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Title:	Community college transfer phenomena: Experiences of academically resilient Mexican and Mexican American students.

Authors:	Sanchez, Adriana, ORCID 0000-0002-3296-4424. Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology, University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA, US, adriana_sanchez@ucsb.edu
	Morgan, Melissa L., ORCID 0000-0003-4044-6763. Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology, University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA, US
Address:	Sanchez, Adriana, Department of Counseling, Clinical and School Psychology, University of California, Santa Barbara, Building 275, Room 4100, Santa Barbara, CA, US, 93106-9490, adriana_sanchez@ucsb.edu

Abstract:	This present study explores influences that contribute to academic resilience in the transfer process of 11 Mexican and Mexican American community college transfer students at a public, Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) on the West Coast of the United States. Semistructured interviews were conducted, and transcripts were analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) Transcendental Phenomenological approach, which entails the scientific study of the appearance of a phenomenon (in this case, students' transfer process) as it is seen and appears to the participants and researcher. Significant emergent statements were synthesized into themes that were then organized to create a composite structural description of the essence of academic resilience for these participants in order to illuminate the meaning of the participants' lived experiences. Findings indicate five emergent themes associated with academic resilience in the transfer process: (a) overcoming challenges in the transfer process, (b) mentor support, (c) maturity through experience, (d) finding community, and (e) desire to pay it forward. Implications for practice and research will be discussed, as well as recommendations for community college transfer programs and 4-year receiving institutions. (PsycInfo Database Record (c) 2020 APA, all rights reserved)

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Community College Transfer Phenomena: Experiences of Academically Resilient Mexican and Mexican American Students

By: Adriana Sanchez;
Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology, University of California, Santa Barbara
Melissa L. Morgan
Department of Counseling, Clinical, and School Psychology, University of California, Santa Barbara

Hispanics or Latinos are the largest ethnic/racial minority group in the United States, making up 18.1% of the nation's population (United States Census Bureau, 2018). Latinx people also make up the largest minority group enrolled in colleges and universities across the U.S., yet attain fewer bachelor's degrees when compared to other racial/ethnic groups (Fry & Lopez, 2012; Fry, 2004, 2002; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009). While degree attainment varies by state and Latinx college enrollment/graduation is increasing (Krogstad, 2016), Latinxs ultimately have the lowest educational attainment rate with only 19% earning a college degree, compared to 26% of Black adults and 42% of White adults (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2011), likely reflective of the fact that Mexican/Mexican American students, particularly more recent immigrants, often face educational barriers such as language, racism and discrimination, internalized oppression, and economic challenges (Llamas & Morgan Consoli, 2012).

Community colleges often serve as an entry point to the higher education and baccalaureate degree pathway, especially for low-income, first-generation, and racial/ethnic minority students (Campa, 2010; Handel, 2013; Jenkins & Fink, 2015; Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004). Lower tuition costs, less rigorous entrance requirements (Fry, 2002), and flexibility to support working and part-time students entice many Latinx students to enroll at community colleges (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2011). It is common for Latinx students to begin at a 2-year college and then transfer to a 4-year university with or without an Associate's Degree (Taylor & Jain, 2017; Taylor, 2016), and it is also common for students to experience academic difficulties upon transferring (Townsend, 2001). It is estimated that 80% of community college students intend to earn a bachelor's degree, but only 25% of these students transfer to a 4-year university and a significantly lower 17% complete the intended degree (Jenkins & Fink, 2015). Again, this is often due to the many unique barriers they may experience. However, we also know that many students exhibit significant resilience. Resilience is defined as facing adverse social and environmental barriers and returning to normal developmental achievements (Garmezy, 1993; Rutter, 1987). While resilience studies have often been criticized for being too individualistic and placing the onus on the student, the current study uses a critical resilience framework, stemming from a feminist critical lens (Anzaldúa, 1999; Collins, 2000; Villenas, Godinez, Delgado Bernal, & Elenes, 2006), which acknowledges how power, educational institutions, society, culture, and historical contexts influence students' navigation of structures that "do not privilege their funds of knowledge" (Campa, 2010, p. 432). This critical framing allows us to appreciate the strengths of these students while also recognizing the unjust and inequitable systemic barriers that they must often overcome to be resilient.

