection already and they just feel so open already and not necessarily vulnerable but open to one another. I feel like even here we feel that and we know that and understand what we’re going through and they understand what it’s like to be a Chicax student at [name of university]. With the courses and having so many other students that can relate to all of this and at the time right now, it kind of helps us just know that there's someone else that thinks exactly like me but we know that we have one another to be able to be strong and united against any oppression that comes.

### *Environment*

Bianca also identified aspects of the CS environment that stood out to her, including language, music, and a feeling of inclusivity. She first referenced the importance of Spanish language at times in the CS environment, which again included a reference to home and family, “just being able to speak Spanish and then the topics were able to talk about, and then the professor when she jokes around, she says a Spanish joke. I can relate to that and understand it and that’s like something my mom would say.” She also described music as part of the CS environment, “every time we enter the class room she’s [professor] always playing music and its always Latin-based or Mexican, Spanish music so it’s really nice going into the classroom and hearing a song that’s so familiar and it’s like what I listen too.” Again, “like I said, for one of the classes they'll even play music and I’ve noticed one of the

TAs wears the Mexican cowboy hats and it's really nice just to be able to see because you don't really see that on campus.”

Other aspects of CS environment, as described by Bianca, included programmatic and mentorship support:

I felt like even the library itself, the library has sections for each major. Like, there's an art room...and chemistry...But i feel like its so nice that on the second floor there's just a Chicax Studies section and sometimes just walking through the library there's artifacts or artwork that one of the students has presented and it's specifically on Chicax studies. So, it's so nice just to have a place to show where we're at and be inclusive in this university and it's not just science.

She continued:

Within the library there's this librarian or research person that helps us find new research within books and papers specifically for Chicax Studies so any time we go to them or anything, we know them by name. So, like there's [name] and I think it was yesterday or two days ago we had to meet up for one of the classes at the library to be able to learn how to really research papers and everything and it was so nice to see 'like oh there's [name].' It's so nice to see a familiar face help teach us, I feel like even when it's someone you don't know, they always approach you and they shake your hand and say 'oh my name is [name] and I'll help you out if you need me and I'm always up here and here's my contact information if you ever need me at night or anything.'

### **Elisa**

Elisa identified *Challenges* of being homesick, transferring from community college, and doing poorly in other subjects. She discussed *Gains* such as self-efficacy, diminished

impostor feelings, positive ethnic identity, sense of belonging, and comfort around her distress related to undocumented parents. Elisa spoke about *Support* from family as she attempted to stay connected to them in college. She shared her *Goal* of becoming an academic counselor for underserved students.

Elisa shared the experience of her interactions with *Professors* that inspired her and gave her confidence in pursuing her goals. She explained the aspects of *Curriculum* which stood out to her: encountering role models, addressing social justice issues and connecting to stories about undocumented parents. Elisa discussed *Peer* interactions and alluded to the shared experiences and the sense of community she felt with them. She identified aspects of unsafe *Environments* in other courses and being inspired by the history her campus' CS environment.

## **Textural Statements**

### *Challenges*

Elisa provided a series of statements labeled as textural in her interviews, beginning with her challenges in college, including feeling homesick:

My first quarter it was kind of hard just because I was moving away for the first time from my parents from [city name]. I was just...I'm very attached to my parents so I was just kind of like, damn, like I really got to get used to it here... and it was hard in terms of that.

However, she described her experience in transitioning from community college to college, and encountering challenges, as a positive one and one in which familiar peers played a part:

It's been again it's been like an overall positive experience. What has really made the adjustment from community college to this you know to this huge university is that I am able to take classes with people of my same background you know. We're from

the same play social socioeconomic background you know. A lot of us are first-generation students or college students should I say. So, I feel like there's a link when I'm when I go to class for first time there's like almost like an understanding among the students. Like we're all like kind of new to this you know we're kind of outnumbered. I don't know there's like this understanding of course. And we're both from like the same cultural or ethnic background. So, for me that's like something that was very comforting and very helpful in adjusting to a college life. or at least like university life here. So, for me that that was really that's one thing.

She described encountering challenges while taking courses in Black Studies, “I did take like a difficult class my first quarter, so I did have difficulties. It was Black Studies. People had warned me like the Black Studies department is no joke. I had to like know my limits and stuff.” She explained how the experience was a challenge for her identity as a student and an experience that eventually funneled her towards CS:

I would say probably that Black Studies class for me it was like...I've never had any bad grades in community college and stuff for me it was a shock I was hoping my gosh like I did not do well. I got a D in the class. and I was like oh my god what happened to me? And then I remember talking to my sister and she's like ‘what happened to you?’ So for me it was like kind of like what I really need the type of classes I'll do well in you know. So for me and I was like something that really stuck out in terms of my experience here because that's never happened to me before. But like I really did learn from it.

### *Gains*

Elisa identified several gains through statements analyzed as textural that she tied to her experience of being a student in CS. She identified confidence as a student as one of

those gains, “definitely it's giving me more confidence in general as a student. Looking back, like this June will be like four years since I graduated high school. Looking back, I wouldn't have thought that I go to a research university institution and that I'd be studying a discipline like to Chicano studies.” She continued to describe this confidence:

And as a student, it [CS] gives me confidence to say like you know I'm still like...even though I'm not in like a stem major or in a prestigious major or anything like that, like I'm still a student that's like very successful at a university. And I have the ability to be successful post-bachelors. So, for me I am...that's like how it has impacted my educational journey. So, in that way and in terms of like looking at my career and looking in the future, it's definitely giving me confidence.

Elisa described this process as one that helps address impostor feelings:

Right now it's impact means that it's giving me the process of giving confidence as well. We talked about the comfort, about giving me comfort and like how I feel like I belong here. Like I'm like I'm home almost. It's giving me that like sense of like you're doing well here you're, OK? And take like learning about yourself the most, it give me a comfort in that feeling.

She continued to describe how the confidence and efficacy as a student allowed her to have more empathy for herself while on her educational journey:

Learning about these issues, I'm kind of like well like it's not my individual fault or anything that I kind of feel like the other. I kind of feel like I, like I'm going to fail or something. Learning about these issues have come to give me the comfort like I have the ability to kind of better myself as a student and because of that I feel like I do like belong in the educational institution. Or I do belong in, like, a discipline that may be dedicated to research. So, learning about issues in Chicana Studies or about the

groups Chicana help made me feel like you know kind of resolve some issues I have with myself.

Elisa continued to elaborate on this confidence:

So, I guess like every time I like give myself confidence I like tell myself like who cares what anybody else thinks you know? I like this discipline [CS] and I like learning it and I know other people are appreciative. So let me just focus on my stuff and what I want to learn, what I wanna do.

In addition to confidence as a student, Elisa described gaining more knowledge as part of her experience in CS as well:

I feel like I'm definitely intellectually growing with knowledge. I feel like I just read a lot. These courses require a lot of reading, which is something I enjoy when I like reading it. So, I feel like I have a lot of knowledge more about myself and my background. So, I just feel a lot more informed, a lot more intellectually grown I guess you could say.

For Elisa, gaining more knowledge allowed her to engage in conversations about Chicana history and ideology:

I'm taking courses and I'm reading books, biographies about histories. Obviously, when you study it, it like, stays with you so when like the time comes and you want to like share insight on a particular issue in the Chicana community or something like that, I at least have like some type of knowledge to like say to my own words. Kind of like paraphrasing... like let's say it I read a book on some person or like somebody's like having a conversation about that person, I can kind of paraphrase from like the book into the conversation as well. So, I can easily better communicate because I would definitely say like beforehand before taking Chicana Studies, if

there is like a conversation going on about I don't know Chicanx or something like that and, yeah, I wouldn't be able to kind of communicate my ideas.

As she alluded to before, Elisa described more fully the exploration of self-knowledge and identity through CS:

The material that's been taught... a lot of the classes that I took were like on the history of Chicanx or the Chicanx movement, history or autobiographies about Chicanos. And learning about my history has been very helpful too in reclaiming that. Like it's more like also a reminder like I should be here and I shouldn't doubt myself because like there has been this whole history and there's a discipline dedicated to like people of my like... of my background so it's almost like a comfort as well to be like, okay you should be here. And like I'm here to do what I want to learn and like to you know go on my educational journey. So, with the material being taught and the people who are taking the classes are definitely what helped my experience be so positive so far.

Elisa identified a sense of community and belonging as one of the *Gains* she experienced through her enrollment in CS courses:

What I have noticed taking Chicano studies courses is that I see familiar faces... I'm like I've seen you before and I've seen you before and so that tells me that the Chicanx Studies major in general is kind of like smaller. Definitely smaller in comparison to like... if I were to be in sociology that major is very like it's a very popular so for me it's like kind of created this... we take the same classes. There's few courses being offered in comparison to other disciplines of course so I feel like I see familiar faces all the time. And I see them at like events you know that are like sponsored by Chicanx Studies. And that gives me kind of like ... I don't know it's

kind of like this community type of like feel. Like I feel so good here. It feels so nice seeing you.

Elisa described how a sense of community and belonging was a gain associated with her participation in CS:

Giving me the process of giving confidence as well. We talked about the comfort.

About giving me comfort and like how many like feel like I belong here like I'm like

I'm home almost. It's giving me that like sense of like doing well here, you're okay.

And like take like learning about you, it gives me a comfort in that feeling.

She described how this community helped her address the psychological distress around having previously undocumented parents:

Like knowing that like I am able to they kind of overcome this [fears of parents being deported] is well...overcome whatever like fears I had as a child as well and whatever. Like even though my parents are still not citizens, like they're still like legal residents, even for a long time they were undocumented. So, I'm like I'm able to like overcome this background not like forget about it completely but like kind of embrace it. And like yeah, they were undocumented immigrants. Yeah, I'm a student here at [university name] but I'm still able to like do what I came here for.

Elisa did, however, feel like the community does need to be more progressive, an example of critical consciousness as a gain:

Like I've come to the realization that it [CS] has to still, like, be like progressive as well. I feel like at some point it kind of stopped being progressive. And we kind of like got stuck in terms of the professors and the courses being taught. I just feel like it needs like I can't say for lack of better words like revamping. Maybe sexism in the Chicano Movement should be taken further. Maybe not just like kind of brush over it



in class. So for me I feel that the kind of having to challenge the Chicano Studies already existing right now, kind of like driving into it more.

In addition to aspects of gender and gender oppression, Elisa identified the need to address the Mexican-centered nature of courses and conversations in class:

Also a lot of like Mexican-centered conversation goes on. Just because I feel like Chicax Studies should be or has expanded more to like also Central American students as well. Like I feel like the erasure that like they're not Chicax it's kind of problematic as well. Like...a person, a student that comes from like Salvadorian immigrant parents or is of Salvadorian descent, I feel like they should have the ability to claim Chicax as a political identity as well. Or, a social political identity as well. So yeah, it tends to be Mexican-centered, which I try not to be like challenging but I tend to bring up the idea of like I feel like Central Americans should be in this conversation as well.

When asked at the end of the first interview if there was anything else at all that she wanted to add that she did not get a chance to address, Elisa again brought up critical consciousness and addressing issues within CS itself:

Well, I was wondering if what are you were going to ask if there was something that I did not like about Chicax Studies. I think I touched upon it earlier about how there are times where I feel like Chicax courses could be or at least like the core courses, the discourse could be changed in many ways. Just because it could be more progressive. It could touch more on issues like there is a lot of like anti-black issues in the Chicano Movement. There's a lot like sexism, a lot of sexism in the Chicano Movement. So for me I am not that I like I hate the Chicax Studies courses here, but I just wish that it would be more progressive in that way, that it would be like... the

professors I know may...some of them are maybe comfortable in teaching what they learned in their time and then from that they stuck to that. So, I feel like the curriculum could be modernized in that way, progressive in that way. We touch up on these issues that are within the community more often.

As an additional feature of the *Gain* of critical consciousness, Elisa then described how it enabled her to challenge others' problematic views and speech:

A lot of the issues or histories that I learn in Chicana Studies I tend to share with the people who don't have like educational access so easily as I do, such as my parents you know. I tend to kind of like a casually like maybe in conversation like slip in something I go 'well did you know that' or 'this and this like happened' and they're 'like really?' and 'we didn't know that.' Also, I tend to it kind of like... if they say that something that's a little like problematic I guess I kind of have like the word. Not in Spanish but like I have like the idea from what I've learned to kind of like talk to them about it. Like sometimes they express, they internalize their like immigration experience onto like Central Americans just because sometimes Mexicans tend to think that they're better than any other like Latin American country, say Salvadorians. They like kind of expressed like resentment for like the caravans coming from Central America. They'd be like questioning like they literally say like a lot of those people are criminals like I don't know 'why they want to come over here?' But you know that there's been a history of like immigration into the US and I kind challenged them on that. I probably give them like some type of like history run down and immigration into like the US from Mexico.

*Support*

Elisa described forms of *Support* in textural experiences, primarily the connection and support she experiences with her family while participating in CS:

Both my parents and the study [CS] have like origins in Mexico. So, like having this discipline I know that my dad is very... he's like fascinated that like there is such a discipline like that. He's like oh you're studying about like this culture and people and the social issues. He doesn't say that but like paraphrasing in his word. And then so I feel like they're supportive of it and they kind of understand me better because of it. They tend to...they like Facebook a lot. And they send me Memes. And a lot of them have to do with, like, a... generational differences or something like that. And so, I feel like they have a better sense of like who I am as a person now. Just because sometimes there is that generational cultural gap between us just because my Spanish isn't very well, isn't very good you know. And there are some concepts like in general in life that I understand that, but they don't. So, I feel like if anything to Chicano Studies has kind of brought us together, kind of brought us like to understand each other more. Like I understand more about their experience in helping immigrants and they understand me more as like a student learning about these experiences.

### *Goals*

Elisa described having the *Goal* of becoming an academic counselor that was influenced by CS, specifically one that is informed on issues on inequality in education:

I feel like I could use like the knowledge of the history of the issues that are being discussed in Chicano Studies courses throughout my whole career. I feel like I can...anywhere I go to, I may want to be going to education or I may like...very broadly I may want to like be an academic advisor or something. And I very much

like want to implement what I've learned into like a cultural perspective at my future career. Feel like I have this like...I have this background and this knowledge of these issues like maybe I can implement it and use it in a future career.

Part of this future career *Goal* involves contribution and giving back:

Specifically talking about inequalities in education, like I never want to... say if I am an academic advisor and I have a student that you know thinks that they're doing bad because they don't have the ability to be academically successful, I would want to like use like what I have learned in like inequalities in the education, about like structural issues... like where do you live, what's your family background? I would want to know that. Like kind of like give students like an advising on that. Like, 'it's not entirely your fault that you were not doing as well as you wanted to be.' There are other issues and other factors that go into that. So that's like a very specific example but I would want to implement basically...I would want to implement ideas like those into like a career in the future.

Another future *Goal* Elisa is exploring is in research and CS:

Before I didn't think about research a career research, especially in Chicax Studies. So now that I know that there's like a PhD program here at [name of college] for Chicax Studies. I didn't know that that was there but like I feel like that could always be an option because I learn from my professors about the program. So that's definitely something that I thought about.

## **Structural Statements**

### *Professors*

Elisa also made a series of statements which were labeled as structural that helped explain her experiences in CS. The structural theme of professors also emerged in Elisa's interviews.

Professors like [name of professor]. After taking one class with him I like learned that he's actually a very, very prominent figure in Chicax Studies, if you want to put a hierarchy on it. So just learning about all the different staff and like their reputations and stuff and a lot of them are kind of like the OGs of Chicax Studies. Like, oh my gosh, they were like one of the first people to write about this. Like Professor [name] in like social psychology in terms of like that kind of Chicax Studies perspective. Like she did that. A lot of professors kinda like drew me to Chicax Studies as well.

For Elisa, professors provide her with confidence in pursuing her future *Goals*:

So again I guess touching up on professors. Knowing that professors and a lot of them like spent their careers and their lives like researching and doing work to expand Chicax Studies even further, that's giving me confidence. And like comfort. Knowing like, okay well I can if I want to. I'm able to do that as well. And seeing that like some professors have been successful...like [name of professor] for example like, he expresses that this has been like his life and it has been very fulfilled with like his area of study. So he's like a history professor but like...with his specialty in Chicax Studies. So knowing that like he had all this work and that he enjoyed doing all this work is kind of like...Well, like, I can do that as well.

### *Curriculum*

Elisa identified aspects of curriculum in statements labeled as structural, initially around historical figures in CS that she encountered through course material:

Learning about let's say Dolores Huerta you know. Just because she's a woman and in her time she wasn't...I don't think she was appreciated much. And even now I don't feel like she's like held to the same you know same pedestal as Cesar Chavez. So learning about her and learning how she was like she's a Latina you know, like she went to college and she tried getting her education learning about herself. And how she kind of like brought herself up in in terms of education. It kind it also gives me a type of like well if she can do it in like the 60s, like what like what says I can't do it now you know? So learning about different types of histories kind of like give me the sense of like, OK, well like there's this whole...I should feel like I can climb up that educational ladder as well so that's kind of what I'm trying to get at.

Elisa continued to described experiences of connecting to real stories through CS curriculum:

We read a book on Diane Guerrero, a good actress, and she's Colombian. So like learning about her story about like basically her personal stories that like as a child she came back one day you know? Like her family is not coming back home you know she found out like her parents were gone you know? Like they had been deported and she's just kind of like, she was a child and she's just kind a like or what do I do? That for me was kind of like something that hit home because you know I'm my parents were undocumented for like half their lives here. Just barely they became legal residents. And growing up as a child that was always my fear you know. Like being like, wow, like my parents are such cautious drivers because they like cannot be pulled over by police by any means necessary. That's our one priority like we cannot like violate any traffic laws because like we can't like risk that. We can't risk being pulled over by officers and then like being asked for ID. Like we don't have an

ID, that's like what was gonna happen then. So, my fear was always having like my parents deported or like coming back home and being disappeared. So, for me like that was something that is very kind of hit home.

CS curriculum also provided an ethnic identity connection for Elisa, “so I guess what drew me to Chicax Studies was like the realization that there is like this whole discipline created around like I guess like an ethnic social political group. So, I think if anything that's what drew me.” Another part of the connection between Elisa’s identity and CS *Curriculum* was having Chicax feminist role models, “I guess like the big thing is that I identify as like a Latina and I could like definitely like...like how we talked before it like I definitely relate to a lot of experiences of Chicana activists. Yeah I kind of like Dolores Huerta.” In general, CS *Curriculum* addressing social justice issues, particularly racism in education, stood out for Elisa:

I think learning about Chicax Issues that have impacted my community has really like...just learning about the issues that like there is an institution or a discipline or a class that's like discussing like inequality in education for Chicax. That’s a class I’m taking. I'm learning about the structural inequalities for Chicax like dating back to like colonial times. Like now I get like why you know how a lot of like my community is like held back. It's just because we were kind of like set up in a way, depending on where you live, I guess, or depending on different factors.

### *Peers*

Elisa also provided statements on peers as part of her experiences in CS. She explains how her peers help her not feel alone in her experiences:

Again, it is a comfort knowing that like you know I wasn't the only one. And also like not only the people I'm reading books from but like the people around me in the

class you know. We're all in or we would have discussions and a lot of people would mention what I mention about myself and my background. So, having that is like really it was really nice to have, really comforting.

Discussions with peers were memorable for Elisa in normalizing agreement and disagreement over issues raised in class:

I really like having discussions as well. I feel like a lot of people we can all relate a lot to each other but then there's also like a lot of challenges to each other, which is also good I feel like. In a Chicana Studies course, I may not agree with somebody, with somebody that says something and they may not agree with me, which is fine. But then we also agree with each other later, which is also nice to have.

The discussions with peers provided Elisa with a sense of community again in a comfortable environment:

So, I feel like since the size of the majors is more like it gives a sense of community to summarize. But also, I feel like I'm able to like discuss in front of people as well. More likely if I were to see them often. So, and in general with Chicana Studies courses it feels again like with the professor and the students together in learning about history or issues the class may be centered on. It gives a sense of community for me. Again, going back to...like I feel comfortable in this learning environment.

Elisa also identified aspects of the CS environment that were significant to her. She pointed out that she is more aware of being in an unsafe or uncomfortable environment:

One of my fears is like going to go into university or college and start class and be surrounded by people that I could not relate anything to you know. Be that people who are white or people who are come from a upper-class family or like a material that I am not too like comfortable with. Like science or something. I don't know or



math or something. So...that creates like an environment of like insecurity, of being with students that are not for my background or also I guess professors are not from my background as well.

Being part of a department that was instrumental in Chicana Studies history was also identified by Elisa as part of the environment, “The fact that [name of university] is known for the birth of Chicana Studies discipline, that has also helped you know, has also given me the confidence to really be proud of my major and what I want to study.”

### **Isabel**

Isabel’s main *Challenge* as a student was doing poorly in other subjects. She identified *Gains* of increased academic motivation, critical consciousness, validation, and a sense of belonging. Isabel discussed parents as her main source of *Support* and her attempts to remain connected. She shared her *Goal* of becoming an immigration lawyer or environmental lawyer that was shaped by her experiences in CS.

Isabel spoke about her connection to *Professors*, as well as their approachability, guidance, and relatability. Her interactions with *Curriculum* included positive experiences with encountering feminist role models, engaging in personal reflections, and addressing social justice issues. Isabel’s *Peer* relationships included shared experiences of ethnic identity and making social connections. Aspects of *Environment* significant to her included the inspiration of her department’s historic achievements in developing a large CS program and the experience of Spanish music.