The current study examines resilience in Mexican/Mexican American transfer students, using a phenomenological approach to deeply and holistically explore (Reiners, 2012) what may be helping Latinx community college transfer students manage and overcome adversities in the context of their academic lives. The research question addressed is: What is the experience of transferring from a community college to a 4-year university for academically resilient Latinx community college transfer students?

Barriers Facing Latinx, Community College Transfer Students

Transfer students in general often face more difficulties than their nontransfer counterparts (Chase, Dowd, Pazich, & Bensimon, 2014; Martínez & Fernández, 2004; Solórzano, Villapando, & Oseguera, 2005), and Latinx students even more so (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007; Núñez, Sparks, & Hernández, 2011). For example, Latinx transfer students may experience unique stressors such as a hostile racial campus environment and/or being a minority in a Predominantly White Institution (PWI; Oseguera et al., 2009; Solórzano et al., 2005) as well as acculturative stress for those who are first generation in college (Castillo, Cano, Chen, Blucker, & Olds, 2008; Cokley, McClain, Enciso, & Martinez, 2013; Lopez, 2005; Torres & Rollock, 2007). English learners and bilingual, Latinx students may experience linguistic discrimination, rejection, and alienation in their universities (Holmes, Fanning, Morales, & Herrera, 2012). Those who are from lower income backgrounds may also experience a heightened worry about financing their educations and supporting their families (Lopez, 2009), or needing to work full-time while attending classes (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014). Such challenges may lead to higher levels of stress for these students. Latinx transfer students are also likely to have experienced stressors in their community colleges before transfer, such as low expectations from instructors and counselors trying to direct them into vocational careers instead of college transfer (Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004; Solórzano et al., 2005). Research suggests that poor retention and transfer rates among Latinx community college students are influenced by misinformation about transfer requirements and a lack of transfer culture (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Dennis, Calvillo, & Gonzalez, 2008) to help inform students about the transfer process through mentoring, academic advising, and tutoring (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Research examining mental health differences between transfer and nontransfer university students seeking services found that transfer students endorse higher levels of symptoms of depression such as social isolation, hopelessness, and sadness, as well as social anxiety symptoms such as discomfort around people and feeling judged or disliked

interpersonally (Mehr & Daltry, 2016). Depression and anxiety are significant predictors of lower GPA and higher probability of dropping out (Hartley, 2011; Mehr & Daltry, 2016).

The stressors experienced by many Latinx college students, in general, affect academic adjustment and participation in the college community, which has been shown to affect students' sense of belonging and interpersonal relationships (Mehr & Daltry, 2016). While there is little extant literature on the transfer students for Mexican/Mexican American students specifically, many studies point to the inequities in the transfer process (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Solórzano et al., 2005) and have shown that, in general, environmental pull factors interfere with students' academic goals in postsecondary contexts. Environmental pull factors may include family or employment responsibilities, which tend to be the strongest for Mexican students (Nora, 2004).

Positive Influences on Latinx Students' Academic Resilience
While most studies of Latinx community college transfer students have focused on the barriers rather than the strengths of the individuals, many Latinx students are able to reduce the negative effects of environmental and personal circumstances and adapt to difficult events while pursuing their educations (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Bernard, 1995). Along with these difficulties, Latinx community college students have reported experiencing individual growth and rewards in their education (Zell, 2010). Academic resilience contextualizes resilience as an increased likelihood of educational success despite adversity (Cassidy, 2016) and has been defined as the ability to effectively deal with setback, stress. or pressure in the academic setting (Martin & Marsh, 2009).