### **Textural Statements**

#### *Challenges*

Isabel shared a series of textural statements beginning with college challenges, which included barely passing courses in subjects other than CS:

I really struggled my first quarter. I was taking like a dinosaurs class. I took like a psych one and I took... I think a writing class. And I think the easiest one...actually was none of them. And but I think I passed everything. I was kind of like content with like just passing that point. Yeah, but yeah at first it was hard and then like my second quarter I got more into it. And like I definitely started doing better after my first quarter, but the first quarter was really hard.

### *Gains*

Part of Isabel's "doing better" included increased academic motivation as a *Gain* she tied to her participation in CS, "I feel like I've definitely developed like more of an interest in certain things that I wouldn't have had I not taken the courses that I have. So, it's like, I mean for me, a cool learning experience. Like being able to take classes in Chicana Studies." She even described her experiences in CS as developing her reflectiveness and critical thinking, "I feel like I've become more like reflective on what I say before saying it. I think I do more like academic work now. I just think I have to reflect on everything that I read and stuff."

Isabel also described a feeling of validation that came with her participation in CS, a gain expressed in statements deemed textural. She began by describing validation through a course in colonization and gender that she found unique to her experiences in academia:

I think validating would be something that comes to mind. I mean it comes from a course I take with [name of professor] and it was I think like colonizing feminism. That was something, that was like, a really like eye-opening course. And it was I felt like it was also healing in a way, which is just something that I think is particular to her teaching style. But I think it's often been something you don't really find in academia.

She also described the emotions that come along with the sense of validation, “It definitely just makes it feel good and makes you feel seen and it makes you, at least for me, wanna like do more for people so that they could be seen you know.”

Another gain described by Isabel through statements labeled as textural was a sense of community, “I mean it's just we have like a different sense of community. You know we really rely on each other. That has to do with it. I think in my experience.” She described the friends she made and the community they formed as part of her validation process:

I think it's definitely been my friend group because we also take classes together and I remember taking [name of CS Course], that was my first class that I took. Several of my friends also took it. And so, it like made talking about...like what we talking about in class it just validated what we were talking about in life you know. Because it's like, oh yeah, like I experienced the same thing. You're like, oh like I feel safe, and I experience this. So, you also learn I think from your group of friends.

She described a sense of belonging that came along with the gain of community, “I just think you feel like...I guess it gives you a sense of belonging. You could see yourself like in what you're learning you know. Through your experiences too or you can relate to that. You have some idea of how what you're learning has impacted you and the people around you.” She even described an emergent awareness of the vulnerability of her community, “at the border and all of that stuff, like obviously that has an impact on us too. Just in general so it's definitely like brought my attention to a lot of those issues and issues that impacted our community.”

Isabel described a developing critical consciousness and challenging others' problematic views as a *Gain* associated with her participation in CS:

It's made conversations with my parents or even my peers too...it's just made conversations better. I would say like not more relevant, but you know like it just it's easier for me to bring up. Like to have conversations that I guess would be difficult had I not had you know because of this. Like you feel that conversations are necessary. It's easier for me to have them now know. Just like addressing the problems in your family. I feel like a lot of people are you know, they're so homophobic, they're so anti-black. A lot of it just having conversations with them. Like it is just easier to advocate for other people.

Isabel felt like she was now able to defend her critical thinking in conversations:

Just sort of change the conversations and give examples of why racism is what has it been. Like to sort of change some of those conversations. I mean my friends are like you know, they have those conversations with me. Yeah, they're my friends, and so I feel like we have similar at least thinking. My parents...with my mom it's much easier, with my dad it's a little harder.

Isabel also felt like her mental health improved after she began enrolling in CS courses, another gain emerging through statements deemed textual, "I feel like it [CS] has made me more aware of like mental health, like coming to college and stuff. That's just not something I really had thought about prior to coming. You know it's just like I guess it was just like my own little world in high school." She then described this awareness expanding to others:

I think probably just more awareness of like my behavior towards others. Just being sympathetic. I think I'm just more sympathetic. I mean you just never know people could be going through. They have other things going on in their lives that isn't necessarily like you know...they're not going to want to tell you really. Like I'm

going through this you know. So just to be like more understanding or just be willing to understand or be willing to realize like people have their own things going on, so it's not always like your fault.

### *Support*

Isabel felt like the support she received from her parents in pursuing Chicana Studies as an academic major was significant and she expressed this in statements analyzed as textural:

I think just like I like this struggle of like our parents get us to school you know like getting us into institutions of higher learning or because obviously owing...least in my case my parents don't have the resources for that. And they really put their best effort. [Crying] I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. [Drinks water]. You feel like you really, it really does take a village [Crying]. It does take a lot for people to get you there. And like you if you're in a position to help somebody right. Why not? I'm here because people think like that too.

She continued to describe her family connection and support:

I mean I think bringing those ideas [from CS] into them [conversations with parents] has never been a problem for us. Because we're able to discuss things. And it's like you're always not going to get along. I think that's, like, the norm. But like we're able to discuss these things. And when I mentioned it to my dad, he was pretty happy about it. That I was in the major. He was like, 'that's so cool you know.' I was like, 'oh we learned about this and that.' He was like 'I learned about that in my third grade.'

### *Goals*

Isabel also describes the goal of becoming an immigration or environmental lawyer that was shaped by her participation in CS, “I definitely want to go into law and I want to do either immigration or environmental law. And kind of driving back to what I said about how black and brown communities are always like the ones that suffer because of the environmental degradation.” She explained that CS helped her narrow her goal to a specific kind of law, “You know law school. I think I knew I wanted to be a lawyer but I think just like it definitely changed my...like the specifics you know. Yeah. It's not like I want to do like injury law you know.” Part of the shaping of this goal included a sense of giving back or contribution, “for me, I think it's just wanting more people that experience the validation that I've been able to like in a broader sense. And hopefully like for them it would happen at an earlier age.”

### **Structural Statements**

#### *Professors*

Through statements made in her interviews, Isabel identified her connection to professors as a significant feature of her experiences in CS, “Like my professors are really understanding. They're like willing to help you. Most of them are. But I feel like I definitely connect to my professors and Chicana Studies more than I do my professors in Global Studies.” The approachability of professors stood out to her as well, “and I feel like they're just easier to approach just in general because I feel like at least like my Chicana Studies professors, they're like, oh just come talk to us and then you know the conversation will go from there.” This had not been Isabel's experience with professors in other subject areas. She continued, “...but with my Global Studies courses I feel like it's more you have to act like you have to ask a question and you have to like at least know something about the question so you can't go in not knowing anything.” She explained that she often looked for

professors or teaching assistants that were women of color, “I feel like the conversation is just much easier to have with Chicana Studies professor. I’ll look for a TA, like if the professor is like, you know not really easily approached. I’ll look for a TA. It’s usually women of color that I’ll look for.”

Isabel described performing better academically in CS courses because of the professors in those classes, “I’ve definitely done better in the classes where I’ve gotten to know my professors and where they’re like accessible. And it’s yeah it’s just like my grades are definitely better with professors that I can actually talk to.” She described the passion of the professors as part of her improved performance and motivation:

It’s also like if I think that professors are interested in what they’re teaching I wouldn’t want to like gravitate to that compared to like a professor that you know doesn’t have that. I feel like it seems like you get what you give right? So, if like the professor is giving you attention and you’re going over the things that are necessary and you need, you’re going to want to reciprocate that to them you know. Because they’re putting in the effort so why shouldn’t you?

She explained that the motivation extended to a potential future professional identity:

Just them having like Ph.D.s and stuff is like the wildest thing because I didn’t see that before you know. Like my...well my principal I guess got but he was like a white guy. Just the people that you know like with these really like high degrees they just don’t look like you, they don’t really like .. they’re not interested in like what you’re doing unless they’re studying you. Yeah. It was really cool to see that they had succeeded.

Professors helped Isabel feel like earning a PhD was attainable:

I mean it's just kind of like motivating I think definitely motivating. Like, oh, that's cool you know who doesn't want a PhD. It's like I guess it just makes it more realistic attainable you know like it's within reach.

Professors even provided Isabel with specific career guidance and support around her goal of becoming an immigration or environmental lawyer for her community:

[Professors communication to her] like the need just for lawyers for in our community really. Yeah it was really motivating to me that one of my teachers had told me that. Like she was just mentioning it...like, 2 percent of like, lawyers in the U.S. were Latina and we barely went over to the 1 percent like last year. Like you barely hit the 2 percent last year you know.

Isabel described professors as being relatable, “usually the professors are cool. They'll sometimes just talk about like their own day just like you know a regular conversation that doesn't seem like forced, it's genuine.” She did, however, point out how gendered comments have sometimes surfaced in her interactions with *Professors*:

But I guess it's like the dynamic like what I feel. There are some professors like...well, I've had two. They still just have like these ideas of like you know *machista* and it just slips out. Yeah. It's the old men professors. One of them isn't even that old. It still doesn't excuse it. Even like you know you would assume that they knew better. Yeah. Just like I don't really get that from the female professors. They're just more conscious or aware.

### *Curriculum*

Isabel described aspects of *Curriculum* that stood out from her experiences in CS in statements labeled as structural. Initially, she was drawn to CS because of the focus on feminism in the first course she took



I think my first one was in [course title] taught by [professor name]. And we did...there was like a whole like Chicana feminism like basically...the topic of the class is like on gender and stuff. So, we discussed a lot of that pretty thoroughly and I think that's what sparked my interest like in the major and it just in general.

Exposure to feminist role models was, in particular, significant to Isabel, “she introduced us so like a lot of reading like Gloria Anzaldua. We read like Angela Davis and like other writings from other feminists. And that was just something that I really, really, enjoyed.”

The nature of reflective and personal discussion and assignments in CS also stood out to Isabel as part of the curriculum. Sometimes the personal nature would be validating, “usually she would make it like a write up. So, that was a good way for us to reflect on what we had read. Just jot down ideas and then we would also share a lot during class. And it was it was just validating to see that other people in the class also had similar experiences.” A specific reflection in front of the class as a final was memorable for her:

For like our final for [name of professor]’s class she had us do like...basically reflected on the quarter and then you shared like your experience or something you know from then and it was our final. So, I really had to do it. And it was really intense. I mean I remember sharing like people mispronouncing my name. Usually they would add at a letter like Liliana. Yeah or they just switch the [letter] with the [letter]. It's [mispronounced name] or [mispronounced name] to a bunch of different names I don't really know. It was like a presentation we just like read. Literally we just read what we wrote. We wrote like a reflection type thing. And we shared that with the class.

These types of assignments stood out as different for her, “it's a very open conversation type thing you know like if you don't know something like the professor is not going to be like

‘oh you didn't do the reading.’ And I feel like with other professors in my global courses it's like much different.”

Isabel pointed to the addressing of social justice issues in *CS Curriculum* as significant to her experience, “we discussed the anti-blackness within our community...[also] like the machismo stuff...ideas like maybe gender norms and stuff like that.” She also identified moments when topics influencing her future goals were addressed, “it was like a report on like levels of like environmental degradation and how that relates to where you live and how mostly the people affected by these things are black or brown. So things like that. You know makes you want to do more to stop that.”

#### *Peers*

Isabel also described the significance of peers in her experiences as a student and major in CS. Having shared experiences stood out for her:

I think healing because like you realize that the experiences are not just yours and that there's like a collective feeling amongst like your peers. [becoming emotional].

It's like a collective, like, healing because you're like you know you all share experiences. You're like ‘oh yeah, I have felt the same way.’

She continued to describe the significance of shared experiences with peers:

It's just a unique environment because you have to have some of that lived experience to be able to really relate and completely understand what's going on. I mean it's like if I go to like an I like an engineering forum because I know nothing...I have like zero idea of what's going on. So just try to understand it. And like I could sit there all day and think they could do all this and I mean I'm still lost.

She described how shared experiences relating to ethnic identity were important to her interactions with peers:

It's more comfortable being in Chicana studies courses because there's people that look like you and you can just connect with them. You know it feels like I'm in high school in when I was around people that were Latino and there was white people but not many. And like I mean I still got along perfectly fine and I was like in the same classes but I definitely saw like more Latinos.

The identity of her peers had made it easier for Isabel to make connections in college:

I think being in the class like with people Chicana and Latina and that makes it easier to like have that conversation of...Like at least discussing it with people that are out there with the kind of identify you can relate to. I think it's a much easier conversation to have with somebody when you have something in common you know. And I just feel like you have to have that like, like, cultural connection to like being Latina or Chicana to even like really understand what's going on. And I feel like it's definitely easier to have these conversations with people that also understand you. Because having conversations with people can be difficult especially if they don't ...I guess it's just that they're like unwilling to understand where you're coming from. Which makes it harder.

### *Environment*

When describing aspects of environment, Isabel described how historical achievements by previous scholars and professors at her university fostered reverence, “they teach you about like you know like the struggle that people went through to even get Chicana Studies at the major here at UCSB and just you know in general.” Along with recognition of these achievements came a recognition that she had not encountered these courses and this advocacy in her high school:

I mean I didn't learn a lot like anything really about like those struggles of you know all we learned in schools like Cesar Chavez and that's because I'm close to like where he organized and I think that's the only reason that they ever taught us anything really. But we weren't taught like specifics or anything like that you know about our history really. I mean it's definitely eye opening to just realizing that like our educational standards just aren't fulfilling the needs of the students. Yeah.

Isabel also described the environment of sharing being validating for her, “[discussions] just like in your experiences. The things that you experience as a first-gen student. I feel like we've had space to talk about it. It was in [name of professor]’s class in [name of course].

Isabel also described music as a significant aspect of the CS environment, “yes I listen to more Spanish music. I don't know I guess it was something that I do now. I mean I still listen to music in English, but I think compared to like how much I listened to Spanish music in high school I think a lot more I think. I think it's just like a way to connect with home. I guess just because that's what I've always had you know at home.”

### **Emilia**

Emilia described *Challenges* in her transition from community college, family deaths, physical and mental health challenges, and culture shock in college. She labeled critical consciousness, validation, and improved mental health as *Gains*. Her *Goals* included becoming an industrial organizational psychologist informed by CS.

Emilia identified having support for her impostor feelings and in the aftermath of the 2016 U.S. presidential elections as the most significant interactions with *Professors*. The inaccessibility of *Curriculum* before college and the personal nature of assignments stood out to her. Her connections with *Peers* were over the inaccessibility of the curriculum and

other shared experiences. Aspects of *Environment* significant to her were freedom of expression and the ability to connect with peers.

## **Textural**

### *Challenges*

Emilia described her challenges as a transfer and non-traditional student in an over a 12-year undergraduate journey through a series of statements in her interviews:

I'm pretty much over a decade older than my classmates here. I spent 12 years cumulatively at community college trying to transfer and get here and then at the end when I was like 'ok, it's time for me to go.' I realized that, oh my god, there is so much happening in my family...

She described how concurrent family problems, such as several deaths, added to her challenges in college. Emilia decided to persevere and continue on with her degree at a university campus, "in the past two years there's been a death every year I have someone close. Previously there was like issues with like domestic violence and then like a bunch of other stuff that was like, affecting my schoolwork, and I was just like I need to do this." She also described the adjustment to college as a transfer student:

And so, I was practically living at the transfer center because no one in my family is going to college. So, I had a lot of questions and I was I was frustrated with myself because I was like I should know how to do things but I don't. But then like a lot of what they told me was like, but how would you know if you don't have anyone in your family that has gone to college let alone transferred to college? So, they [transfer counselors] kind of like, always talked me off the ledge a little bit.

Emilia explained how she became overwhelmed to the point of needing to reach out for physical and mental health support:

So, I think for the first quarter I really just kind of assess like what I need for my physical health. And then winter quarter because the Christmas break was really hard with my family and so I realized like I need extra help. And so, I started going to a therapist here at El Centro. And that has helped a lot. And then like this quarter I'm like trying to like reach out and get support because I feel like I am more confident in my academics because inadvertently I chose some of the hardest subjects to take my first quarter. I only had three classes but it seemed like five. One of my professors was like very like, you need to do this, and just like every class you had to be prepared or you were just completely lost.

Emilia also described feeling culture shock after transferring from community college to a research university. The shock was based on racial and socioeconomic factors:

Definitely part of the culture shock was here. While there is a lot a lot of rich people and a lot of times people assume like rich equates to white. But I'm also lumping in like the international students and lumping in like those from a higher socioeconomic status because there's certain behaviors that they do that I was not used to. Like I don't come from the greatest of areas. So like at my community college, if you left stuff f by themselves, the librarian will come and yell at you because you shouldn't leave your stuff alone because if somebody steals it they're not liable. You're going to lose your stuff here [current university]. I'll see people drop their iPods or their Mac books.

### *Gains*

Emilia also described gains she experienced through statements labeled as textural. She described how she developed her critical conscious while enrolled in CS. She explained

how developing critical consciousness helped her explain and cope with issues in her personal life:

It has helped explain a lot of the phenomena that I've seen in my personal life and in the life that life around me like. It's like I don't know. It's kind of off-putting to some people they're like, oh your like, why are you a feminist? I'm like I'm a feminist because of my brother and they're like, 'why are you centering in your feminism on a male?' But really it was because I remember there is a certain point in time when my brother was doing mathematics at a higher level than I was [eventually he dropped out of school]. And it's really hard because I didn't know the reasons why [her brother was allowed to drop out when he was talented] until I started taking Chicano and Ethnic studies classes because then I saw the school to prison pipeline you know. How they specifically track males of color and like, make these environments where they're better off either working or not doing anything and having idle time to do anything or everything.

She explained how gaining critical conscious helped her explain and cope with sexism and conservative values in her family:

And then I also saw you know the over-sexualization of women of color and specifically like Latinas. I was raised by really conservative Mexican immigrants who are Catholic. So, I have a lot of feelings about my body and my sexuality and what is appropriate and what is not appropriate and what like good girls do bad girls do things like that. And so Chicana and Ethnic studies showed me that there are stereotypes there are biases against people of color, women of color of, men of color and so understanding that it's not me. There's not something intrinsically in me that

makes me get this kind of attention or that I need to be treated a certain way. It's the way that society is.

She explains that CS helped her to understand sexism, not take it personally, and not let it affect her mental health, "I don't take it personally it tells me a lot about the other person that's doing it but I have this like kind of like armor. Like it's not me the individual they're just seeing me as a stereotype or as a token minority or whatever it is it's going on a situation. So that's helped me a lot." Critical consciousness, and developing it in CS, supported Emilia in countering negative images of Mexican people in wake of the 2016 U.S. Presidential election:

I was like, you know what I don't like the way they're talking about Mexican people but I don't know about the history of Mexicans in this country. So, going to take a course. That's the first course I took was...Chicanx in contemporary society. Well like what's going on that people think...And then that class was really informative because it taught me like about like white passing privilege language privilege and these are all the things that I have. Like maybe that's why I've been so successful in school because I appear...I did assimilate really hard [before college].

Emilia described that CS validated her and her experiences in various ways, when she for long felt like an "outlier." She explained that part of CS is the validation of people's experiences:

Chicanx Studies [asks], 'but what do you think? How do your experiences relate? How is yours different?' And I really like that because it's validating everyone's experience and because for the longest time I felt like an outlier. You know, like, I'm in the smart classes but I'm Mexican and I'm the only one in the class you know. Or you know I am like older but I don't have kids. And so having these like not quote



unquote normal attributes it's really nice to walk into a classroom and just be like everyone you don't understand and the looks that makes you nervous about .

Emilia also explained that CS helped her see the need to take care of her mental health and not “fight every battle”:

And I think that's also something that Chicax Studies has taught me it's like sometimes like you don't have to fight every battle. Like one person cannot take all of this on by themselves. You need those people around you. And the fact of the matter is like and if there's anything that I learned from my transfer experience and feeling like I was the only one that can do this for my aunt is that no, you need to ask for help because there are people and the worst that can happen is that people say no you know. And then you're just still in the same place you're no worse off than you were before. But a lot of pride.

### *Goals*

Emilia described goals that were shaped by her experiences in CS. She explained that she wants to be an industrial organizational psychologist and felt that CS as a major would be important preparation:

My end goal is to get a master's in industrial organizational psychology. So as a Chicax Studies major, I really have to show that I have a good foundation of the behavior of people when they're working together. And I specifically want to focus on black and brown people, which is why I'm going for a black and brown people because they they're the people that make the majority of the workforce.

She explained that she is not simply trying to justify a fit between those subjects but very intentional in her choices to pursue psychology with a foundation in CS:

And so I feel like being very intentional about the courses that I take and how they relate to each other helps everything because it helps me as a person just build my foundation because I'm going to have to build a very strong case to get an industrial organizational psychology to masters without having any psychology degree.

## **Structural Statements**

### *Professors*

Emilia described being supported and connected to professors during her time as a student in CS. She reported that the first stand-out memory of support from a CS professor came in the aftermath of the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Emilia remembers how her professor went out of her way to check-in on her students:

And so I had a big project do like the day after the election and I was really struggling because I was watching the numbers come in and I was like oh my god, oh my god it's actually happening. This is terrible. And I just remember writing an email to my professor at 2:00 in the morning and I was like I'm really sorry Professor, I could not finish my project. I was super distracted by this election and I just don't have I don't have anything right now to put into this, to put into my academic work you know. And like yeah that day like we held class him, she completely suspended any like lecture she had planned and she was like let's just talk about the elections. Let's check in. What are you guys feeling right now? What was your reaction?

Seeing her professor get emotional stuck with Emilia, as she felt connected to her professor and believed she cared for her students:

I had a lot of feelings and I just remember a professor she was really empathetic she was really caring and she also cried because she was like 'this is what I study.' And I

just can't believe and I'm like I don't think anyone in my class could believe. But one of the things that our professor did make a point to say look towards the end of class like after people had discussed was like but the fact is you are all here. You all came to class.

Emilia also described receiving more personal support from professors. She explained that it helped her deal with feelings of not belonging on a university campus:

And I mean I've gotten just like professors like these, "Emilia, you're amazing or wonderful" and I'm just like and you know because as a transfer student like I feel like everyone else is just so ahead of me. But getting that kind of feedback it makes me feel comfortable that I definitely belong here. I'm bringing it you know. I'm bringing what the professor brought to these courses.

Emilia also discussed how her CS professors have influenced her way of thinking. She explained that CS professors taught her to make connections and this helped in developing her goal of working as a culturally-informed industrial organizational psychologist:

But for the majority of my [CS] professors have really taught me two things. They've helped me see things in a new way. They've helped me connect things even more than I thought. We're connected. And so I think like I just really like to do what interests me. And I think that's why it's surprising for people that I would choose Chicana Studies because they're like, 'why?' And I'm like why not you know. And then I explain to them like look applied psychology minor and Black Studies minor, and industrial organizational psychology, who's the majority of the workforce?

She also explained that her changes in thinking also included being able to question points made by others, including, CS professors in class if they appear incorrect or problematic,

“when I see that someone is saying something and it' really messed up I can speak out about it you know. When I hear professors say things during lecture and they're not ok, I can question them.”

### *Curriculum*

Emilia identified elements of curriculum she encountered and felt were significant to her experiences. One of her first realizations as a student in CS was that she was studying material in class that was previously inaccessible to her as a student:

I realized like everyone says that I'm really smart and that I know a lot about different things but I don't even know anything about my culture. I don't know anything about the history of Mexicans here in the United States. Like it wasn't until I took like Chicana and Ethnic Studies that I learned that like Mexicans fought in every United States war since the revolution. And I'm like What the heck? And then like we didn't learn this. But it makes sense. We're literally right there.

Emilia also observed the personal nature of discussions and assignments in CS courses. She felt it was part of the curriculum as well as a willingness by the students to go to personal places with their responses, “I feel like people in Chicano Studies they're more willing to speak out about personal things.” Learning about forced sterilizations of women in Californian during the 1970s brought out some personal experiences in a CS course addressing gender:

Sometimes the topics that we cover are very personal. I remember speaking about the consensual sterilization of Mexican-American women in California and how that also happened in New York to Puerto Rican and black women and just like and someone was able to say like yeah that happened to my grandma after my mother was born. She never had any [other] kids. And so, my mom ended up being an only

child and it's like it's really impactful because a lot of times these things are presented as history but we forget that because we are looking at people it's living history. It's one of those things where I just really like the fact that everything we're learning is very active.

### *Peers*

During her discussion of the inaccessibility of CS curriculum, Emilia also reported being connected to her peers over this issue. She explained that this also makes her worry about the future of other students being exposed to CS:

One of the things we definitely talk a lot in my Chicana and Ethnic studies classes, how we feel like almost that we didn't know these things back in the day and there are some high schools that are definitely like putting in ethnic studies into their curriculum but there's not enough. The fact that we're all of the U.S. and some concepts are being introduced for the very first time and like I don't want my cousins to do that.

Emilia also felt like shared experiences connected her to her peers, “and like I said whether they're first or second generation or they just came, like there are overlapping experiences and it's something that I really appreciate in the class because most of their classes like they treat things like as fact.

### *Environment*

Emilia also discussed the environment around CS and described the level of comfort she felt there. The CS environment allowed a freedom of expressing not seen in other course environments:

It's comfortable. It's comfortable because there's always a sense of watching my words or saying things in a certain way when I'm in like different kinds of classes. In

these classes I definitely just listen. I don't think that I have any experience to bring to that [other courses]. So, I'm definitely absorbing but in Chicana Studies I definitely have experiences. I've definitely gone through certain things that I feel like might help the class. And then also because like I said I've taken so many classes, I'm able to connect things and I'll always ask the professor like is this related to this or like is that kind of what they were talking about.

She also described the environment as one in which she is able to connect with others over their shared experiences:

I'm around people that understand like the environment that I came from and just like the way that I grew up you know, with like having strict parents. Like with one of my good friends that I'm actually gonna be her roommate next year, like that's how we got together.

### **Alejandra**

*Challenges* identified by Alejandra included being a first-generation student of color, encountering privilege, discrimination, and having to prove themselves. Their *gains* included improved academic performance, increased motivation, sense of belonging, critical consciousness, and self-esteem. Alejandra's *support* mostly came from family. They shared *goals* of becoming a researcher and that they would not have held this goal without enrolling in CS.

Alejandra formed relationships with *professors* over shared identity and was supported in not dropping out by a professor. They explained that the inaccessibility of CS material before college, addressing social justice issues, and the personal nature of CS as the most standout features of *curriculum*. Alejandra shared about *peer* relationships that were

different from other course environments, connecting over shared experiences and impostor feelings.

## **Textural**

### *Challenges*

Alejandra, who identifies as a queer woman of color, identified experiencing challenges in college, particularly around her identity as a first-generation student of color:

Oh, it's definitely been really hard. Being like a first-generation student of color and just like coming here and figuring out like that these institutions really aren't made for you or people like you. And of course, like there's a lot of hardships like not even just like being a student of color on campus like with a lot of white people, but just like realizing how much like less you have compared to another's. I guess just being in such a privileged environment.

In addition to encountering privilege among the student body on her college campus, Alejandra described experiencing discrimination in classroom environments, citing it as the most significant memory before enrolling in CS courses:

One time I guess that really stuck in my memory was like a class that I had in my first year here because I was a poli-sci major at first when I came in. And I had like a section and the discussion that was going on was about like welfare and like public like social services and stuff like that. And like the TA like posed the question and then I answered it. And then someone like this girl next to me who like I had felt like had it out for me all quarter. It was a white girl. I thought I was just being paranoid but then like right after I said something she was pretty much saying like “no like all these all these Mexican poor people are just like taking resources from everybody else.” And it was just like...it wasn't really the first I've heard of something like that,

but it was the first time that I've heard it so directed at me. Because it was very obvious that it was like an answer to what I just said. That's the thing I remember most.

This experience of discrimination, in addition to other encounters, influenced Alejandra wanting to prove herself while a student:

Definitely like my first goal was to graduate because like especially now it's looking like it's going to be a little harder than I thought it would be. But yeah like I definitely want to like prove to other people not just myself that like being a minority, that I can succeed here in these institutions. And that like I am as good as everybody else here. And I guess just like that's kind of what's been like driving me my entire time in college is just like that need to prove myself kind of.

### *Gains*

Alejandra described, through statements labeled as textural, several gains she experienced through her participation in CS. She first described improved academic performance, especially when compared to other subjects such as Poli-Sci, owing it to the nature of course material she engaged with which she engaged:

Learning about my own history and my own people, it does make me feel better about what I'm learning. I feel like I've done well... no I don't feel, I definitely have done a lot better in these class just in terms of grades. I've gotten As in these classes compared to like Bs and Cs I got in Poli-Sci.

She also explained how her motivation as a student improved as well following her participation in CS, "I kind of already touched on it but I guess you could call it a psychological impact of just like being in that environment. It makes me feel better about myself and what I'm learning. And it just makes me do better in school."



Alejandra indicated that a sense of belonging and community was a significant gain throughout her experiences in CS. She shared about developing a sense of pride in this community that began when she chose to major in CS:

I mean like especially ever since I switched to the Chicana Studies major, I definitely do feel like...I do you have like a sense of belonging here. And like there is like a lot of communities there [in CS] that I'm a part of that I'm really proud to be a part of. And yeah those have pretty much been like the most important part of like my time here I guess, like the community that I'm a part of.

She explained that the sense of community she established has contributed to meaning and purpose in her direction as a student:

Even though it wasn't my major when I came in, it is what I came here to do. And yeah like I just like knowing that you have like a community here and people here who are like you. And being in those classes and like actually seeing them. And like actually being able to hear from these people, like their experiences and everything how they relate to yours. Yeah that's what contributes to that sense of belonging.

She continued to describe the purpose and meaning to this sense of community, describing a feeling of doing wrong if she chose a subject outside of CS at this point, "being able to take these classes, and not even just like subject matter, being around other people who look like me...it feels right. Like learning anything else at this point I would just feel wrong because I feel like this."

Alejandra also described increased self-esteem as a gain associated with her participation in CS. She began by tying this self-esteem to being a part of the CS community:

I think in terms of my self-esteem, it's [CS] probably had a very positive impact actually. I guess what's contributed to that is like being in these classes with like people from my community and being taught from someone for my community. But also, just like feeling like I'm finally I'm studying something that I really like that I'm interested in and that I feel is going to be useful to me. It's opened my eyes to a lot of stuff.

She explained that majoring in the subject she wants, CS, contributes to this self-esteem, “yeah because I know that like I am in these classes and I'm learning what I want to be learning and I'm enjoying when I'm learning.” She returned to the subject of self-esteem by explaining feeling worthy while in the environment of CS courses:

I think I already said this before but just like as a student just being in this department, it's made me like I feel a lot better about myself. And about the work that I'm doing here and about what I'm learning because like I really feel like it is valuable. Not just to me but like it's valuable to have this kind of education and these perspectives.

She again tied a sense of worth to participation in CS and the environment around CS, “It reassures me first that I belong at this university. For me personally just, it wasn't till I got into these classes and like being in them and being in that environment that I actually felt heard. Not only heard but like understood by everyone.”

Alejandra also described experiencing the increased confidence related to her participation in CS, as well as activism and advocacy. She first described this gain as being tied to her journey as a student, “just knowing that I'm investing like my time and my energy and my money into something that I believe in, like something that I believe is valuable. Not just to me but like this type of education is valuable for everyone to have.” She did,

however, describe this confidence stretching outside of her experiences as a student, “outside of being a student I think it's made me more confident about like what I'm doing outside of school, I guess. Like just in general it makes me more confident.” Alejandra described how her confidence in speaking up about social justice issues has increased:

Like I said before, being in these classes has made me feel like more confident in terms of like speaking up and everything. And not like not even just in class but outside of school like it's made me more confident in speaking up in situations like in organizing and political organizing. Before I always was kind of not a bystander, like I would participate in it, but I would never be the person that would stand up and actually say something.

She continued to describe the confidence as an experience not common for her until her participation in CS:

It's definitely helped me with like just my confidence in me communicating like my own wants and my own needs because that wasn't like... like I said before I was never really the type person that would speak up. And now like being in that community that fosters that kind of confidence and that encourages students to speak up, to speak about their own experiences and about anything else, it's definitely helped me not just in class but outside.

Alejandra also described the experience of developing critical consciousness due to her participation in CS. She described the opportunity to develop critical consciousness as one of the features of CS that drew her to the courses initially:

Also, what drew me [to CS] was the fact that like the field itself is like... it literally forced me to think about stuff. Because it's not like it's not like Poli-Sci where you

were just handed a bunch of information and you regurgitate it. It's made me think about like myself, my communities, and my history and everything.

Critical consciousness led Alejandra to be recognize her own privileges:

I think it's made me a lot more of like appreciative of the privileges that I do have. Like being born here. And not ever having...because my parents are citizens, like I don't have that to worry about that either. And it's just like...yeah, it makes me appreciate like the very few privileges I do have compared to other people. And it just like it makes me appreciate my people more because like knowing but all that they've gone through and like everything that like they've had to fight for her just to be here.

The recognition of privilege extended to recognition of privileges related to her identity:

I think it's [CS] also made me more aware. And it's made me more considerate of other people because like yeah, we're all Chicanx, we're all Latinx, you know, at the end of the day like people, people do have different experiences. Like I said before I do have the privilege of being born here, of having parents who have citizenship, but then when I am like in classes and I hear stories of other people who immigrated here, whose parents got deported... it's all very... it just makes me more aware of like what's happening within my own community. Because of those privileges that I have like sometimes I'm blind to them.

### *Support*

Alejandra spoke to support she received from her family during her experiences in CS, especially in supporting her being in college at all:

My parents definitely. They have supported me like not only financially but just like just like by even like letting me come here and everything. Like legally they could've

stopped, me I was like 17 when I was accepted. Just like knowing that they have like been there for me and they've help me...they helped me like not only pay my tuition when like my financial aid wouldn't cover it. But they also like supporting me coming back when like my grades are really bad and I like I thought I was gonna flunk out or whatever. [Tearing up] They have been my biggest support system.

### *Goals*

Alejandra also made statements label as textural about her future goal of becoming a researcher or professor. She explained that this goal was influenced by her participation in CS:

It's like pretty much the reason why I like completely changed tracts, from being in Poli-Sci and wanting to go to law school to now being in these classes and this major and like knowing that I want to focus my research in this area and eventually become a professor. That wasn't part of my plan before.

She did not even see graduate school in her future but now does because of CS:

It's kind of the same thing but I didn't...I wasn't like planning on going to grad school before. I didn't even see it as an option really until like I started talking more to my professors. And not just professors but other people who work in the department and they've all been very encouraging and very supportive and like have pretty much like made me feel like I can get that far.

Part of her goals included giving back or contribution to her community, specifically in making sure students of color have access to ethnic studies:

Well another goal I have is like being here and like seeing how valuable this department and these classes have been for me, I do eventually want to get into education and have ethnic studies programs be implemented in high schools.

Because I feel like that's something that would've been very valuable to me and other people, other people of color that went to my high school.

## **Structural**

### *Professors*

Alejandra made a series of significant statements that helped explain factors potentially contributing to her experiences in CS. She began by discussing how feeling connected to professors and teaching assistants was important to her experiences in CS, “but the professors, the TAs they look like me. They came from the same background and just seeing them being active and successful as they are has really inspired me to want to eventually be a professor someday.” She also described how becoming close to her professor helped her decide to not drop out and persist in school:

This year was especially hard for me and this is actually one of the first quarters I actually like got really close to some of my professors. I was pretty close to dropping out actually and a professor that I had like she pretty much convinced me not to. She was just like yeah like I know you're going through a hard time right now, but school is like ultimately that's what going to be there for you. Because she basically was like I know how hard you work as a student and I'd hate to see you throw that all away. And that recognition from someone I respected a lot. That really helped me.

### *Curriculum*

Alejandra also described aspects of CS curriculum that stood out as part of her experiences. She indicated that studying material in class that was related to her identity and made previously inaccessible to her was an important aspect of her experiences in CS:

Being in those classrooms and learning about like your own history, like when a lot of times it's like a history that has been erased and like hasn't been discussed at all

before higher education. It definitely does make it feel like when I'm learning here is more like it has more of a purpose for me especially.

She explained that CS courses were not available to her in high school:

Another thing that drew me was just like the fact that I never been exposed to those kind of classes before. Like ethnic studies classes. Because they don't, they don't have them in high schools and like the few options that they do have you have to pay for them to like take them like taking a college course like as a high school student.

Having the option here to take that I think it really drew me to it.

She was struck by the oppression and suffering she encountered in this new type of course material for her:

In my opinion it's really important especially for those who like their history has been erased. Especially in the United States...I don't know like for me hearing, not even just like that like the oppression that like my people have suffered here but just reading about like the accomplishments. How these people have stood up and like fought for their themselves and their rights and their people. It's very inspiring I'd say.

She then explained that the initial draw for her to CS was learning about her own history, once obscured from her:

I chose Chicana Studies over like any other like class that would have fulfilled the requirement because I was interested in it. And like I was interested in learning about like my own history and basically like I knew that I would get like what I was missing out on being in like another department.

Another aspect of curriculum that stood out to Alejandra was the personal nature of conversations and discussions in class:

One thing that I've noticed is that people, the types of late conversations that you have with people, and the settings are a lot more genuine just because there is that like personal component of it. Just because a lot of what we are learning it is personal and these are the same experiences that we've been having.

### *Peers*

Alejandra described immediately noticing the differences in what her peers looked like when she first began in CS courses, “since I took my first Chicana Studies class, like I automatically noticed how different it was than all the other classes that I've been in because not only was I like with other people who look like me.” She also identified shared experiences as something that connected her to her peers:

It's mostly just like just like having them around and hearing them share their experiences and everything and like how they relate to mine or even how they don't relate to mine. It's like really good to feel that there's a lot of people here that have been through the same things that you have and that like the support that I got from other students basically is just knowing that we're all here and that we're all like we've all struggled. We're all still struggling but we're at like we're still here and we've made it this far basically.

She explained that she predicted that CS would be different from other course environments, “I knew that in Chicana Studies that it would be different. or at least I hoped that it would be different. and that I just wouldn't hear one view of things. In fact, in these classes I hear the opposite of what I would hear in those.”

Alejandra spent more time describing how she felt disconnected from other peers, primarily her white peers on campus. Encountering privilege as a student stood out as an early memory for her as a college student, “It wasn't until I came here that I really like saw



like how much more other people had been than me. Because of where I lived it was a very like kind of like segregated. I mean it was all Latinx people in my neighborhood. And mostly like immigrants too.” She encountered this privilege in her Poli-Sci classes:

Yeah like most of my like experiences like that really stuck out for me have been in like class discussions. And like a smaller setting where especially when I was a Poli-Sci major, that major is mostly filled with mostly white people, mostly like rich white people. It was like it was very hard to be in those like enclosed spaces and hearing people say things like that [discriminatory comments].

Feeling disconnected for Alejandra led to feelings of not belonging in certain spaces and classes:

I mean especially here...like I said like being a student of color like amongst a campus that has a lot of white people, a lot of privilege. When I was in the Poli-Sci major when I was mostly around them, I definitely felt like an outsider. And like it wasn't just me like it was definitely other people there that were making it clear that like me and like my friends who looked like me, [they felt they] didn't belong there.

These feelings emerged for her when she participated in discussions in Political Science:

The Poli-Sci department here, it's very white, it's very conservative. Like being in that department like it was very obvious to me that I was different than anyone else because everyone else was like white and conservative. They made that pretty clear in class discussions and everything.

### *Environment*

Alejandra explained that aspects of the environment in CS courses and with her peers contributed to how she defines her experiences. She began by explaining how membership in an LGBTQ group was influenced by her participation in CS and have been significant

supports for her, “especially the LGBTQ community here and all the organizations and everything. Like they have been...having that sense of community and belonging and like home really helped me.

She then described the significance of a safe environment in CS:

For me, I find it empowering because it's an environment that actually helped me find my voice because before when I was in the Chicana Studies major, I was never one of the students who would participate in discussions unless as I had to. And then just being in this completely different environment, like the opposite of what I was in before, like I don't get scared or anxious at all like the talking in front of all these people.

Alejandra described feeling aspects of the environment as soon as she enters the CS space, “I think just as soon as I walk into like a class it feels very open and feel safe for the most part. For me, like it's always been a very positive environment and one that has reassured me about a lot of things like about myself and just like about other people too.” She then explained how the environment of not being judged for her experiences, as she was in other courses, impacted her emotionally:

I mean like that environment has impacted me like emotionally a lot. Just like feeling safe in there and like being able to express things about myself and my life and my experience that I wouldn't feel safe talking about with other with any other people or in any other setting. Because...I'm specifically thinking about the times that I've like gone and I've discussed like very personal things like being assaulted or like anything. Yeah, it's really hard for me to talk about that obviously with one person but when I'm in a class like that I can say these things. I can like talk about it as if it

doesn't even phase me just because I know that everyone that's in there is listening and like they're hearing you and they're not gonna judge you.

Alejandra described the student organizations and activism associated with the CS environment and its students has played a significant role in her college experiences. Her activism around interpersonal violence and sexual assault stood out as especially meaningful for her:

I participated in the students against sexual assault stuff and there was like a sit-in. I can't think of where it was now. It was like two years ago, during my first year here. That was like the first time that I had actually been a part of something like that. And then there was also a march for the same cause that we did. And me and a friend of mine spoke at it.

She then explained how terrifying it was to speak in public as an activist, but that CS had prepared her for the experience:

It was terrifying because I was speaking about my own experiences with the issue and everything. I'm speaking about something really personal. But because like I had already talked about that and like touched on it in one of my Chicano Studies classes, it was easier for me to like stand up in front of strangers and like tell my story I guess.

Alejandra explained her reverence for the achievements made by previous students and professors in CS and are part of the environment around her:

It's definitely made me more like grateful for the fact that I can even go here and I'm even here. It's because I know like how hard people had to fight to even get Chicano Studies to be like implemented here. Just like being able to be like a part of the department that like you know values you and your education. and meeting and

professors and everyone who like actually have a genuine interest in you because they faced the same obstacles. It's been really helpful, and I feel like I definitely wouldn't of gotten this far in my education if it hadn't been for some of those professors.

### **Sandra**

Sandra explained that her main *challenges* as a student were being an undocumented, transfer student and struggling in Math courses. She identified *gains* of improved academic performance, self-efficacy around public speaking and sharing undocumented status, and diminished impostor feelings. Sandra received *support* while a CS student from family, friends, and the campus transfer student center. She shared her goal of becoming an academic counselor attuned to social justice concerns.

Sandra felt her relationships with teaching assistants were more significant than those with *professors*, helping her with homework and knowing her by name. She identified the inaccessibility of CS material prior to college and space to explore undocumented experiences as stand-out features of *curriculum*. Sandra connected with *peers* over ethnicity and support for her impostor feelings. She explained that music helping with homesickness and the emotional qualities of the CS *environment* were significant for her.