Many factors have been found to contribute to students' resilience, such as cultural values (Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013), bridge programs and faculty, staff or peer mentors or other institutional supports (Cortez & Castro, 2017; Rudolph, Castillo, Garcia, Martinez, & Navarro, 2015). Cultural values are significant contributors to individuals' ability to overcome adversities (Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013) and to college adjustment (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Schneider & Ward, 2003). Specifically, traditional values such as *familismo*, or belief in "family first" and family support, is an important aspect in Latinx students' overcoming adversity. In particular, students who perceive social support from family members seem to have a greater potential for thriving, or being "better off" after adversity (Morgan Consoli & Llamas, 2013). Also, having a strong sense of ethnic identity and individual drive to succeed (Castillo et al., 2006; Devos & Torres, 2007), as well as having *ganas,* or honoring parental struggle and sacrifice (Easley, Bianco, & Leech, 2012), have been found to play important roles in the successful achievement of higher education for Latinx students. Qualities that Hispanic students report as relevant in mentors are openness, common values, trust, availability, and commitment (Rudolph et al., 2015). Qualitative studies with Mexican and Mexican American community college transfer students have shown that a combination of programmatic support and guidance from individuals who acted as institutional agents assist in students' transfer processes (Cortez & Castro, 2017) and assistance based in the values of Mexican American culture, in particular, help them overcome socioeconomic, cultural, and personal barriers in pursuing their educational goals (Campa, 2013). Therefore, it follows that transfer student resilience may be affected by cultural and environmental influences.

Culturally sensitive "bridge programs" have also been found to aid in helping Latinx transfer students achieve success (i.e., The Federal TRIO Programs, which are federal outreach and student services programs in the United States designed to identify and provide services from disadvantaged backgrounds; Educational Opportunity Program; Puente Program; Summer Scholars Transfer Institute; Cortez & Castro, 2017; Martínez & Fernández, 2004; Schneider, Martinez, & Ownes, 2006). Such programs, like The Puente Program, support Latinx community college students in achieving their educational goals through coordinating transfer days where students meet with 4-year university admission staff to review transfer requirements (Rendón, 1992), receiving validation of their life experiences with tangible help on planning from professors and staff (Gandara, 1996), and

by providing students with Latino literature and workshops that integrate family members (Gandara, 1996; Martínez & Fernández, 2004). Guidance from individuals who serve as institutional agents, within and outside of these formal programs, also assist students in a successful transfer process (Cortez & Castro, 2017). Studies show positive correlations between the frequency of student-to-faculty interactions and students' GPA, such that the more a student meets with faculty outside of the class the higher their GPA (Crisp, 2010; Tovar, 2015; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Further, advisors and counselors who address Latinx students' psychosocial needs are better able to assist them, facilitate matriculation and their overall college experience (Tovar, 2015). For students from minority backgrounds specifically, peer support also serves as a resource that provides them with information on how to navigate specific challenges of college through advice, mentoring, or encouragement (Dennis et al., 2008; Richardson & Skinner, 1992).

Method

Design

Qualitative research is often conducted when the researcher wants to empower individuals to share their stories, to hear participant voices, and to understand the context in which participants in a study address an issue (Creswell, 2007). The qualitative approach of transcendental phenomenology entails the scientific study of a phenomenon as it appears to the participant and researcher (Moustakas, 1994). In transcendental phenomenology, the researcher sets aside as much as possible their own experiences and "focuses on the descriptions of the experiences of participants . . . by taking a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination" (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). This process was particularly important given the researcher's own experience as a transfer student and her subsequent work with transfer students. Researchers can be insiders, outsiders, and sometimes both (D'Cruz & Jones, 2004). Literature supports that being an insider to a study may cause a perception of sameness or differences that could impede research, understanding, and representation of stories (Gair, 2012). On the other hand, an outsider might not get the same access to the field as an insider (D'Cruz & Jones, 2004) and it has been argued that despite the potential for inaccurate perceptions, being an insider can facilitate empathy and sharing of a member's lived experience, which help the researcher understand and interpret participants' experiences (Neuman, 2014). In this case the researcher was an insider.

Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological method is situated within an interpretivist/constructivist philosophy of science paradigm (Creswell, 2007) and champions the participant's view of the phenomena under study. This perspective is discovered by gathering rich descriptions of the phenomenon, or, in this case on the community college transfer process of Mexican and Mexican American students who felt they had overcome academic challenges.

Researcher Positionality

The first author is a first-generation graduate student in Counseling Psychology and former transfer student. She identifies as a Latina of Mexican descent. Her interest in conducting this study emerged from her own personal experience in transferring from a community college to a 4-year university. She is interested in exploring the influences that have helped other Latinx community college transfer students be academically resilient, despite facing adversities in the academic setting. She also worked at her university's transfer student support center where she served as the Graduate Student Mentor to the transfer student community for several years. She started the project with the preconception that transfer students are academically resilient, as they have overcome many barriers at their community colleges and during their transfer process. She expected to hear participants discuss common transfer student barriers (i.e., financial aid, impacted classes, poor counseling) and also anticipated them to mention how they were able to overcome these barriers (as it was part of recruitment criteria that they had), as well as include aspects of their culture, such as values or ethnic identity, that may have influenced their experiences.