### **Textural**

#### *Challenges*

Sandra is an undocumented transfer student who expressed challenges in transitioning to college from community college. She described being told by many people that she would not be able to go to college or, at the very least, pay for it:

I started at a community college not knowing if I should go to college. Well, my whole time in high school I had really good grades and I was really good student and

I think if I would've applied, I would have got accepted to a lot of places. There weren't a lot of people to tell me that you can go to college even though you are undocumented. So, I just thought like...oh, I can't pay for it, like there's no way I can go to college. And I wasn't even going to apply to community college. Like everyone who wasn't going to a university was going to like the local community college. I was like I'll just apply and see you like how it is. And then I went to my community college and it was a great experience. I majored actually in math at my community college. It was a really good time and took me three years to get out of there and come here. And then once I came here, it was like it was very difficult to get adjusted to like being away from my family. The transition was really hard but it's good now. I like it here.

Sandra described struggling in math as a student after transitioning to a university campus.

She explained that these struggles are part of what led her to CS:

Well when I first I'm here to [name of university], I was admitted as a math major. So, my first quarter I spent taking like all math classes and that was really difficult, especially like taking a stats class. I found the professor for stats and went to his office in one of the first few weeks of the quarter and he didn't seem like he wanted to help me. And then I found that there was no help for [academic support program] for the stats class I was taking. It was very discouraging, and I didn't pass that class, but I stuck with my math major into winter quarter. And then that was when I finally switched my major to Chicano Studies.

### *Gains*

Sandra described several gains she experienced as a student in CS. She first explained how her performance as a student improved:

I am doing way better in like my classes now. So, I think that being just interested in the topics that I am, just been really interested in like the major allows me to do like really good in school. I spend more time because I enjoy the readings, so I actually do the readings, do the notes, pass the classes because I'm really interested in it. I don't feel like falling asleep or anything. I don't feel like the homework is something I don't want to do and also through the readings like I am I can connect with all of this the stuff we're reading about and it's really interesting to me too.

She explained how being in CS has improved her confidence in several areas. She began by explaining that she gained confidence in public speaking:

I'm not really good at a public speaking and that's something I am intimidated about. So, I had never thought about giving tours to people, like I would like I thought I would ever do that. But when it's people that are coming from community college that are Latinx and like minority students, it makes me want to. And like I have been doing tours, so that something that it has changed it because I never thought I would do something like that.

Sandra also explained how that confidence was tied to her overall confidence in identifying as undocumented student, which has also increased due to her participation in CS:

It has made me not like ashamed of who I am and like telling people. Yeah, it has made me not be like afraid of telling people because it's just who I am. I think that before, especially in high school, I would not talk about it. No one knew. And now my friends know, and it doesn't matter.

Sandra described experiencing a *Gain* in dealing with impostor feelings, especially related to her undocumented identity. She expressed feeling like a “phony” for not being

Chicana, as she is from Mexico and not the United States. Being able to identify with CS material in a personal way has been significant to her:

When I first switched my major, I was like I feel like a phony. Like I'm not a Chicana because you know I'm just Mexican. I'm not Mexican American. Yeah and even like now I feel like a little bit of that. Because...I don't know if you know [undocumented student group] on campus? When we have meetings or whatever and they're all like let's go around and like tell your major or whatever. I was still kind of nervous because I'm like I don't know like I'm Chicax Studies, but I don't identify myself as Chicana. So, I always feel like a phony but it's really interesting to me. And like learning about like Mexican Americans like in this country. So that's what kind of drives me to it, I guess I can identify with it a little bit just being in the U.S.

She further explained the difficulties of feeling like an impostor in an environment where the ethnic distinctions are so complex:

It's super interesting, there's like imposter syndrome but then there's imposter syndrome within the impostor syndrome and that I think is happening like to me right now. People talk about impostor syndrome being here and like noticing you're surrounded by people that are not your ethnicity. Being a person of color but then it there's like me being surrounded by people of color in Chicax Studies courses but not being Chicana.

### *Support*

Sandra also described the support she received from friends and family while being a student majoring in CS. She initially explained how her parents were supportive of her switch of major from math to CS, "I feel like my parents in their own way. When I first changed my major from math, if it's what you want to, do what makes you happy. So, not

being like not being mad that I changed my major or like thinking like oh what are you gonna do with that [Chicanx Studies major].” She explained the *Support* from peers and friends has been important for dealing with the impostor feelings while majoring in CS:

No one has ever judged it or not understood it. It’s not something I have experienced. Especially when they know that I'm not Mexican American but that’s a me thing. I don't... like maybe they did judge, and they don't tell me anything. But I just feel like that's like me being like being insecure about that, like struggling with that myself. They [friends] don’t think it’s a big deal. I identify as undocumented but that's not like what defines me kind of thing.

She even experienced support specifically for being a CS major from her peers:

When I talk to someone about this like I don't know if I should change to Chicanx Studies...but just talking to other people, “you shouldn't feel like that, study whatever you want you know.” So, I think my friends have really been supportive in it. I wish like I could go see more counselors but I don't have that much time, but I think that they would be like very supportive.

Sandra also described receiving support from a mentor from her university campus transfer student center. She explained how this support program, and her mentor in particular, helped her adjust to college:

My transfer student mentor, she's really supportive. Because...well we have a [CS] class together, so we like talk about the readings and like the homework and stuff so that's how she is like supportive. If I have any questions like I go to her and I think she's more than just like a mentor, she's like my friend too. If I'm feeling down, she's there to make me feel better and remind me like you know it's only a quarter system,



it will go by really fast. She just reminded me that yesterday, but I can get through it basically.

She was encouraged by her mentor to focus on positives, “my first quarter I did not do too good but when I would go to her, she would be like oh but you passed all your classes and it's your first quarter, like don't be so hard on yourself. So, they just remind me of like the positives instead of me focusing on the negative.”

### *Goals*

Sandra described having career and personal goals that were influenced by her participation in CS. She explained that she wants to be an academic counselor and feels that being a CS is good preparation for that position:

Another way it impacted me is how like with math I knew that there were like a lot of fields that I could go into career-wise. I had always [thought] with Chicana Studies that it's not like that open, maybe you'll have a hard time finding a job. That's how I felt like I first thought it was gonna be a challenge for me to find a job with this major since I changed it. Because I thought that with math, I could do like so many things. But I wasn't happy anymore and I'm happier now and I think that I can still do what I want to do. I really want to be like a counselor, so I think this is like a good major for it. I was scared when I wasn't going to be able to find a job after with this major, but I feel like way more confident now.

Sandra sees social justice aspirations in her goals as an academic counselor. She felt that a counselor informed about challenges in the education system would be good for other Latinx people, “So I think it just makes me a better fit for the job maybe if I want to be a counselor especially if I want to help Latinos. It'll make me more prepared or like just more knowledgeable about stuff that's happened [racism in education system]. Whereas like math

or like stem classes...” Part of her goal as an academic counselor includes sharing the potential for other students to learn about themselves through CS, “I don’t know if this is the right word... but be an advocate for encouraging other people to take Chicane Studies classes and learn more about themselves. I just think that everyone should take a Chicane Studies class, just to learn about it.”

Sandra also described a *Goal* of wanting to give back or contribute by way of passing on what she learns in CS. She first identified how important it would be for her to share her experiences with her siblings:

All the stuff I'm learning makes me want to talk to my siblings so they can be aware like at an earlier age than I was. Because it was until I came here that I learned these things that relate to me or my family or my friends. And so, it makes me like want to have my sisters become aware and take these classes at an earlier age. Maybe it could make them aware of stuff and want to learn more and want to like be empowered to like help others and stuff...It's really cool and it makes me like want for my sisters to go like a skip the part about being embarrassed and then fast forward to the part where they don't care [about their identities].

She even extends the spreading of CS knowledge to her friends and partner, still framing this act as “giving back”:

It makes me more aware. It makes me like I want to give back more. I find myself like always talking about stuff that I'm learning to my friends who aren't in Chicane Studies and my boyfriend because he's white. So, it makes me like want to tell him like all these things and also makes me wanna like tell my sisters everything that I'm learning. I guess just giving back.

Sandra explains how giving back is part of her nature and CS affords her opportunities to deepen that value:

Even when I wasn't a Chicano Studies major, I would always want to give back. Like I've always been a tutor or like helping younger kids, but now it allows me to... add to a little bit, I guess. Not just like tutor but I also tell him them what I'm learning. So that's how it [CS] has added to it I guess. And encourage other people to take these classes too and learn about themselves. Most of the students I work with are Mexican American or Latinx. So, it makes me wanna encourage them to take these classes. I feel like a lot of people don't know about it. Coming out of my high school I didn't really know about Chicax Studies courses or Women's Studies classes. It's good for me to tell them there's these classes that you can learn about yourself and it's really interesting. Instead of keep on taking math you know, it's really good.

## **Structural**

### *Professors*

Through statements label as structural, Sandra described the connection and guidance she felt from teaching assistants as a student and major in CS. She did not speak much to professors that influenced her experiences, but interactions with teaching assistants were meaningful for her. She also indicated the importance of having women in the roles of teaching assistants:

It's made me really interested in like what I'm learning. It has allowed me to make connections with my TAs. I enjoy talking to them, they seem like they care, and they are friendly. They're willing to help them with homework or anything, like questions. That's something that wasn't there in like math. Like with my math courses a lot of

the TAs were like men. In Chicana Studies, they're all female and like it's cool, but it would be cool to have men TAs.

Sandra also spoke about the importance of teaching assistants knowing her name. Again, she draws a comparison to TAs in other settings, “and then I really like the TAs. They're super cool, like they know your name and they're willing to help you like whenever you need help. Which is super different than like the math TAs.” She explained that sometimes it came down to teaching assistants taking the time to know her name that made her feel connected to teaching assistants, or not:

Well, it's very different. When I started as a math major, I didn't even know my TAs name and they didn't know my name. And if I hadn't gone to class, they wouldn't have known. And here I like email my TAs and they are like “[name]”, so they know my nickname. And this is very different experience and relationship too.

### *Curriculum*

Sandra described feeling as if the curriculum in CS was significant in her experiences as a student and major. She identified the nature of course material taught in CS being previously inaccessible as an important feature. Again, she compared the experience to being a student in STEM fields:

It has definitely been so different than like taking it like STEM. Mostly like... it's something that again... it's like new to what I know because I haven't really learned about it before. It's super interesting to me but like what I haven't been taught even though you know years of my taking like history in high school. Just how I had not learned any of this in my high school. so this it all new to me. And like I can relate to it a little bit, like I can relate to that, yeah. It's stuff that happened to me or that

happen to my friends. Like being discouraged from stuff. But I hadn't really thought about it until now. 'Oh yeah, this is something that happens like to a lot of people.'

She explained that the previous inaccessibility to the type of course material in CS made her develop a newfound awareness:

It [CS] made me really like and be aware that you know Mexicans, Mexican Americans, Latinx have been in this country for like a long time. But even though we have been a part of this country like it we still don't get taught at an early age that we have been in this country. Like especially in like high school even or like it and anytime and like the younger grades. And it makes me sad that I am...of all the students who didn't get to go to college or stop at high school then they won't like be aware of this. And I feel like I should really be part of like high school or like middle school or like elementary school. I feel if it's like offered like in high school or like middle school even it'll just make people be able to connect and maybe want to continue like learning about it and like maybe want to continue going to college and just learn about it.

She later returned to the topic of CS inaccessibility:

What we're learning in these classes it's people who have been here for like generations or like who aren't new to this country. I don't mind like I really like wearing about him you know like the history. But it would be really interesting to learn or to take a class that maybe talks more about undocumented students or people.

Sandra also described the personal nature of reflections and discussions as part of her CS course curriculum. The nature of the coursework has allowed her to make sense of challenging experiences:

Just thinking back about like myself and my life and being able to reflect and really think about certain experiences, just like the torta thing [being embarrassed by torta at lunch]. And like not thinking about it like as a bad time or like... not just thinking of it as difficult times and like thinking about it in another way where you're not mad at that experience. I'm mad at myself because I was embarrassed back then when it's a learning experience. Just like I am thinking back about my life.

She explained that she can now explore previous, challenging experiences without becoming overwhelmed emotionally:

There were things I had never talked about and never really thought about it, just like wanting to like forget about it. And Chicax Studies allows me to think back to those times and like make things easier, especially difficult times. It and allows me to think about them and talk about them and be able to talk about them, without like it being super sad or like emotional and crying about it.

Sandra again indicated how different this is from other course experiences, especially the emotional experiences:

It really makes me think about like my life and that something that math didn't give me the opportunity to. do Sometimes in the some of my classes like we'll talk about or watch a film or an episode or something, a video and I find myself really really into it. Or like sometimes I feel myself getting emotional from like the topics that we talk about. Just like relating to my family or I don't know just myself. Reflecting on like the hard work or like sacrifice of my parents for me to get here.

Sandra seemed to be struck by films in the CS courses that depicted stories and situations she with which she could relate. One documentary she saw in class actually featured students from her own high school:

The connection [to CS and CS course material] is mostly what drew me. I remember they showed this movie and I forgot the movie's name, but it was like this team for my high school and they have like a robotics club. They actually came to [name university]. They competed and ended up winning and I just felt like that made me so happy. Kind of empowered too just to see people I can relate to doing all this great stuff so that's something.

Other stories like La Llorona and depictions of generational conflict allowed Sandra to relate to the CS course material:

Being able to relate to stories or like things that you heard as a little girl. Right now, we are talking about La Llorona. Learning about something that... I like a story that I knew about since I was little girl and learning more about that. Just learning about feelings that happened to a lot of people. We watched a film and there was this one scene with a girl and her mom, and her mom I couldn't afford to buy her like a really nice dress or like a suit for a ceremony she had to attend. And the mom stayed up all night to make her like a dress, but then the girl didn't like it and she was embarrassed to show it off or wear it in front of her school. And it made me so emotional because I feel like sometimes when I was little, I would be embarrassed of my mom doing something or like it making me wear something.

She recalls a memory of being embarrassed to eat a torta in front of her white peers and how stories in CS allowed her to make sense of that experience:

I don't even know, I can't remember a specific time but I know it's happened. It was probably homemade or something like that. I went to a lot of schools I work mostly like white, so even just like going to school with a torta there was like "oh never

mind I don't want to eat.” Just being able to relate to like the movie or whatever in class.

She further explained her process of overcoming her embarrassment through her encounters with stories in CS:

Especially with stories being told that when I was little girl and being able to go back to like that time when I was little growing and first like hearing about the story. Or like going back to time when I was embarrassed to like even just eat my food. Yeah and reflect on my younger me. I feel like now like I'm not embarrassed you know but it makes me emotional to think of there was a time where I was [embarrassed].

### *Peers*

Sandra also described the significance of being connected to her peers in statements label as structural. Connecting with other students of color has given her new interpretations of past experiences, essentially developing a critical consciousness:

In high school, I remember like me and my best friend would be a higher math course and we would be the only people of color, students of color. And we would notice it, but we didn't really make a big deal out of it or like it like think like oh this happens a lot or whatever. We didn't really think much of it we just noticed it. and so now I can be like yeah like it that happens like everywhere you know. Like it being aware of the obstacles that we had like in the past that we didn't even know of.

She explained that being in an environment like CS where she shared ethnic identity with her peers, and was capable of approaching of her peers, became significant for her:

I feel like I really get along with them [Chicanx Studies students]. And I feel like I can really relate to them, so I'm not intimidated to go up to anyone and talk about the homework or talk about something that I'm struggling with or like have questions



about. And when I was in math, I couldn't really relate to the people that were taking math classes because they were mostly Asian or like white. And so, I wouldn't really want to ask it like for help or ask anything because I would feel intimidated. Like, oh I don't know why she's taking this class or anything.

For Sandra, Math courses made forming study groups or student relationship difficult:

When I was in Math, yeah, I wouldn't ask like other people questions. I would feel like sometimes I didn't belong in there because they wouldn't be too many people like me, like students of color. So, I would feel intimidated to ask or even form a study groups with other people. So, I would mostly stick to people I can relate to for math. And then here I mean like taking Chicana Studies classes now. I feel like I can just ask anyone in, like I don't care.

Sandra did, however, speak to areas of disconnect from her peers in CS. Again, she addressed the issue of being undocumented from Mexico and not identifying as Mexican American, “for me, I really see it differently because I'm Mexican, I'm not Mexican American and like I feel like even if I was like to get my citizenship, I think that I would still consider myself Mexican. I wouldn't think of myself as Chicana.” At times, Sandra has been scared to express this fully to her peers, “another way that it has impacted me is just feeling like kind of scared to tell people like I'm in Chicana Studies, but I am not a Chicana.”

### *Environment*

Sandra described the experience of feeling homesick and the environment of CS, including music and a feeling of safety, helping to cope with that. She eventually explains how the environment reminds her of being with her family:

Like the first day of class this quarter, I walked in and the professor was like playing Banda. Yeah and it's really cool. Like I just wanted to like Snapchat it, like this is so

cool. Like it just makes me comfortable and happy, like it just makes me feel like I'm back home. I just makes you feel like... or sometimes it reminds me of when I am like with my parents and I'm like at a family party. So, it makes me feel comfortable and makes me think of happy times. Mostly because they are not...I don't live with them right now. I moved from [city name], so they're like so far away. So, they're so far away and just and I feel like being here like at [university] it's a different than community college. I would go back home and like spend time with my family and then here it's just like... I am like I'm not with them. Like I like only call them for like a few minutes sometimes. So, it's easy to not think about my family but then going into that like reminds me of them.

She again compared the experience of Banda and other connections in CS to the environment she experienced in Math courses:

Especially at [here] because it is very different life. When I was taking Math classes, I would feel like where are all my people basically? Like I'm surrounded by people that I can't relate to or that are so different than me. And then like I just going into that class [with Banda playing], like I'm surrounded by the people that are like me. I'm pretty sure we can all relate. We like all know this song.

Sandra feels these connections allow for the expressing of emotions that would not be present in other settings, such as a Math course:

We're like talking about stuff that I've been through and stories that I've been told. And movies that I've never seen or like shows that I've never seen that I can relate to. A lot of other majors like they won't allow me to feel. It's just like study this or read this but like I have no relation to it. P: it is a more friendly environment. More comfortable too. I feel like they're [professors and students] more caring.

Sandra explained that many of the clubs and organizations in which she has taken part include many of the same peers in CS. She even described some of these groups as almost “sub-branches” of CS, “I feel like you just go up to whoever in Chicax Studies, but there also like like I guess like sub-branches. And that’s where it would be like [list organizations].” She explained that specific group that she would not have found through STEM courses have become significant for her:

Here on campus, I know a lot of stuff that I can go to and like really relate to. Like [undocumented student group], [another student group], and [Latina mentorship group], I feel like there's a lot of like little communities at [name of university] that I could go to and like relate to and like feel comfortable in. And in STEM, I didn't know of many.

She spoke specifically of her positive experience with resources for first-generation and transfer students:

I did this summer program through [first-generation student program] and so it was for transfers students. And I met a lot of people there and so I became friends with some of the people that I met there and that really helped me. And then like the transfer center, they have like a mentorship program and that helped me too be placed with someone like one on one, but I could go to.

### **Daniella**

Daniella referred to her *challenges* as an undocumented transfer student, commuter student, and as communications major in her interviews. She identified critical consciousness as her primary psychological *gain*. Daniella experienced *support* primarily from family. Her *goal* of continuing onto graduate school in CS was clearly shaped by her experiences there.

Daniella's relationships with *professors* were shaped by guidance, support for personal issues, and approachability. She saw addressing social justice issues and the inaccessibility of CS *curriculum* before college as the main curricular features. Daniella connected with *peers* over identity, language, and shared experiences. She saw the CS *environment* as inclusive, safe from microaggressions, and significantly including Spanish language and music.

## **Textural**

### *Challenges*

Daniella is a transfer student that began her first year on a university campus as a commuter, living in a city about 45 miles away and working at a job about 10 miles from campus. She described the pace as a challenge for her now that she has made the move from community college to a research university:

Well it's gone by really fast. I did change majors so when I first transferred in I was a Communications major. But my first quarter here since...Comm is like so broad, I was able to take elective courses. So, I don't know. I guess it's been like really fast but I was on a quarter system before in community college so that wasn't really different for me. I guess it was mostly like the culture.

She remembers one of the challenges on a university campus was the disconnect she felt with some of the students. She specifically noticed the difference in the racial identity of most of her peers, as well as how overwhelmed she was:

And so, I just felt like it was so weird because like my first class was a Comm class, it was just like so many I guess like white people. And so, it was just to me like I just felt my...I remember like my first quarter like the first week like and everything like I just felt so overwhelmed. I didn't know who to talk to and like you know just

everything because like you're a new student. Like when you're transfer there's not really like I don't know like there's a transfer center but like there is like really you know like you have to figure out everything again.

Not doing well in Communications courses and becoming overwhelmed with her commuting demands influenced Daniella's decision to add Chicana Studies as a major:

So, I ended up not doing good in communication because I was commuting and because I like I think it was like the overwhelming sense of like everything. So, I ended up changing majors and I decided to change majors. I did fall, winter... I changed in the spring of last year, so I decided I wanted to double major and in Communications and Chicana Studies.

She explained that the challenges in commuting and working also prevented her from joining student organizations that she knew existed through her interactions in CS:

One of the questions on the other paper [demographic form] was like if I've been involved in orgs and I haven't a really had a chance. Since the fall of my first year here I was commuting all the time. I didn't really have time to get involved. And then after like I don't know like... I felt like it was like too late. And I still had to work full time, so it was really no, there really is in like no time in between.

### *Gains*

Daniella described developing a critical consciousness as the primary gain she experienced while a student in CS courses. She explained how it aids her in challenging problematic views and language:

I think like the fact that I'm constantly taking new courses [in CS], so like it's like I'm expanding my knowledge. I mean argue like why I don't feel ok with a person saying what they're saying. And why it shouldn't be said in public or and why like that

general term shouldn't be done. And like I don't know like the fact that you can show like real life examples of like why intersectionality matters, I guess even though like someone might be of a different race like how you're actually connected to them.

She described her process of learning more in CS courses and expanding her critical consciousness:

I just think like then like the fact that like you learn more every time. Like it's like it gets never the same thing. Like right now I'm taking in a Chicax education class and like I don't know like you also get to see how things intertwine together. Like how they use Yosso's community cultural wealth like model... it falls in like not only in Sociology but like in Chicax Studies.

Part of Daniella's critical consciousness included awareness of racism in the educational system, particularly around ethnic studies programs, and Chicax Studies programs even more specifically:

I guess it also helps you understand why I like the educational system is set up the way it is or like you know like you learn about like in Arizona. Like the Indigenous Studies Program was like taken out [Ethnic Studies was banned in Arizona public schools in 2010] because like even though they brought up higher test scores like and better results. Like it was just because it was like blind racism in there you know and like just the fact that like they wanted to keep history as a white space, like I don't know just because they feel like it's going to create a riot. And like you know like just makes you learn about that.

Daniella continued to articulate how banning ethnic studies in Arizona public schools was an attempt to preserve the academic subject of history as white space, "they're allowing for like graduates to go into teaching and like reproduce that white space you know. Like they

are allowing for change and what's the reason behind it? Like besides like it being like racism?"

For Daniella, part of developing critical consciousness centered upon challenging the views around her that she felt were problematic, "it's [being a student in CS] like allowed me to challenge any people and have like backup arguments to what they say. And like also allowed me to support my ideology I guess and be more mindful of the people around me."

Challenging other's views began with her siblings:

I think as a person like I think it's like also like giving me like resources or just like backup my arguments. Like for my sister and for my younger siblings. I feel like me pushing good grades on them like... like how Yosso's article where she talks about like students like that Chicax student pipeline. So, like I feel like with that I have like proved to my sisters like 'hey look like this is a scholarly article.' Or even for my friends like I like to explain stuff. And I think in that sense it's like made me able to have like something like to back up what I'm saying. So, like to have like an argument as to like why it matters or like you know to support it in general.

While also challenging on a personal level, Daniella has also had to challenge the views and language of her close friends:

I think in the way that like I'd really like monitored myself to is like I like my friends. I think like I have changed in the way where I like I feel like if I'm not comfortable with something that someone is saying like I've always been the person I'm like okay you shouldn't say that. But like now like I'm like you shouldn't say that because of this you know like or like if you keep saying like...

She recounted how difficult it was to challenge her friends overusing a specific racial slur as a casual way to refer to each other:

Like one of my friends says a word, [racial slur]. So, like for me like I had to like address it with her and be like you shouldn't do this. And this is why I don't feel comfortable with you saying it around in public. Please don't say it because like if someone comes up to you and they're like 'I don't feel okay with you saying that,' I can't back you up because they have a right to feel that way.

Eventually Daniella's challenges to their language, this and another friend stopped using that racial slur not only around Daniella but altogether. Daniella believes challenging them intellectually and using critical consciousness was significant in the process:

A lot of the talks we have are like intellectual. I mean we do talk about other stuff but it's like there's a like challenge or way of thinking too. My other friend, she's caught on to her like from somebody else, they're roommates. She's like 'we're gonna stop saying the word [racial slur]. And so we agreed and but it's so weird because usually I'll be like 'hi, [racial slur] or whatever.' And then this time he came home, and she is like just like 'hey,' like she didn't know what to say after. So, it's hard. And she's really trying. So, she's trying to stop saying that.

### *Support*

Daniella described support she received from her family for majoring in CS, as well as some of the disconnect it caused. She centered these experiences upon interactions with her mother:

When I go home...So when moms like my mom will be like...it's funny because we talk about it in classes. My mom will be like, 'ever since you went to like school like you're a different person and like your ideologies changed' and like this and that. And I'm like What do you mean? Like I'm still the same person.



Daniella also alluded to support she received from mentors that she felt was instrumental in her journey as a student, “I think about like me as a young adult and like I feel like if I would never had like the mentors that I had like I personally wouldn't have gotten this far in education.”

### *Goals*

Daniella identified one of her future goals as continuing as a graduate student in CS. She refers to the limited options she feels she may have with a degree in CS:

And I feel like Chicax Studies has made it harder because it's like what do I do?

Cause like one of my options...I wanted to be a year off since I graduate next month.

And so, I want to take a year off and possibly go take the Mexican American studies graduate program at San Jose State.

### **Structural**

#### *Professors*

Daniella recounted what she felt were significant interactions and relationship she developed with professors in CS. She received guidance and support from a specific professor that impacted her decisions as a student:

And I had gone to [name of professor]'s office hours previously like in the fall and I had talked to him about like how I like the class. And like you know just everything.

I had it in my head, like maybe I'll change majors later. I don't know for me it was kind of like hard because like I felt like I was going to fall behind by like a lot.

After receiving this guidance and support in a challenging situation, Daniella felt comfortable opening up to this professor about her personal life, “I think like the fact that for me personally I could go into his office hours and be talking about like about a paper that was due in a week but then somehow it would be like because his papers are like so

personal, I feel like you'd end up talking about your personal life.” Daniella described feeling safe in opening up to this professor and not as though this professor would just try to direct her back to coursework matters when discussing her personal problems, “and like he wouldn’t like shut you down you know like he wouldn’t be like ‘ok, well let’s get back to talking about the paper.’ He would just...like I don’t know like make you talk about it. And then eventually you like help you with your own personal stuff.” Daniella remembers even getting support from this same professor for a family issue that arose during her time as a student, “for example, like my first quarter here, I think I went into [name of professor]’s office and I was talking to him about like how my uncle was having issues at work. And I ended up telling him like how like my uncle was like not a citizen and stuff. And like how because it was like American history class, I was like I don’t really like how would you help you know.” The professor then guided Daniella to an administrator in the CS office that could connect her to resources for undocumented citizens:

And then that’s when he ended up.... that’s actually the first time I talked to [CS administer] and he ended up giving me like resources to like try to figure it out. It was like the 1-800 number for undocumented students and their families, their immediate families. So, I don’t know like I just feel like [name of professor] like tries to take action right away. And like he doesn’t really make it seem like well you can probably do this, but like actually like gives you a solution. I don’t know how to explain it but it’s like about your personal life, it’s not really about like school you know.

In addition to the significant experiences of support that Daniella experienced through interactions with a CS professor, she also describes being inspired by these

professors. She encountered professors working to build CS into a subject area that “seems like it matters”:

I feel like all the professors are like really passionate about what they talk about. And like they make it like seem like it matters you know. I know that like Chicax Studies is a newer field and like their cohort of PhDs [current CS graduate students] is like I think this class is the second class or something like that. So I think like even if that's not their field of expertise, like they still have like gone out of their way to like look into it and make the like the class into something that actually matters to them based on like Chicax Studies. Because right now like I'm taking my senior seminar which is [name of course] and like Professor [name] like actually he's written these books. It's about leadership, like Chicax leadership and like he researched all of that. I don't think his to his PhD is in Chicano Studies.

The professor who supported Daniella through a challenge in her family life was also influential in her choosing to major in CS because of their personal connection and because of the professor's guidance:

I feel like if I wouldn't have taken the class with Ralph like I would have not gone into Chicax studies. Like him as a professor for me personally I feel really connected with him. And I've talked about like grad school with him and everything and I feel like because he was telling me like if I could do with a PhD.

She explained that this professor's approachability and accessibility was part of developing a mentorship-type relationship that influenced her decision to pursue CS as an undergrad and beyond:

I feel like when he teaches in class...because I took [name of course] with him. For like my pre-majors, [before] I had declared the major, like I feel like other professors

aren't as open as they're like for the office hours. So, I feel like they're not like I don't know like everyone in the Chicax Studies program...the professors are cool, but I feel like I like I feel like it's just easier to talk to him. Maybe like his personality.

Her arc towards majoring in CS coincided with not performing well in her Communications classes. Again, the same supportive professor played a role in her decision:

So, I didn't want to do that. But at the same time like I wasn't doing really good in my Communications classes. So, I knew that like I wasn't going to get into the Comm major. So, in the spring in the winter actually I started talking to [name of administrator] in the Chicax Studies department because [name of professor] connected me with him and I ended up working on my Ed plan. And so, I ended up declaring Chicax Studies in spring. So, I don't know. To me like I feel like he was like a main guidance like while being here at [name of university] specifically like if I have an issue or whenever like I have a question like, I feel like I could go ask him.

### *Curriculum*

Daniella described aspects of the curriculum in CS that attracted her to the field or that became significant in her experiences. She first reported that that addressing social justice issues, such as racism, were memorable to her experiences:

Well I think that class the...Racism and American history. That was my first class here. But I had never taken it like a Chicax Studies course ever. I had taken sociology because of my community college and I really liked sociology, but in Chicax Studies, when I was looking for classes like I was like 'well that would be cool to take.' I don't know I just thought it would be different especially because it talked about racism in American history and sociology 1A... in my community

college kind of touched about like racism. So, I don't I just thought like it would be cool to learn, and I did learn a lot.

Daniella referenced how not encountering CS or any courses addressing racism in high school stood out as memories during her CS experiences, “yeah discrimination and stuff that like, a lot of stuff that I learned in his class like I had never learned in high school so I think that's an important part of those studies.” The curricular distinctions in high school and college, and the options it affords her as a student became clearer as she encountered the historical achievements of leaders in Chicax history:

Even in my [name of course] we are reading books so like on either Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, Sal Castro and then Bert Corona. So, I don't know I just think like those are like huge figures in history that like I feel like would be important. Like we were talking about it in my section. Like how a lot of these people we don't learn about in high school and like how that is also problematic.

She also recalls reading *The Panza Monologues* in one course and thinking critically about the oppression of women:

I took a bodies, culture, and power [course] and we read a bunch of *The Panza Monologues*. And I don't know it's just different because it's like *The Panza Monologues* is how a woman's stomach could be integrated [metaphorically] into like how society treat women. And like they [CS courses] are just different, stuff...it's never the same. Like not any classes [are the same], I mean things intertwine with each other but it's never the same.

Continuing this thread of CS curriculum being exciting and not repetitive, Daniella explained, “I mean you're not learning the same thing over and over you know like reading different articles and like I know it's pretty interesting. I don't think it's ever really boring to

read.” Daniella explained developing critical perspectives about why CS is not accessible in high school or before, “I think like it's not available for a reason. I don't know. Like public education doesn't allow it for a reason and I'm not sure why, but I feel like it could be integrated all right.”

Daniella describes being able to connect with many of the films that were screened in her CS courses. These films also challenged her to develop critical consciousness:

I feel like Chicax studies sometimes you also watch films or like you know like stuff that relates to what you're talking about. Like *Mi Familia* or whatever. Because it's like you can relate and you know how Professor [name] looks at how intersectionality plays in like films like *Mi Familia* or like how hyper masculinity or you know stuff like that.

### *Peers*

Daniella described significant experiences of feeling connected, or at times not connected to her peers in CS. Through statements label as structural, Daniella explained how she connected with peers over identity, language, and shared experiences:

But I think like I like being around like other Latinx like it makes you feel like... Because like I was saying earlier like when I first got here, I felt like it was like such a white space. And like being in a class with like other people that speak Spanish or like you know like for example Professor [name]'s class was showing a film, *Mi Familia*. And like other people were laughing around you because they actually get what they're saying. Like I don't know I think it's just cool like it's a cool bond.

Daniella explained that sometimes the connections to her peers included sharing personal experiences in an inclusive space:

It's like being around others who look like you have similar experiences. Yeah because like even a section for her class [professor]. Like I remember like we were talking about like mothers and how they teach their daughters to, when they're like menstruating, to be like discrete about it. Then like our TA was like...Chicanx Studies like I feel like it's like such an inclusive space where it's like other people are also welcome you know.

For Daniella, the personal nature of the courses draws her closer to her peers in CS. She again makes mention of the experience of personal connection to peers is unlike experiences in other classes and subject areas:

In a Chicanx Studies class like in [name of professor]'s class it's like a lot of like personal stuff. So, like even there...I was just like WOW because like people would talk about like their personal stuff. Like they would talk about like being scared of like their parents being deported or them dying at the border. And like having to take like the responsibility of taking care of their siblings and being in charge. Like that's not something you would talk about in like sociology, you know. In Chicanx Studies you would talk more about that stuff and more like personal and like people would be...I remember people in the class would be crying with them.

Daniella explained that these emotional moments often led to deeper personal connections with peers:

It was just like more all like talking about like how your parents and their struggle and how you understand their struggle now. And like I don't know like being first-gen and like how that impactful to who you are. I think there was a girl that she's like African-American and she was like talking about how like for her, even how she doesn't even feel like how she belongs on campus because like it's like 3 percent

[African American students at her university] or whatever. She's like it's hard because it's like people stare at you like you're different.

Daniella explained how she felt disconnected from her peers in other subject areas:

I remember that Communications...like it would be mostly like white-dominated major and it's mostly, like I mean it's a combination of male and female, but it's like a lot more males, I guess. And so yeah so, I just remembered like that like being different sitting in those two classes.

### *Environment*

Daniella recounted several features of the CS environment that were significant to her and her experiences. She pointed to how professors provided space to races and ethnicities other than Chicax or Mexican American in the CS environment:

And like other races are also welcome to put in and like have an input. Like it's just different because there was like there was like other races in that class...in that section and so like our teacher was 'like does that even still happen you know? Like do you guys that are like younger than me...' Just have like that input you from different cultures.

Daniella explained how she shares the value of making the CS environment about being a space for other cultures even when they are not the primary focus of the course material:

Because I don't know, for me, like Chicax Studies is also like about...cause a lot of people think that Chicax Studies is like mainly about Chicax but I don't think it's like that. I think it's more like Feminist Studies you know. Like you want equality for everyone, and anyone is able to call themselves like Chicano.

In addition to the inclusivity in the CS environment, Daniella explained that CS professors often worked to create a "safe space," where students were protected from



discrimination and microaggressions in class from other students. This also included making space for views often counter to the majority of CS students:

My professors in Chicana Studies always say it's a safe space. Like they're like if you don't feel like it's a safe space then that's concerning, and it needs to be addressed. I feel like a safe space is like somewhere where like you feel like you could say whatever you want, and nobody else is going to judge you or like you know say something. Like for example like in [name of professor]'s class, there was like a guy that was like 'I don't know why they keep coming from Mexico.' And it was like we were literally just learning about it. Even for a professor to be like, 'well that's their ideology you know and like I'm going to let them say what they feel like saying without making them feel like they're not included into the class.' I think that's also important.

She explained how environments in other course areas do not include the same sense of safety and inclusion, whereas Chicana Studies regularly ensured that. She explained how the environment in CS protected students from discrimination and microaggressions:

I feel like I feel like with sociology like it was like a male-dominated major. And there was...it's also a white-dominated major. Or it was, like now there's like more Latinx in it. And I feel like it's a lot of like micro-racism in there, microaggressions and like you know like just a lot of stuff like that. Until like...I think because it's Chicana Studies, I feel like they're more aware of the microaggressions that Latinx face and like they try to be more inclusive of everyone.

Thus, the CS environment allows students to communicate in ways that would not be possible in other course settings:

I feel like you wouldn't be able to say the same things that you say in Chicana Studies as a in Communications class. I feel like that Communications class is just like lecture. I remember, I'd be like 'you gotta, take notes, and take notes, gotta take notes' but like in Chicana Studies I feel like if you're like 'wait if this is this thing like...' And even if it takes it a little off topic, like oh like this reminded me of the movie that I saw because it includes that. Is that like what you're talking about?' Like you're able to like converse with your professor in lecture verses like it just being like a lecture.

Daniella felt, however, CS could do more to be even more inclusive in its environment:

It was a senior seminar and I was telling everyone else I just feel like education like with history, like I don't agree like that it should be like mainly Latinx in [CS]. I don't think it should be just Latinx. I feel like it should be an inclusive of everything. I guess like a class on racism in American history towards all races because like also like Japanese Americans have experienced racism in America. Yeah. Anyone that's not white. That was my argument towards it. I don't think like students should just learn about Latinx in history, like I feel like it's okay to learn about everybody else. So I don't know. That was my argument with like my friend being a history major and not being taught about that.

Daniella also discussed the importance of music to the environment in CS. She explained how coming into a CS course is much different than other course environments:

Also, in my Chicana Studies classes, the professors always play music before you get into the class. So, they'll play like salsa and cumbia and like Selena like you know. And Communications classes like you're just going to lecture and like sit down for the powerpoint on the front screen.

She described the emotional impact it has on her to enter the CS spaces. Latinx and Spanish-language music in the CS environment signaled a reminder to Daniella that she was no longer in a “white space”:

I think it kind of makes you feel like happy to be there. It changes your mood because you're like, wow like you're in such a white space all the time that like when you're going to class like you're just like oh it's different. It's like you're no longer in that white space. I don't know, like a more culturally inclusive space. I don't know because I like they also play like other types of music English music and like you know like. But I don't know it just makes it more exciting and I get into lecture. I think I think it just makes you feel more comfortable to be in there.

Daniella also experienced more guidance and support in the CS environment when compared to other course environments. Daniella remembers receiving instrumental support in putting together the paperwork and registration to complete her major in CS and this did not occur in other departments:

So like I don't know just that I feel like going there and like you into the [other academic department], it's different than going to like the Chicana Studies program and like asking them for like help because I even like the lady in the [other academic department], she is just not very helpful. It has to be fast like it's like you're going there to drop off something. But if you have any questions then she'll give you the sheet. But she like does it really fast. So, it's like if you don't really understand what's going on and I feel like it's hard for first-gen students...some of my friends have also had the same problem. And then the lady in [other academic department] telling me that like...basically like just shooing me away like saying like ‘well don't say that you're going to be done by this time if you don't know you're gonna be done because

what if you're not even done?' It's like disappointing to face that and I feel like in the Chicana Studies program like I never had that.

### **Text Message Reports**

As previously outlined, participants in this study exchanged text messages with the researcher 3-4 weeks after the initial interview to give a report of what was happening in the current course. This approach was used to supplement the interview data with more fresh experiential reports of the student experience, coursework, and the course environment, as well as any other potential data, while also using an approach to gathering data mid-experience in way that is typically accessible to the age of the participants. The researcher sent four questions to each participant covering the specific experiences in the current class, the types of activities and assignments with which they are engaging, observations of the course environment, and any further impact on their educational journey. All but one of the seven participants followed-up with the text message portion of the study.

### **Bianca**

Bianca recounted how a professor allowed a teaching assistant to take over the class for a couple of days. She explained how she appreciated the flexibility shown by her professor and how bringing different approaches and perspectives into the lecture setting, as opposed to just in smaller class section meetings, helped deepen the discourse:

This quarter, in one of my Chicana Studies courses, I had to opportunity to see how the professor allowed one of her TA's to take over the course for 2 days. I was able to see how there is flexibility in the course to allow a graduate student to put her own input into the course. It was a fresh and updated perspective on the course and on our society today. She was able to open up the forum to topics about our readings that we

usually can only truly go into depth in sections, but in lectures because of the time constraint and a lot of material needed to be covered, we can't do as much.

Bianca discussed developing her familiarity with feminist Chicana perspectives in literature, as opposed to more dominate Chicano voices, while in her the course she was taking at the time:

The courses have helped to reinforce topics I either knew from previous Chicana Studies courses or introduced me to newer topics. I'm able to expand my readings but what I think is the most important is how I'm expanding my Chicana literature. Before Chicano literature was what would be mainly focused on, but now I'm able to experience the Chicana experience and relate to the readings on another level that I'm unable to with Chicano literature.

She also emphasized the adaptiveness present in the CS environment, especially when so many experiences need to be shared when discussing historical and personal issues. This allows the course to respond to discussion dynamics as opposed to only a lecture and activity prescript:

The environment in Chicana Studies courses that I'm taking right now is more open to adaptiveness. What I mean by this is we never truly know how the course, or the lecture will direct our discussions. In other courses where we have discussions and feel like the time of 30 minutes feels like a long span, it's not this way with these courses. In fact, it feels like an hour-long discussion isn't enough or enough time to express our experiences or relations to the topics. Often times we are rushed in the end to try to get the needed material typed down for our benefits on the essays.

Bianca mentioned that the courses involve endurance with writing, but that her passionate and motivation continued to grow during this course:

These courses, although I know it will involve a lot of writing, aren't so painful to bare. At the end of the quarter's CH ST courses are always the courses I favor the most and always succeed the best than other courses, and I believe it has to do with having passion in the courses.

### **Isabel**

When the researcher reached out to Isabel for a report on the course she was currently taking, her response to the first question indicated that she is experiencing more enjoyment, relatability, and connection in to the material in her CS classes than in her other coursework. She explained these *gains*, “so far I'm really enjoying my CS classes, definitely more than my other courses because I've been able to relate to some of the material that is covered and it makes it easier to be engaged in the class when I already have a connection to the topic.” Isabel explained that her level of awareness has increased with the readings and other material she has encountered this quarter. She has also mentioned attending lectures and other events related to topics important to her through CS:

The courses have been a good amount of reading and they've increased my awareness of issues that affect my community like the effects of language policies in our education system. It has made me attend more events like guest lectures relating to topics that interest me that are covered in class and some that are not. Some events are for extra credit but regardless I still enjoy attending and I attend the ones that relate to issues I want to know more about.

She emphasized the relationships and connections she had had with *peers* through her CS courses. Again, she explained how these relationships are unlike those in other courses:

I've had some great experiences with other students in my CS courses and I generally get along with them pretty well because it's easy to make friends with each

other. I've definitely made more friends in CS courses than in any other courses I've taken at [name of university]. I've become good friends with several people I met in CS courses and we help each other out on filling in what we missed in lecture if one of us happens to miss and we form study groups as well.

Isabel also explained that her future goals of giving back and making contributions to her community had been strengthened through the CS she was taking:

As a student taking these classes has made me want to learn more and take more classes on things that affect my community and how to help alleviate these issues. More generally I feel that CS courses give me the validation that my community is worth it and that the work we do is important not only for our communities but all those marginalized as well.

### **Emilia**

Emilia described *gains* of expanding her critical consciousness in terms of examining her own privilege. She recognizes her privileges even though she acknowledges her own systemic oppression as a Chicana, "I feel that my classes this quarter are expanding my worldview. Even though I am Chicana, I have learned things that make me realize that I have more privilege than I previously thought, and there is still more for me to learn in this field." In terms of the course activities and assignments, or elements of *curriculum*, Emilia described getting the chance to delve in visual art, with which she is comfortable. She was exposed to Afro-Latinx art and experiences, which was new for her. She even set a *goal* of developing a podcast:

My courses have been thought provoking, especially my Afro-Latinx Art and Performance class in that I am seeing the value in different arts more, and in learning of the history, I appreciate those specific experiences more, as I previously had little

knowledge about Afro-Latinx people. I am pushing myself to perform in class, not only because it is a requirement, but also to do something different than visual art in which I am more comfortable. I am planning on making a mini podcast, which would make me listen to my own voice, a thing that is uncomfortable to me.

She explained the *environment* in CS was safe and comfortable in course she was taking, allowing her to developed relationships with peers and be acknowledged by her professor:

The environment is open and welcoming, I feel that my experiences are not only valid, but there are other people who have been through similar life events. I get acknowledgement from my professors and my peers and I like the feeling I get in class, that not only am I learning, but I am also giving knowledge. I have made close friendships from my classes and I like being able to say ‘hi’ to classmates around campus.

One of the changes and developments that Emilia noticed this year was her appreciation for own resilience and ability to recognize the obstacles that held her back before:

As a person I know I am appreciating more and more what it took to get me here to [name of university]. I used to say I was just stubborn, but now I see that I have an incredible amount of strength and resilience to keep going after all these years. As a student, I am trying to be more gentle with myself when I don't do as well as I want to. I definitely have perfectionist tendencies, which have negatively affected me in the past, but now I am acknowledging that I am doing well for what I have gone through.

### **Alejandra**

Alejandra described feeling more academic and future career direction based on the courses she was taking, “this quarter, I am in classes that are more oriented towards my



career/goals, in education and politics and I feel I am gaining a lot of valuable knowledge and experience that'll help direct me during the rest of my time here at [name of university].” She explained that her experiences in CS directed her towards more political organizing and community work, “my courses have been mostly electives this year, apart from my courses from this quarter. I have engaged in more political work within my communities as a result of the courses I’ve taken this year, including volunteering for the [name of university] workers strike. Alejandra described the *environment* in CS as welcoming and facilitative of developing relationships, unlike her experiences in other course environments, “the environment in Chicana Studies is a lot more open and welcoming than other departments on campus that I have been in. I’ve developed closer relationships with my professors and peers, as they are people who I have shared experiences with.” Alejandra also shared how CS and the CS community shaped her future and *goals* significantly this past year with respect to staying enrolled in college and addressing her mental health:

The experiences I’ve had in this major/community have heavily shaped my educational/personal journey since starting at [name of university], as some of these people and professors are the only reason why I was encouraged to stay in school after having a rough year last year and this year with my mental health.

### **Sandra**

Sandra described on her *gains* in the course she was taking at the time of the text message reports as increase knowledge and familiarity with politics:

One of the classes that I have been enjoying the most this quarter is [name of course]. Before this class, I knew very little about politics and I’m slowly learning. I’m very intrigued by the topic of neoliberalism and its effects on the Latinx

community. I also enjoy another Chicana Studies class I'm taking that allows me making art.

She described the *curriculum* challenge of having to engage in a considerable reading, but her CS art course is allowing her to cope with some of that stress:

My classes this quarter have been heavily on the reading side, for some, it's been out of a book or reader and for another it's mostly independent searching to get a better understanding of the subject. Like I mentioned earlier, one of my classes also provided me the time to de-stress by working on art and currently painting.

Sandra described the *Environment* in CS as welcoming and friendly, comparing this environment to that of her Math courses:

The environment in Cch Sst [CS] is very welcoming, friendly, and approachable. Compared to my time in the math department, I feel much happier in the one I am currently in. I feel that the TAs and instructors care for my success and are available to provide help if I have any questions. The students in my classes are also very friendly and I feel that it is easy to approach someone to ask anything or suggest a study group.

Sandra explained that she has developed the *goal* of wanting to expand her political and historical knowledge around Chicana people:

Especially with the [name of CS course] that I am currently in, I feel more enlightened about my knowledge in politics. I definitely want to learn more about this as it is a good idea to be informed about laws and policies that affect my community. With the other courses, I enjoy them bc I continue to learn new things about the history of Chicana in the US. I really believe this is beneficial in feeling

empowered and having motivation to continue through the struggles faced both academically and personally.

### **Daniella**

Daniella pointed some of the important experiences and *gains* in the class she was taking at the time of text message exchanges involved seeing her own values reflected in the courses and developing critical consciousness, “these experiences have impacted me in my life because I think it’s allowed me to see my values in my classes. I think it’s also allows me to be a critical thinker with facts about how Latinx matter in history. Also, it’s allowed me to be able to argue more with facts than just my opinions.” She has enjoyed the open discussions as part of the *Curriculum*, emphasizing how it allows her to connect with *peers*, “I think that I really enjoyed my prerequisites classes because there is a lot more discussion going on about reading and other materials. This is the space where I could connect with other students and talk about how we can relate to each other.” Daniella emphasized the importance of feeling safe from judgement in the CS *environment*, “I think that the space is more of a safe space that your opinion will never be judged. It’s a space where professors encourage discussion and can say that they also learn from their students. It’s not a space where you feel your professor will say that your response is wrong.” She ultimately described how she has become closer to her family and focus on her *goals*, “I think it’s allowed me to become closer to my family and also allowed me to narrow down my focus as a student. I think it’s paved a smaller path of what I’d like to do later.”

### **Finding the Essence**

The final goal of phenomenological research is reaching the essence of the studied experience (Creswell, 2017; Dahlberg, 2006; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The word “essence” on the surface may invite feelings of flightiness or non-rigor, but the process of

determining the essence is not mysterious (Dahlberg, 2006). Finding the essence in this study involves consideration of the textural and structural data to understand the core of the CS experience. Textural themes of challenges, gains, support, and goals lent greater understanding to the lived experiences of students in CS. Structural themes of professors, curriculum, peers, and environment helped explain the facilitation and nature of those experiences.

The essence of the textural and structural findings is that CS acts as a touchstone of sorts for the emotional and psychological needs of Chicana and Latina students. In the environment of CS, students can identify and work through many of their challenges and experience psychological thriving. This thriving serves as a platform for subsequent academic growth. CS students experience psychological barriers in other academic environments, often due to the nature of those environments themselves. The space of CS serves to promote healing for students, building their efficacy as students and equipping them with the critical consciousness to begin to pushback against the previous vulnerabilities in college. CS attracts many students who could benefit from the psychological gains tied to CS and provides the conditions for corrective emotional experiences (Bridges, 2006). These corrective experiences do not simply remediate student experiences and make them fit for success in other subject areas. According to the experiences of these participants, CS supports student identities and helps students reimagine themselves as capable of pursuing social justice-influence goals. CS produces agency in students to impact their educational environments and free themselves of the barriers to psychological and academic thriving.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

This dissertation study contributes to the understanding of how students participating in Chicana Studies academic courses describe their psychological experiences, using transcendental phenomenological qualitative research and multiple data collection methods. Participants described encountering CS and its environment, undergoing psychological gains and transformations, building academic achievement on a foundation of psychological thriving, and increasing their commitment to earning their degrees and pursuing future goals. The triangulation of data from initial interviews, experiential data from text messages, and final exit interview data drew connections from students' past and fresh experiences to form a conceptual model of the psychological and academic gains associated with CS. Contributions resulted from the exploration of challenges faced by students, psychological gains experienced, family support, goals influenced by Chicana Studies, professor relationships, curricular interactions, peer relationships, and environmental considerations. This chapter explores the implications of results with current literature around CS, Chicana and Latina student populations, as well as statuses such as first-generation and undocumented students. Discussion of significant findings will be followed by exploration of study limitations, potential future directions for this line of research, and recommendations for practice and implementation.

#### **Conceptual Model for Chicana Studies**

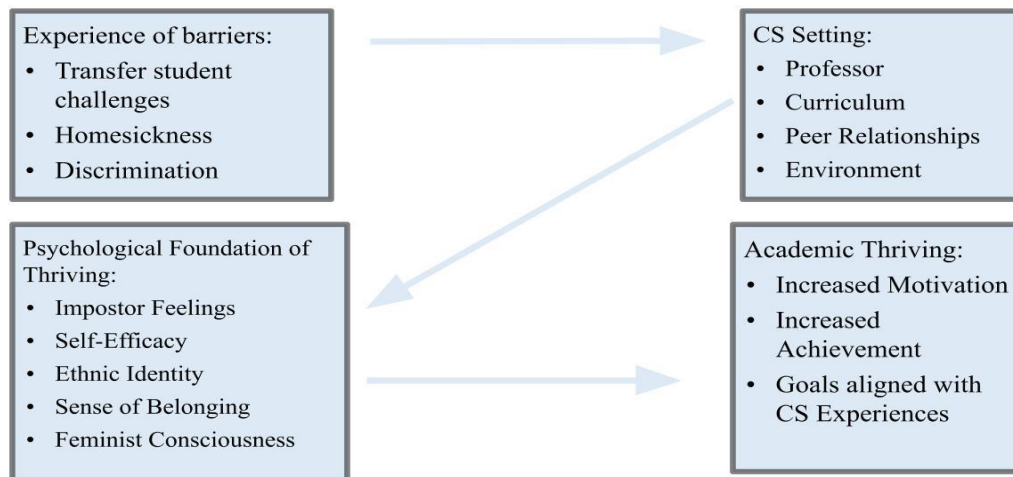
The core finding that binds the textual and structural findings is the emergence of a basic, tentative (to be subjected to further studies) theoretical framework for the phenomenological experience of CS (see Figure 1). The conceptual model captures the essence of the CS phenomenon and begins to explain the relationship between the textual

and structural findings. Challenges and barriers such as transferring from community college, homesickness, and discrimination as uniquely experienced by Chicana and Latina students, along with significant psychological and academic gains. This framing asserts the importance of the foundational quality of participants' psychological gains, most notably lessened impostor feelings, self-efficacy, positive ethnic identity, sense of belonging, and critical consciousness. These aspects of psychological thriving serve as a foundation upon which academic gains, such as increased achievement, motivations, and pursuit of positive goals. The academic thriving students described in this study occurred only after their significant psychological needs and conditions were satisfied. The CS environment facilitated the satisfaction of essential psychological thriving through crucial structural experiences such as professor relationships, peer relationships, interaction with unique CS curricula, as well as subtler environmental conditions.

Addressing psychological components of participants' intersectional identities of Chicana or Latina and first-generation college student (and sometimes first-generation transfer student) through CS facilitated later academic thriving among these participants. For example, some students better adjusted to college, as defined by increased academic performance and motivation, after CS addressed aspects of their homesickness. Another process experienced by students involved CS' attention to discrimination through an inclusive environment of peers and educators who facilitated interconnectedness through shared experiences. The psychological boon of interconnectedness among peers and professors often motivated students within CS classrooms and, more surprisingly, as well as classrooms in other subjects where they previously struggled. The challenges faced by transfer students in this study necessitated the recovering of academic self-efficacy in the nourishing environment of CS to return to positive levels of academic motivation and performance.

This study uniquely contributes to the literature on CS by offering a conceptual model to understand how CS (in this case, but possibly other ethnic studies programs) can positively impact the psychological and academic thriving of Chicax and Latinx college students. Of course, academic success will likely contribute to the relative psychological thriving of most students in some way. This model, however, begins to explain how Chicax and Latinx students must navigate their own set of unique barriers to find academic success in college and persist towards their goals. CS addresses their unique barriers by providing the conditions for significantly corrective emotional experiences (Bridges, 2006). Students in this study expressed how unpacking and processing experiences from being teased for Mexican foods at lunch to holding the possibility that their parents could be deported at any moment in an environment that was safe, validating, non-judgmental, and shared. These participants' shared experiences around immigration and working-class struggle in the U.S. are precise examples of how the implications of this study's results point to educational processes that are uniquely Chicax and Latinx.

### Model for Chicax Studies and Thriving



**Figure 1. Conceptual model to explain the process of Chicax Studies facilitating psychological and, subsequently, academic thriving.**

## **Barriers**

### **Transfer Student Challenges**

First-generation, transfer student participants in this study expressed that their experiences in CS helped them to mitigate their specific challenges of shifting academic and social positioning. CS served to facilitate more positive adjustment for these first-generation transfer students of color by acting as a space for students to work through the psychological barriers present when they shift their social and academic worlds. Most of the participants of this study were transfer students, two of them undocumented, and all the transfer students reported challenges related to their transfer status on a research university campus. Multiple students reporting doing well in high school and as a community college students, only to have their quality of performance as students dip once arriving on a research campus. Students reported experiences of not doing well in subjects such as Math, Chemistry, and Political Science, and CS becoming the environment in which they recovered the identity and experience of being a “good student” again. This recovering of a good student identity highlights the process described in the CS conceptual framing, namely that the provision of psychological healing facilitates subsequent academic gain.

Students also expressed the difficulty of encountering a different racial and ethnic environment upon arriving at a research university from a community college. Some referred to the experience as a “culture shock,” moving from a setting in community college where a large Chicanx and Latinx student population existed to a predominately white institution. CS provided these students with the experience of being in classroom environments with high Chicanx and Latinx student enrollment when they experienced being the minority in number and in impact on the classroom environment in Math, Chemistry, Political Science, and other subjects. The psychological experiences of safety,



familiarity, shared experience, and validation in CS supported students in navigating the shock of changing their sociocultural environments. Again, the CS environment allowed students to pursue academic success from a foundation of psychological thriving.

Student participants in this study expressed experienced numerous challenges related to their experiences as not just undergraduate college students, but as first-generation Chicax, Latinx, and undocumented college students. Participants' specific challenges in transitioning from community college to a research university may appear on the surface to simply contribute to the understanding of the transfer student. However, being a transfer student has become a significant vestige of the Chicax and Latinx student experience (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Sólorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). In fact, a clear majority of Latinx students in states like California who enter post-secondary education do so through the community college transfer student path (Sólorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). Chicax and Latinx students choose the community college transfer path due to reasons from financial constraints to feelings of efficacy as college student and have reported choosing the transfer path over admission offers to traditional four-year universities (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009). CS, whether fully intentional or not, is currently addressing psychological needs for some of their first-generation transfer students. These psychological gains are not only cultivating academic success and achievement, but also serving an important and underserved population in Chicax and Latinx undergraduate students.

### **Homesickness**

CS appeared to also aid students in mitigating the feelings of homesickness through environmental interactions that substituted elements for home. Multiple participants discussed homesickness as a significant challenge in their experiences as first-generation students at a research university. Working through homesickness, unsurprisingly, helped

participants persist through thoughts of not being able to finish and earn their college degrees. For the transfer student participants, feelings of homesickness and not belonging in college contrasted quickly with recent community college attendance, which was close to home and void of the separation from family that traveling to a larger and more regional university necessitates. Homesickness might seem endemic to any population or demographic of college students but when examining the U.S. American college student population, homesickness is associated with English language proficiency and perceived discrimination (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2010). Perceived discrimination is one of several stressors commonly experienced by Latinx college students that impacts well-being and life satisfaction (Ojeda, Navarro, Rosales Meza, & Arbona, 2012).

Ethnic discrimination is a barrier to be discussed in more detail, but it is important to note here that discrimination and cultural factors appear to influence experiences of homesickness for Chicanx and Latinx college students, a relationship confirmed in the qualitative results. Validation of ethnic-centered experiences such as discrimination and cultural practices in the CS environment, such as Spanish language and music, lessened the weight of homesickness for students in this study. Self-compassion for their own college readiness or their protectiveness of undocumented status also helped address homesickness for participants, where self-compassion has previously been associated with less homesickness, depression, and life dissatisfaction for college students (Terry, Leary, & Mehta, 2013). CS specifically facilitated personal validation and self-awareness in an environment described as “homey.”

The cultural values of family and family support have been linked to experiences of resilience and thriving for Mexican American and Latinx undergraduate college students (Morgan Consoli, Delucio, Noriega, Llamas, 2015; Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013;

Morgan Consoli, Llamas, & Consoli, 2016). Family values, or *familisimo*, have also produced values conflicts for some Latinx undergraduate students, conflicts arising between the prioritization of academic success and family connection (Vasquez-Salgado, Greenfield, & Burgos-Cienfuegos, 2014). Participants in this study reported family support for their majoring in CS, but also disconnect and lack of familiarity with the discipline at times. There were also reports of staying connected to family through CS, at times helping with homesickness. Latinx students and their families have shown significant differences in their individual academic and collective family goals from those of white students and their families, namely concerns around socioeconomic status and proximity to home. These at times have been barriers to degree attainment and retention (Ovink & Kalogrides, 2015). Latinx students separated from their families when attending college have distinct experiences of homesickness, often requiring family support and connection. CS, for first-generation Chicanx and Latinx students in this study, reflects these experiences and aids in diminishing homesickness, addressing retention issues by allowing students to persist in their academic pursuits.

### **Discrimination**

The CS environment acted as a corrective space for participants, countering the exclusive and discriminatory environments they encountered through professor and peer interactions in other academic environments. CS became a safe environment facilitating healing related to the wounds of discrimination, which aided participants in navigating the systemic challenges facing Chicanx and Latinx college students. Students in this study shared experiences of ethnic discrimination and the impact on adjustment to college. They reported experiencing discrimination in classroom environments, including class discussions, and had discriminatory comments at times directed at them. These experiences

led students to describe course environments such as Chemistry, Math, Communications, and Political Science as unsafe and uncomfortable. In multiple instances, unsafe academic environments led to doing poorly academically and psychologically in these courses.

Several participants then felt incapable of succeeding in other subject areas and changed their academic majors to CS, or at least chose to major in both CS and another subject. Some participants even described the damaging impact on their overall mental health. The process of falling into poor mental health because of the campus and classroom environments appeared to almost be almost reversed by CS.

Discussions within and around CS courses allowed students to connect over and explore experiences of racial discrimination. Exploring these experiences in CS again highlights the process within the study's conceptual model: CS facilitating important psychological healing that serves as the fundamental first steps of academic adjustment and performance. Perceived discrimination among Latinx undergraduate students is previously associated with several undesirable mental health outcomes such as psychological distress, suicidal ideation, state and trait anxiety, and depression (Hwang & Goto, 2008). Impostor feelings, to be discussed more at length, are often tied to experiences of discrimination for Latinx individuals while in college, moderating the relationships between discrimination and both depression and anxiety (Cokley, Smith, Bernard, Hurst, & Jackson, 2017). As previously mentioned, discrimination is also linked to challenges in adjustment to college such as homesickness (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2010). Ethnic discrimination is obviously an experience Chicanx and Latinx experience only in common with other racial and ethnic minorities, and not white students, and one contributes significantly to barriers to degree attainment and positive mental health. CS specifically offers a healing space within an academic space, focusing on specific discrimination relating to the sociocultural and

socioeconomic positioning of Chicanx and Latinx students. Inspiringly, all students in this study committed to the CS as majors and double-majors and crafted future goals beyond college that included social justice values inherited through CS. The foundations of psychological thriving achieved through healing in the CS environment contributed to the thriving of participants in this study.

### **The Psychological Foundation**

This section will discuss the significant psychological gains comprising the foundation of psychological adjustment that propelled academic success for participants in this study. Diminished impostor feelings, increased self-efficacy, positive ethnic identity, a sense of belonging, and critical consciousness were all significant components in improving psychological thriving. All students reported challenges and barriers as Chicanx and Latinx-identified college students, whether as first-generation students, transfer students, non-traditional students, or all of these statuses at once. Where relevant, the interpretation of findings in this study will be discussed in intersection with literature.

### **Impostor Phenomenon**

Students participating in this study identified CS and the CS environment as a source of relief from impostor feelings. The data provided a variety of pathways to impostor feelings experienced by students, feelings later addressed through interactions with CS. In all of these instances, as well as other participants reporting impostor phenomenon, CS was identified with diminishing impostor feelings. Some felt comfortable managing their impostor feelings as other majors, but attribute their decision to add CS as a double-major as imperative in that process. Other participants' interactions with CS professors specifically helped them to manager their own impostor feelings and persist through a pursuit of post-secondary education. One undocumented participant identified relationships with CS student

peers as a significant factor in managing impostor feelings relating to not identifying as Chicana as a CS major, allowing her to be open and proud of her academic goals. Aspects of CS such as environmental differences from STEM subject areas, as well as supportive professors and peers, provided students with resources to overcome impostor feelings, a significant barrier to Chicanx and Latinx student achievement.

Chicanx and Latinx students experience considerable risk for impostor phenomenon (Cokley, McClain, Enciso, Martinez, 2013; Cokely et al., 2017; McGee, 2016; Peteet, Montgomery, & Weekes, 2015). Impostor phenomenon is seen as one of many causes of poor performance and adjustment to college for Latinx students, while also being associated with lower levels of psychological well-being and positive ethnic identity (Peteet, Montgomery, & Weekes, 2015). The impostor phenomenon also exists as a significant barrier to Latinx students in STEM fields. Impostor phenomenon exists as a threat to educational attainment in higher education. Experiences of impostor phenomenon have even been found to be a barrier to graduate school and graduate degree attainment for Latinx students (Espino, 2014). Data in this study suggests that participants are looking beyond their degrees and are cementing future goals, owing to the convergence of CS experiences and their impostor feelings.

### **Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is another key component of the positive psychological development students experience in CS. Most of the participants in this study expressed confidence and self-efficacy as important gains associated with their participation in CS. Building self-efficacy in the nourishing environment of CS put students in a better position to succeed outside in other subjects, often after cultivating experiences of success within CS. Again, a number of pathways towards self-efficacy were expressed in the interviews and text

message data, explaining the individual experiences of self-efficacy development in a way that only qualitative data can provide. Participants detailed experiences of developing strong and efficacious identities as students in CS that allowed them to achieve greater success in other academic subjects. Each instance demonstrated unique pathways to self-efficacy. These students all identified obvious growth in confidence and self-efficacy as students and attributed this development to being in the CS environment. Each of these students struggled in other academic subjects, and as students overall, before experiences in CS changed this original college trajectory. CS clearly cultivated self-efficacy and, when combined with other components of psychological thriving, pushed students forward instead of out of college.

Confidence and self-efficacy are critical for Chicanx and Latinx students in college, often playing an important role in persistence, retention, and degree attainment (Garza, Bain, & Kupczynski, 2014; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Lopez, 2013; Torres & Solberg, 2001). First-year Latinx students with low levels of confidence and self-efficacy, owing to a lack of knowledge about college expectations, are at great risk to dropping out, often in their first year of college (Garza, Bain, & Kupczynski, 2014). Participant responses reflected this exact experience. Developing and maintaining self-efficacy as a college student throughout enrollment is critical for degree attainment in Latinx student populations (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). There are also gendered aspects of self-efficacy for Latinx students. Latinx females are significantly less likely to have student self-efficacy at the start of their first year in college (Lopez, 2013). This is important to note, considering all but one of the participants in this study identified as female. Self-efficacy is not only tied to persistence and degree attainment for Latinx students, self-efficacy was also linked to better health outcomes (Torres & Solberg, 2001). Student development of self-efficacy in CS addresses

the barriers to academic achievement and thriving that are unique to Chicanx and Latinx students.

### **Ethnic Identity**

Results from this study's interview and text message data are consistent with long-researched findings that ethnic identity positively impacts psychological and academic thriving for Chicanx and Latinx college students. All participants experienced positive ethnic identity development through CS, according to their own recounts, but did so through very distinct pathways. As a construct within this study, ethnic identity demonstrates the qualities of a multi-faceted touchstone that were discussed as the essence of the CS experience. Interview data that focused on past experiences and text messages that provided more fresh experiential data included instances of developing positive ethnic identity. Participants reported feeling that CS allowed them to explore and develop ethnic identity in ways that were previously unavailable in schools and academic settings. Participants also specifically identified aspects of CS curriculum, such as personal group discussions, in both interview and text data that promoted her exploration and development of ethnic identity. Peer relationships formed in the CS environment facilitated discussions of ethnic identity exploration and development. Relationships with professors who share participants' ethnic identity were facilitative ethnic identity development, as seeing a professor from their culture significantly changed their feelings about being a Chicanx student capable of becoming a future professor. While CS exists as a landing place for students possessing room to benefit from positive ethnic identity development, CS also provides numerous pathways through professors, curriculum, peers, and environment for said development. These pathways all led to the broader psychological development that contributes to later academic success for Chicanx and Latinx students.



Ethnic identity was long ago found to be important to the academic and psychological functioning of Chicana and Latina students (Phinney, 1990; Cuellar, Nyberg, Maldonado, & Roberts, 1997; Ong, Phinney, & Dennis, 2006; Iturbide, Raffaelli, & Carlo, 2009; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). More positive and developed ethnic identities appear to be associated more with first-generation Latina college students than those with college-educated parents (Cuellar, Nyberg, Maldonado, & Roberts, 1997), with all the participants in this study sharing the first-generation college student identity. Higher levels of ethnic group identification are associated with higher levels of academic achievement for Chicana and Latina college students (Ong, Phinney, & Dennis, 2006), while the converse has also been found, that lower levels of measured ethnic identity are associated with lower levels of academic achievement (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). In addition to academic achievement, positive ethnic identity has been linked to increased psychological well-being, acting as a protective factor against psychological distress and challenges (Iturbide, Raffaelli, & Carlo, 2009). The interview and text message data in this study suggest that positive ethnic identity is one of the fundamental psychological gains that precedes significant academic gains, contributing to the emergence of the CS conceptual model.

### **Sense of Belonging**

Interview and text message results point to a sense of belonging, both to a community within CS and as a student in general on a predominantly white institution, as part of the fundamental psychological thriving necessary for first-generation Chicana and Latina undergraduates. Participants in this study reported a lack of belonging in course environments other than CS. Experiences in Math, Chemistry, and Political Science contributed to students' feelings of not belonging on a research university campus. This stood out as counter to the psychologically nourishing environment of CS when students

first encountered it. Whether due to peers, professors, or size of the community, CS appears to provide significant feelings of belonging to these students experiencing barriers, often due to challenging experiences in other course environments. The corrective emotional experience tied to CS for Chicana and Latina students foments a sense of belonging vital to high academic functioning in college, building upon a psychological touchstone of multiple psychological gains experienced by all participants.

A sense of belonging, or a lack thereof, serves as a pathway, or obstacle, to psychological well-being and academic achievement for many Chicana and Latina college students (Hernandez, 2002; Johnson et al., 2007; Nuñez, 2009; Kiyama, 2011). At the foundation, Chicana and Latina college students experience significantly less belonging than their white peers (Johnson et al., 2007). The challenges in cultivating a sense of belonging in college exist as a significant barrier to educational attainment for Chicana and Latina students (Hernandez, 2002). When facing barriers to belonging, Chicana and Latina college students often find belonging in organizations or other sociocultural experiences (Kiyama, 2011). In environments where Chicana and Latina undergraduate students typically face challenges to belonging, diversity experiences supported belonging (Nuñez, 2009). Results of this study suggest that CS provided participants with a sense of belonging they were not previously experiencing, feeding into broader psychological thriving.

### **Critical Consciousness and Chicana Feminisms**

Results from qualitative interviews and text message responses indicated the importance of developing critical consciousness to the experiences of participants in this study. The recounting of critical consciousness development in CS demonstrated the complex ways in which participants applied their critical analyses to situations in their own private and student lives. The negotiation of personal struggles in some cases led to

psychological and academic thriving. Participants explained how the development of critical consciousness within CS course environments allowed them to challenge sexism. Students also applied their critical consciousness to the environment of CS itself, suggesting that students are looking to enhance the emotionally corrective qualities of CS. Students expressed feelings that CS is a great site for developing critical consciousness but that the CS could be even more progressive and inclusive when it comes to other Latinx nationalities and ethnicities. Similar views were expressed about how CS analyzes and presents gender concerns. Voices coming from the students in interviews should, and will be, considered in recommendations moving forward with this research. It should not be taken lightly that students are showing educators how to enhance the psychological benefit of CS and offer it to a wider population of students. The data in this study suggest that not only are these students developing critical consciousness in the CS environment, they are applying that consciousness to issues unique to their lives as Chicana and Latina students, as well as issues for other vulnerable communities they acknowledge. Here we can see a clear potential in CS' capacity to impact communities not identifying specifically as Mexican and Chicana culture, or who are oppressed to some extent by Mexican and Chicana culture, and expanding the psychological benefits to more students.

Applications of critical consciousness in this study are also reflective of the participants' intersectional identities, as women and queer-identified gender non-conforming Latina first-generation college students. Addressing sexism in one's family, within CS itself, or exclusion of other Latina and Black identities are demonstrative of non-male students of color impacting their own oppressive realities. Much of these intersectional perspectives and actions are consistent with critical feminisms, and the multiple identities for Chicana feminists (Hurtado, 2003). The process of not only developing critical Chicana feminist

perspectives but also developing the power and capacity to voice them is one the potential offerings from CS. The environment of CS cultivates space of intersectional identities, their empowerment, and the expression of important ideologies connected to liberating them from oppressive sociocultural and educational circumstances.

For Latinx students, particularly female and queer-identified, students, the presence and influence of *marianismo* remains a cultural force with which to inspect and wrestle. Originally coined by political scientist Evelyn Paniagua Stevens in 1973, “*marianismo*” entails the Catholic-influenced values of purity and obedience to male authority (Castillo, Perez, Castillo, & Ghosheh, 2010). Participants in this study, as part of their Chicanx feminist consciousness, defy notions of *marianismo* in the processes of engaging with CS curriculum and environments. The results and conceptual model in this study indicate that overcoming traditional notions of *marianismo* are essential to the psychological and academic foundations of thriving for participating CS students. The adherence to *marianismo*, especially among young Latinx males (Piña-Watson et al., 2014), suggests the importance of a critical Chicanx feminist consciousness in achieving the psychological foundation to overcome the limiting powers of traditional values.

The development of critical consciousness stands out as one of the primary gains associated with student participation in CS (Acosta, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2005). Researchers have pointed to the capacity of CS to facilitate Chicanx and Latinx students’ critical consciousness development around their own ethnic identity and ethnic community history. Educators have emphasized critical consciousness as one of the main pillars of psychological transformation for participating students (Acosta, 2007). Other educators have intentionally incorporated the development of critical consciousness through exposure of students to critical race theory (Yosso, 2005). In all observations of critical

consciousness development, students shifted their analytical perspectives as well as their psychological orientation towards race and ethnicity and the structures in society that stratify those identities. Thus, developing critical consciousness is not simply an intellectual or academic gain, it is a restructuring of psychological response to societal artifice that connotes stratification. The attempts of CS educators over decades to promote and infuse critical consciousness into student development is reflected in the data from this study, suggesting those attempts have supported generations of Chicanx and Latinx students improve psychological and academic functioning.

### **Thriving**

The concept of thriving explains the collection of psychological gains associated with participation in CS. The experiences of diminished impostor feelings, self-efficacy, positive ethnic identity, sense of belonging, and critical consciousness are all indicative of students who are better off psychologically than before their enrollment in CS (Carver, 1998), while often suffering in other course environments. Students made meaning of their experiences in CS (Parry & Chesler, 2005), undergoing experiences like recovering their student identities from high school or finding corrective healing to counter the discrimination faced in other course environments. These experiences that supported psychological thriving typically began before academic thriving occurred (Benson & Scales, 2009). Conceptually, thriving helps explain the unique duality of psychological and academic thriving for Chicanx and Latinx students. They often face discrimination, homesickness, and other barriers to thriving, and psychological thriving serves as the platform for later academic success. The importance of cultivating thriving for Chicanx and Latinx students (Morgan Consoli, et al, 2014; Perez & Saenz, 2017) speaks to the critical role that CS plays for these student populations. The potential for CS to foster pathways

towards thriving lends it incredible power in positively transforming the psychological and academic trajectories of students.

### **Academic Success**

As discussed in the presentation of the CS conceptual model, academic success appears to be built upon the essential psychological gains crucial to adjustment and thriving for Chicanx and Latinx college students. Students shared complex narratives of academic motivation and success following positive psychological experiences in CS. The environment of CS better situated students psychologically through self-efficacy, belonging, and other discussed gains, to achieve in college, earn their degrees, and set goals that reflected the values they cultivated in CS. In these sections on academic success, discussion of student data from interviews and text messages, along with consideration of research literature, helps us understand the academic benefits tied to psychological thriving supported by CS.

### **Improved Academic Performance and Motivation**

CS facilitated pathways to motivations and performance that potentially would not have existed otherwise for participants, which should be seen as significant when considering the issues cited above for Chicanx students in higher education. Students expressed increases in their motivation and performance generally as undergraduates following the psychological gains experienced through CS. Interview results in this study confirmed multiple participant reports of improved academic performance in college that was not limited to performance in CS. Multiple participants also discussed their confidence and self-efficacy as students due to their participation in CS. Participants in this study shared experiences of not being supported or given access to the resources to cultivate a successful student self-image in subjects in STEM or Political Science. CS provided students in this

study with the support and personal resources to craft self-images of successful students capable of thriving in the completion of their degrees and beyond. These experiences in other subjects pushed students toward CS as permanent home by becoming a CS major or double-major, holding onto to a STEM major in one instance. The experiences in other subjects appear to be so overwhelming and damaging to self-efficacy and belonging for participants that the corrective experiences in CS were necessary to reimagine themselves as capable and successful students.

Only 6% of Chicanx students attain an undergraduate degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004), the lowest attainment rate of any Latinx subgroup in the U.S. (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). This disturbing and challenging trend for Mexican American and Chicanx students is despite the fact they are among the fastest growing Latinx ethnic group in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Results in the study suggest that CS provided a pathway for participants to envision the goal of completing an undergraduate degree, as well as career goals beyond this. As will be discussed later with other recommendations, the importance of CS producing a global academic advantage in terms of performance, motivation, and efficacy should not be lost on post-secondary educators and administrators. As was previously found in the CS programs that were banned in Arizona, students participating in CS experienced better overall academic motivation and performance, and these gains were not limited to CS courses (Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx, 2014). Ethnic studies programs in general have been found to improve the global academic performance of participating students (Dee & Penner, 2016; Sleeter, 2011). Participants in this study reflected psychological and academic gains consistent with these previous studies, lending further support for the CS conceptual model framed by the results of these participants' phenomenological experiences.

## Goals

Each participant identified future career goals that were influenced or inspired by their participation in CS. Participants identified pediatrician, academic counselor, immigration or environmental lawyer, industrial organizational psychologist, professor, and researcher as goals that were shaped by the psychological transformation they underwent. CS. The theme of social justice ran through each of the participants' goals. Whether as a pediatrician serving oppressed communities, an academic counselor serving students underrepresented in the academy, or an immigration or environmental lawyer bringing justice to vulnerable communities, their goals all possess a quality of contribution or giving back to their own and other oppressed communities. All participants attributed this social justice quality of their goals to their experiences in CS, where they gained awareness and critical consciousness around important sociocultural issues for Chicana and Latina communities. Not only are students in CS developing important career goals, these goals seem to be oriented towards the values of justice and equality. Providing culturally responsive career support to Latina college students enhances overall wellness, academic performance, retention, and graduation rates (Berríos-Allison, 2011), resources and services that also appear to be part of the CS experience.

College self-efficacy is directly associated with peer and faculty integration, supporting persistence in completing undergraduate degrees and pursuing career goals (Torres & Solberg, 2001). Differences between Latina college students who completed their degrees and students who did not included academic difficulties, efficacy for the necessary socialization to college, and career goals (Zurita, 2004), all gains found within the results of this study. The CS academic environment facilitated career goal establishment for participants in this study, with the establishment of career goals appearing to aid in the



persistence and attainment of their degrees. Career goals always came after or were modified by the psychological changes associated with their CS participation.

### **Environmental Components of Chicax Studies**

The previous sections of discussion in this chapter thus far have mostly addressed the implications of psychological and academic processes from a textural perspective (Moustakas, 1994). While many of the gains included structural components such as professors or peers supporting participant experiences, the discussions were not from a structural perspective. This section, however, will focus on participant data from a structural perspective, focusing on how pedagogy, relationships, and *testimonio*-influenced discussions facilitated strengthening of psychological thriving and, subsequently, academic success. It is also worth noting that text messaging data became more significant in producing structural data than textural. The textural experiences required more space for expression, while structural factors were more adaptive data to the text messaging phase.

### **Pedagogical Methodology**

Participants in this study noted the presence of critical and equitable methodologies in their interactions with CS professors inside and outside of the classroom. CS appeared to provide an environment in which equity was practiced in clear distinction from other course settings. The psychological response to equitable methods of pedagogy and an equitable environment also fed into the psychological foundation of thriving. Interviews and text message data confirmed the equity in pedagogy. Participants emphasized the importance of CS professors occasionally using Spanish, which established a structural sense of equity in the classroom through an act of reaching out to the cultural and language diversity in the room. Others pointed to the inspiration felt from professors due to their attention to diversity, oppression, and activism in their pedagogy. An environment in which CS

professors promoted critical and equitable perspectives into their pedagogical approaches accomplished many of the recommendations outlined in literature: cultivate an environment that reproduces active agents in its students, working to dismantle structures oppressive to their academic and psychological thriving.

Representation of underrepresented minority faculty does not significantly impact the academic or psychological thriving of these student populations without genuine attention to diversity in their pedagogical methodologies. Providing students with culturally nurturing experiences in their college careers positively impacts minority student populations (Castillo-Montoya, 2019). Professors practicing equity-minded pedagogy also significantly impact the experiences of underrepresented ethnic minority students in college (Dowd & Bensimon, 2015). This entailed not only the inclusion of methods critical of equity in aspects of history and society, but also micro-pedagogical decisions such as infusing equity into syllabi to cultivate an equity-rich course environment. Chicanx professors often intentionally infuse critical consciousness and equity into their pedagogy in an effort to dismantle white-dominant pedagogical methods faced by their students in most other classrooms, as well as construct sustainable, alternate methodologies.

### **Corrective Relationships in Chicanx Studies**

Participants spent more time in the qualitative interviews and text messaging speaking about professor relationships than any other textural or structural theme. Clearly, this aspect of the CS is significant to the psychological and academic gains reported by students. Examples provided by students demonstrate important relationships that were responsive to personal psychological needs, whether that be efficacy, belonging, or positive ethnic identity. Attending to these needs provided students with the psychological foundation to build academic success. Participants reported that the understanding and

approachable nature of CS professors made a lasting impression. Some felt that they had more academic motivation and experienced better academic performance due to these relationships. Other participants described professors feeling like extended family members, one student explaining that one professor felt like another aunt to them. This specifically supported Bianca through her feelings of homesickness after leaving home for college. Participants spoke to the personal nature of her interactions with a supportive CS professor. One remembers a professor helping her navigate issues relating to an undocumented uncle, providing the student with instrumental support in the form of a referral to an immigrant's rights legal resource. In all of these examples given in interviews and text messages, professors provided support around personal student issues that greatly impacted their psychological and academic thriving. Whether supporting students through homesickness, family problems, or even dropping out of college, professors impacted the positive development and trajectory of Chicanx and Latinx undergraduates.

Personal relationships formed by CS professors with their students positively impact those students as much as classroom pedagogical approaches, if not more so (Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby, & Muller, 2011; Gonzalez, 2002; Nelson Laird et al., 2007). In comparing the experiences of Latinx students at predominately-White institutions (PWIs) to those at Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), students at HSIs felt more supported than those at PWIs, resulting in higher student engagement, academic performance, and favorable professor relationships (Nelson Laird et al, 2007). Students often feel more supported by professorial mentors and advisors when they are matched by race (Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby, & Muller, 2011), specifically when also equity-minded. Chicanx and Latinx students have also expressed the importance of welcoming and approachable Chicanx professors to their own sense of efficacy on their educational trajectory (Gonzalez, 2002).

Chicanx and Latinx students may be more capable of developing relationships with professors when those relationships reflect their ethnic and cultural experiences, and when they sense culturally informed support. Text message and interview data highlight many instances of CS students encountering the personal and cultural support from professors along their process of gain acquisition.

All participants referred to the importance of connecting with peers in CS over ethnicity, identity, and shared experiences. There were again comparisons to other course environments in which the ethnic identity composition stands out in contrast to the environment in CS. The corrective experiences in peer relations again supported the positive psychological development of participants, often leading to instances of academic success. The small size of a mostly Chicanx and Latinx peer environment appeared to facilitate positive psychological and academic functioning. Comparisons were made to other course subjects in Chemistry, Math, and Political-Science again, the implications being the CS provides a unique environment to build significant peer relationships. It is important to acknowledge that students from many, if not all, ethnic backgrounds benefit from peer support. However, these results indicate that peer relationships with other Chicanx and Latinx students in CS provides the opportunity to build support around ethnic oppression specific to this population, and which is not possible in other course environments.

Text message and interview data from this study similarly resembled many of the findings situated in current literature around peer relationships among Chicanx and Latinx students. Supportive peer relationships and peer interactions positively impact the psychological and academic functioning of Chicanx and Latinx college students. (Baker, 2013; Cerezo & McWhirter, 2012; Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Nuñez, 2011). Data from this study involving all Chicanx and Latinx participants confirmed the significant role

that peers play in the thriving of students. Peer relationships are fundamental to the academic success of Latinx students (Baker, 2013). Peer relationships and supportive social networks specifically serve the transition of Chicanx students into college life (Nuñez, 2011). An important aspect of that transition and peer support is coping with social and institutional racism. A lack of peer support resulted in poorer adjustment and transition to college life, leading to diminished psychological function and lower achievement in form of grade point averages (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005). However, group interventions emphasizing peer relationship building and social awareness improved college adjustment, as well as the development of critical consciousness (Cerezo & McWhirter, 2012). Thus, peer relationships among Chicanx and Latinx students improve their chances for improved psychological thriving, academic achievement, and retention as undergraduates. Data from this study supports this perspective.

### **Spirit of *Testimonios***

Qualitative data from text messaging and interviews detailed experiences of personalized course material and interactions, resulting in heightened motivation around CS and academics more generally. Several students pointed to their realizations about CS course material being previously inaccessible to them in high school and even earlier. Participants also pointed to the social justice nature of the curriculum and the importance and attraction that held for them to be present in academic coursework. The curriculum in CS itself holds the potential for powerful corrective experiences that broaden the psychological and academic adjustment for students. Examples from student data align with this model conceptualization. Students pointed out that CS curriculum offered Chicanx feminist role models. Several participants again compared their experiences to interactions with STEM curricula, and that of Communications and Political Science. Students felt disconnected

from and less motivated by these outside curricula, whether they chose to continue with them as double majors or not. Participants discussed the emotional quality of CS curriculum, explaining the importance of space to explore and process emotional experiences related to identity that would be seen as impossible or inappropriate in other subject settings, such as in STEM. Being free to explore these experiences in a safe environment supported participants' psychological and academic thriving. Not only did experiences outlined in the qualitative data confirm the personal nature of CS and its positive impact on student achievement and engagement, there were clear emotional and psychological gains associated with students' interactions with CS curriculum.

Participant retellings of significant interactions with CS curriculum run consistent with research literature. CS curriculum, or the arrangement of course material, discussions, and assignments, is quite personal in nature, addresses student concerns about ethnic representation in course material, and positively impacts student engagement, achievement, and empowerment (Burciaga & Navarro, 2015; Nuñez, 2011; Sleeter, 2011). As participant data suggested in this study, CS courses are personal in nature. The practice of *testimonios*, personal accounts of lived experiences that are inherently Chicanx and Latinx in nature, lend not only a personal quality to CS, but a platform for personal exploration, expression, and growth. *Testimonios* are not just personal discussion and sharing, but rather an academically and emotionally rich experience that has implications for academic well-being, achievement, retention, and career beyond or within academia (Burciaga & Navarro, 2015; Sleeter, 2011). CS curricula is intentional, rigorous, and cultivates student engagement, achievement, and empowerment. CS curricula is also responsive to student concerns about not being represented in Euro-centric academic environments, a condition that are not only aware but one they can explain with great first-hand detail (Sleeter, 2011). A review of CS experiences

by Chicax and Latinx students found that the experience of learning others' perspectives in personalize curricula helped students develop critical perspectives and engagement in their learning (Nuñez, 2011). Student interactions with a personalized curricular environment reported in this study, and the positive psychological and academic consequences, are consistent with much of the literature on CS and *testimonios*.

### **Other Aspects of Environment**

Additional, subtler aspects of the CS environment emerged from text messages and, to a lesser extent, semi-structured interviews, intersecting with research and playing important roles in the psychological and academic thriving of students. For Chicax and Latinx students, environments in college must feel supportive, to an already underserved and under-acknowledged population, to reach the best possible conditions for success as undergraduates (Baker, 2013). Participants in this study indicated support from professors, teaching assistants, peers, and campus programming that acknowledged them and made room for their experiences. When students encountered the opposite in STEM and other Social Science and Humanities fields, they felt significantly the lack of support and the challenges those environments presented to their psychological and academic thriving. Recent sociopolitical events in the U.S. have also changed the landscape of support and belonging for Chicax and Latinx students on campus. The aftermath of the 2016 U.S. presidential election cultivated an unsafe and unwelcoming environment across college campuses for Chicax and Latinx students (Frankling & Medina, 2018). As Daniella stated, safety and inclusivity stand out as the most significant aspects of environment that helped her feel as if she belonged and could be successful as a transfer student. The 2016 election negatively impacted the emotional well-being of a CS class attended by Emilia, and she

expressed the importance of her professor noticing the change in environment, stopping the curricular agenda, and attending to those emotional shifts.

Several students in this study commented on the importance of hearing *Banda* and other genres of Mexican and Latinx music as they entered the classroom. They separately noted the role that hearing music in class played in their mitigations of homesickness. Hearing music common to their families and family events quite literally made these students feel at home, a feeling in direct opposition to those fomented by the various levels of unwelcome messaging to Chicanx and Latinx students. Chicanx students face unwelcoming messages on college campus on a number of experiential levels. Chicanx students encountered unwelcoming messages in social, physical, and epistemological settings (Gonzalez, 2002). This entails encountering oppressive rhetoric in social interactions, in physical spaces such as classrooms and administrative offices, and epistemological exchanges among students and educators. Engaging with cultural nourishments support Chicanx students in facing the unwelcoming interactions that are common on college campuses. Music, specifically Spanish-language and Mexican music, serves as one such cultural nourishment (Gonzalez, 2002). In even more subtle micro-exchanges, students are provided with positive and healthy psychological conditions while in CS, promoting their psychological foundations for academic success.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Several limitations within the design of this transcendental phenomenological study should be considered to improve future phenomenological designs, as well as research on CS. One limitation relates to the sample and recruitment of participants. The study does not capture any transgender or male participants. Six women and one gender non-confirming student participated and provided rich data on feminist and gender-diverse perspectives.



Making phenomenological studies responsive to transgender participants in applied psychology research helps service an important gap in attention and service to the transgender population (Singh & Shelton, 2011). Recruitment efforts could have been more deliberate to include transgender perspectives through connection with trans-student organizations and student groups on campus. Specific attention should also be paid to the justified sensitivity to how transgender populations and participants will be represented in research as well. When researching around social justice themes such as in this study, efforts to be inclusive of transgender and gender diverse communities seem appropriate and necessary to strengthen social justice. The potential benefit of holding stories for transgender students in CS, including their own psychological and academic trajectories, with the goals of social justice and spirit of inclusivity as expressed by participants deserves exploration.

The study also failed to capture Chicax and Latinx male voices. Consideration must be given to how the design and content of the study contributed to this failure. Perhaps male students in CS do not feel as comfortable or seen in a study that looks specifically at how CS has impacted their journeys as students. The study's conceptual model also suffers from the lack of inclusion of male voices. Another process of engagement might exist for male students in CS that does not get voiced or examined. The impact on psychological functioning and academic trajectory possibly paint a significantly different picture for male CS students. The design of semi-structured interviews and text message exchanges could also be less accessible to male participants in a study of this nature for a variety of reasons. Alternate methods or meta-research on Chicax and Latinx male participation need consideration and examination in hopes of attracting these voices to illuminate the CS experience. CS may not be functioning in the same manner for male students and may be functioning in other important pathways that need understanding. The design, recruitment

methods, and the field of applied psychology itself may act as barriers to participation. More direct and intentional recruitment of male voices may also increase participation.

Another design limitation arose in the final interview phase of the study. Much of the data from this phase did not add new themes to the data or provide any new facets or components to existing themes. One explanation is that this phase became futile in the collection of this specific data in this study, as it merely seemed to recap data from recent text message exchanges and did not build any new thematic data from the initial interviews and text messages. Another explanation could be the nature of questions in the final interview protocol (Appendix C). The questions themselves may not have elicited any new data because they were not asking for new data. Perhaps these questions only asked students to review previous experiences. This phase did allow for the possibilities of new experiences or realizations to be shared at the end of the grading period, but none of the final interviews produced new realizations. The initial interview and text messages produced rich data to explain a conceptual model of the relationship between psychological and academic gains. The final interviews reiterated this process and the main thematic components but did not add to them.

The text message phase of the study produced rich data but also featured design complications. Text messages were sent out 2-3 weeks after the initial interview, depending on how late in the marking period the initial interview commenced. Students were instructed to reply as soon as possible without interfering with their academic responsibilities and not while actually in class. The responses came in a variety of time frames: some within hours, others within a week, and others over a week later, but not exceeding more than two weeks. Collecting text message data was much less orderly than the initial and final interviews, which were all finished in under two hours each and in one sitting. It is unclear how this

impacted the actual data produced in the study, but the varying time frames produces an unknown. Perhaps there is minimal impact and part of using text messages to adapt to an undergraduate-age population also involves collecting data in varying time frames depending on the person replying to texts. This limitation is easier to endure than others mentioned, but attention to text message time frames in subsequent qualitative studies could enlighten researchers on the impacts of varying time frames around collecting specific data types.

The text message phase is also where one participant dropped out of the study. Elisa was unresponsive to text messages and repeated attempts to remind her of the next phases of the study and the incentives available. As seen in the results and discussion sections, Elisa contributed rich data to the study from her initial interview, but it is unfortunate to miss out on the potential for rich data in the remaining phases of the study. Incentives perhaps undermined the potential for attrition in this study as all other participants finished and collected but were not enough to keep all participants in the study.

Recruitment for this study elicited participants who were very enthusiastic, for the most part, about CS. Future directions could include studies of those who were not enthusiastic, or even dropped out, to better understand the full range of the phenomenon from varied perspectives.

The psychological components of thriving associated with CS participation warrant continued research and exploration after their appearance in this study's data. The nature and interrelationship of impostor feelings, self-efficacy, positive ethnic identity, sense of belonging, and critical consciousness are forming an emergent model for how CS produces specific psychological processes to be understood. Measures that exist or need to be developed around these constructs could be explored for their relationships. Further

qualitative exploration could be focused on these constructs themselves to understand the process underneath even further. This study began to uncover these gains but more specific exploration of each could tell researchers more on how CS is specifically producing these gains.

Chicanx and Latinx students will benefit from greater understanding of how professor and peer relationships work specifically in their psychological and academic favor. The specific aspects of professor relationships that facilitate psychological growth are important to further understand. In this study, professors were seen as approachable, supportive, personable, passionate, and inspiring, but how these qualities came across to students and how they specifically impacted them is only recently being understood by researchers, including in this study. How and why other CS students impacted participants was clear to some extent. Being the same race and ethnicity, sharing experiences, and validating each were also discussed by participants as significant components of the peer relationship process but further modeling the relationship and processes within these experiences only enhances our understanding of CS and how its students function within and without the space.

Further exploration of aspects of CS environment is required as well. Data from things like use of Spanish language and music was not as rich as some of the major themes discussed in this study, but their appearances in the data warrant further exploration of the perhaps less obvious factors contributing to psychological thriving. How to use language and music effectively in CS and other course environments to encourage more psychological comfort and adjustment for Chicanx and Latinx students, as well as other identities in these settings, is important. Other subtle factors would certainly emerge if similar qualitative

methods spent significant time on only environmental factors. Thus, research along this line could be fruitful and contribute to the growing body of literature on CS.

Understanding how other races, ethnicities, and identities experience CS is also important. Students from all backgrounds can end up in CS courses because of general education requirements or interests in the subject regardless of their own shared identity. How the experience and benefit from CS course environments is also vitally important to understand. Enhancing how they experience CS in a way that contributes to broader campus inclusion and safety for Chicanx, Latinx, and all other student populations.

From a design perspective, further use of text message data collection proved very valuable for this study. The multi-method approach to collecting data ensured past, rich experiences of CS were captured, as well as fresh experiences once students were more aware of the significance of their individual interactions with CS. As mentioned before, the semi-structured interviews were effective in producing both textural and structural data but were often presented by participants from the perspective of textural, phenomenological experience. Text messages were much more adept at capturing the structural components and their relationship to textural experiences, which was vitally important to the study as well. Additional studies looking to balance their collection of textural and structural data should look at how combining semi-structured interviews with text message interactions, particularly with student populations, as enhances both historic and fresh experiential data collection.

### **Recommendations**

Researcher Gina Ann Garcia developed a typology of Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) identities (2018) to determine the extent to which they positively impact the academic outcomes as well as the cultural representations of Latinx students. The identity types

ranged from Latinx-enrolling HSIs, with low academic and low cultural service, to Latinx-serving, which was high on both dimensions. In many ways, this typology is parallel to the CS conceptual model of addressing psychological and adjustment needs along with academic. Both frameworks at the core acknowledge the importance of developing student thriving more holistically for Latinx students. The recommendations of this study are also similarly aimed at developing CS programs and campus that are student-serving and not simply student-enrolling. Recommendations to expand CS' influence, develop well-rounded CS professors, and challenge other academic environments to learn from CS are all captured and bound by this framework.

The first and primary recommendation is to support and expand CS programs as much as possible. This is a complex and precise goal. Generally, college campuses with even small Chicanx and Latinx student populations should consider the scope with which they are offering CS. The psychological barriers students outlined in this study could guide college campuses in assessing for the specific type and scope of the psychological needs of their Chicanx and Latinx student populations. This could ensure that the number of CS professors, courses, and seats is as close to need as possible. Achieving this level of reach for CS obviously requires institutional and funding support. Expanding CS does not need to be limited to expansion of the CS programs themselves. This wisdom derived from the student data in this study identifies specific psychological gains to emphasize in the service of students. Assessing how professors and administrators in CS programs are producing these psychological gains, challenging other academic environments to acknowledge Chicanx and Latinx students and their unique psychological needs, and exploring how the campus more broadly is serving students becomes part of this goal.

The unique role of CS professors as explained through the results in this study highlight the significant amount of responsibility they take on, especially in the early and formative experiences of CS. Students in this study identified how they came to CS with low self-efficacy and belonging, having experienced discrimination and homesickness, and CS becomes an environment that at times can hold all of that for students. A large part of that labor is supplied by CS professors. CS provided personal support, validation, and essentially counseling in times of crisis. CS departments want to be sure that professors are capable and prepared to experience the broad roles they will fill, as well as support them in these efforts. Attention should be paid to the emotional, cognitive, and physical labor provided by CS professors and the level of psychological support they need. This may also distract from their research responsibilities, so adjustments to how CS professors are evaluated may also be necessary. Compensation for the varied roles and intensive emotional labor should be examined as well.

Challenging other academic departments to acknowledge and contribute to the service of Chicax and Latinx student populations is also necessary. The psychological barriers and wounds endured in other course settings shift the labor of healing onto CS professors, administration, and other program resources. Numerous other academic programs were identified as the site of psychological distress, which was then attended to through CS. Campus faculty should be trained on the unique needs of their entire student populations and how to be as responsive to these needs as possible through their pedagogy. Promoting Chicax and Latinx student thriving should not fall only on CS and other Chicax and Latinx-targeted student programming. Truly serving Chicax and Latinx student populations will require more expansive campus focus on psychological thriving. Looking at the social, physical, and epistemological makeup of the campus could enhance

the safety and welcoming quality of institutions (Gonzalez, 2002). This entails addressing peer interactions and communities on campus and how they might be enhancing collective psychological thriving. The physical realm needs to address how campus spaces are welcoming or not to Chicanx and Latinx students. Epistemological considerations involve how campus rhetoric inside and out of classrooms is cultivating safe environments or not. Student programming, and not only Chicanx or diversity-focused programming, should help address the multiple layers of environment need to solidify psychological and academic thriving.

Understanding the nature of psychological thriving for Chicanx and Latinx college students, and its relationship with academic thriving, is also valuable for clinical and counseling practice, especially in college counseling centers. The typical barriers experienced by participants in this study should inform counselors on the potential pathways toward mental health challenges that some of their Chicanx and Latinx student clients. There are also potential settings in CS that provide potential for psychological thriving of which counselors and psychologists could be aware. Understanding the nature of Chicanx and Latinx mental health barriers, as well as possible institutional support through CS, could be valuable for some student's pathways to psychological and academic thriving.

### **Conclusions**

The recent attempts at banning and the historic politicizing of Chicanx Studies, always guided by racist and oppressive goals, threatened important psychological and academic thriving for Chicanx and Latinx students. This study demonstrated the potential for the establishment of fundamental psychological thriving in Chicanx and Latinx student populations, upon which academic gains can be achieved. CS acts as a space of healing for Chicanx and Latinx students facing mental health barriers unique to their identities. CS also



develops students into confident scholars capable of impacting their communities through their social justice-oriented goals. The qualitative designs in this study were appropriate for the original questions and produced data valuable to understanding Chicax and Latinx student experiences that inform the best strategies for thriving, achievement, retention, and beyond. Acknowledging and supporting significant thriving for Chicax and Latinx students through CS helps address larger systemic issues threatening student thriving. Students experiences in CS can help inform broader campus attempts to foment more inclusion, thriving, and thriving for Chicax and Latinx students.

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## Appendix A

### **Semi-Structured Interview Protocols**

#### First Interview Protocol

1. What has your experience in college been like so far? (Prompts: What experiences stand out?)
2. What has Chicana Studies been like for you? (Prompt: What stands out when you think about experiences there?)
3. What drew you to CS? (prompt: Was there something specific that you liked about taking these courses?)
4. How has CS impacted your educational journey?
5. What helped to support this process for you? (Prompt: did friends or family help you or have views about you taking CS courses?)
6. Describe the CS environment as you remember it.
7. How has CS impacted you outside of class? (Prompt: How do you see it influencing your thinking, behavior, or choices?)
8. How has CS shaped your future goals and pursuits? (Prompt: Are there goals you did not have before CS that you now have for yourself?)

#### Second Interview Protocol

1. Please describe your experience thus far in CS classes. Any experiences we have not discussed before? (Prompt: review experiences if necessary).
2. Please describe the impact these classes have had on your educational journey. (Prompts: How has CS impacted your thinking or perspectives? Describe conversations you may have had with others about your classes/class content).

3. What experiences contribute to this impact (or not)? (Prompt: are there things about the courses that are particularly memorable? Things that have made you feel or react strongly about the content?)
4. What has changed since our first interview? (Prompt: remind of some themes if they do not remember)
5. What have you learned about CS in your experience thus far? (prompt: How do you see it fitting into the big picture of your life?)

## Appendix B

### **Text Message Protocol**

1. What stands out from your experiences thus far this quarter in CS class(es)? (Prompt: How have these class experiences affected you?)
2. What have your courses been like? (Prompts: What types of activities are you engaging in because of taking these courses? How would you describe any such activities?)
3. What is the environment around CS like? (Prompt: What are the people like? What kind of relationships are you developing?)
4. Describe how these experiences are having an impact on your educational journey?

Appendix C

**Demographic Questionnaire**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Gender

1. Female
2. Male
3. Gender non-conforming
4. Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 5.

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Year in school \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Chicax Studies Classes Taken \_\_\_\_\_

Will you be taking another Chicax Studies class this year? Yes No

Race/Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

Country of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Are you (and any siblings) part of the first generation in your family to attend college?

Yes No

What generation are you in terms of your family's immigration to this country (1<sup>st</sup>- you immigrated, 2<sup>nd</sup>- your parents, 3<sup>rd</sup> – your grandparents, etc.) ? \_\_\_\_\_

What are your parents' highest education levels (high school, college, etc)? Did they take any Chicax Studies or similar courses themselves?

## Appendix D

### **Consent Form**

#### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SANTA BARBARA

Title of the Study: A Phenomenological Study of Participation in Chicana/o Studies

Lead Investigators' Names, Department, Telephone Numbers, and E-Mail:

Daniel Meza, Graduate Student

Counseling, Clinical and School Psychology

Gevirtz Graduate School of Education

University of California, Santa Barbara

Phone: 917-498-8342

Email: dmeza@education.ucsb.edu

#### PURPOSE

You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to understand the experiences of students who participate in Chicana/o Studies.

#### PROCEDURES

If you decide to participate, you will have the opportunity to participate in semi-structured qualitative interviews about your experiences in Chicana/o Studies with the researcher. The interviews will take approximately one to one and a half hours and will be audio recorded with your permission. The recordings will be used to transcribe the data and your name will not be used on the transcript. There will also be a text message phase of the study. Your name will not be stored in the phone or used in any of the text messages sent to you. Your text messages in response will be recorded the day they are sent in a secured computer. The messages will be individually deleted from the phone when the text is transferred to a computer. All data will be destroyed once the project is completed. Please be aware that you do not have to participate in this research and you may stop your participation at any time without penalty. You may also skip any questions that you prefer not to answer.

#### RISKS

The possible risks associated with participation in this study are minimal. They include possibly remembering some difficult life experiences and feeling some slight emotional discomfort if you choose to discuss very personal topics with the interviewer. You have the right to disclose topics at your discretion. If you experience any uncomfortable feelings, we can provide you with referral resources.

Should you feel any discomfort after answering and questions, you may contact the Hosford Clinic, UCSB at 805-776-3722 or the Crisis Intervention and Counseling Neline at 1-800-999-9999.

#### BENEFITS

There is no direct benefit to you as a result of your participation in this study. Potential benefits associated with the study include gaining more knowledge about yourself and contributing to knowledge about Chicana/o identity.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

Your responses will be kept confidential to the fullest extent possible. The information you provide will be looked at as group data only and will not be traceable to you as an individual. Audio-taped recordings will be used only to help researchers remember your responses, and will be destroyed upon completion of the project. The transcript will have no identifying information. Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, as research data is not protected from subpoena.

#### **COSTS/PAYMENT**

You will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card after the completion of the first interview and \$25 after the completion of the second interview.

#### **RIGHT TO REFUSE OR WITHDRAW**

Participation is entirely voluntary and you may change your mind about being in the study and discontinue participation at any time without any negative consequences.

#### **PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR'S PERSONAL AND FINANCIAL INTERESTS IN THE RESEARCH AND STUDY SPONSOR**

The investigators in this study have no financial interest in this research and will not benefit monetarily from this study.

#### **QUESTIONS**

If you have any questions about this research project or if you think you may have been injured as a result of your participation, please contact Daniel Meza at 917-498-8342 or [dmeza@ucsb.edu](mailto:dmeza@ucsb.edu).

If you have any questions regarding your rights and participation as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Committee at

(805) 893-3807 or [hsc@research.ucsb.edu](mailto:hsc@research.ucsb.edu), or write to:  
University of California, Human Subjects Committee, Office of Research,  
Santa Barbara, CA 93106.

#### **CONSENT**

**PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW WILL INDICATE THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT IN THE STUDY DESCRIBED ABOVE. YOU WILL BE GIVEN A SIGNED AND DATED COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP.**

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Date\_\_\_\_\_