The second author identifies as a Latina (Mexican and European) Counseling Psychology faculty member, and specializes in research with Latinx populations. She was trained in a social justice orientation and has conducted and supervised qualitative research for many years. She served as an internal auditor for the project through discussion of themes, interpretations, and final coding scheme with the first author.

Participants

Participant criteria for this study included: (a) being 18 years of age or older, (b) being a community college transfer student, (c) feeling that they had overcome academic challenges, and (d) self-identifying as Latinx. Upon receiving approval from the university's Institutional Review Board, the researcher recruited all at the public, tier one research university Hispanic Serving Institute (HSI)-designated university (HSI designation indicating that meaning that at least 25% of the institution's undergraduate student population identify as Hispanic (Benitez & DeAro, 2004). Participants from various Latinx and transfer student specific campus organizations were recruited by posting information about the study on several university group and social media pages. Interested participants contacted the researcher via email to set up an interview. Participants chose the location of the interview (e.g., quiet sitting area on campus, quiet coffee shop, transfer student support center office). Further participants were recruited using the snowball technique, by providing each participant with the primary researcher's email address to forward to any other Latinx community college transfer students that might be interested in participating in the study.

Eleven Mexican and Mexican American community college transfer students (8 females; 3 males) ages 18–24 responded to the call for participation and identified as either Mexican or Mexican American (See Table 1). The majority identified as first-generation college students and one participant identified as multiethnic, indicating she identifies as Mexican American and Caucasian. Each participant was asked to choose a pseudonym in order to protect their identities. Academic major at the 4-year institution and generational status in the United States is included in the Table 1 summary.

Table 1
Participant Demographic Information

Name	Age	Sex	Ethnicity/Race	College generation status	Major	Generational status in the United State
Salma	24	Female	Mexican-American	First generation	Sociology	Second generation (born in United States—both parents from Mexico)
Betty	22	Female	Mexican	First generation	Biology	First generation
Alan	21	Male	Mexican	First generation	Political science	First generation
Zoe	21	Female	Mexican-American	First generation	Psychology	Second generation
Jennifer	21	Female	Mexican	First generation	Not identified	First generation
Paco	21	Male	Mexican-American	First generation	Sociology	Second generation
Yessica	20	Female	Mexican-American	First generation	English	Second generation
Christian	21	Male	Mexican-American	Second generation	Sociology	Third generation (you and your parents were born in the United States, but both grandparents were born in another country)
Stella	21	Female	Mexican-American	First generation	Anthropology	Second generation
Alicia	22	Female	Mexican-American and Caucasian	Not identified	Sociology	Fifth generation (you, your parents, and your grandparents were born in the United States)
Darlene	20	Female	Mexican-American	First generation	Spanish	Second generation

Participant Demographic Information

Procedure

Students who met criteria were invited to participate in an in-person interview with the first author researcher. Before the interview began, the researcher went through the consent process, informing participants that they could decline to answer any questions or stop their participation at any time. Possible risks and benefits associated with this study were discussed and referral resources were offered in case participants experienced

uncomfortable emotions during or after sharing their experiences. Participants were then asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire before the interview. Interviews averaged 45 min and were audio-recorded with the permission of each participant. Ten-dollar Amazon gift cards were emailed to students upon conclusion of the interview.

Instruments
Demographic Questionnaire

A demographic questionnaire created for the purposes of the study was used to collect information about participants' age, major, class standing, previous institution(s), ethnicity, gender identity, preferred pronouns, first language, and generational status in order to gain a deeper understanding of the students' context.

Semistructured Interview Protocol

The researcher designed an in-depth, semistructured interview protocol that was created based on a review of the extant literature on Latinx community college and transfer students. Interviews consisted of eight open-ended questions about participants' perceptions of their community college(s) experience, transfer processes, and adjustment to their 4-year university (see the Appendix). As called for in phenomenological research, the researcher utilized nonleading open-ended questions to decrease possible influence on participants' responses (Krauss et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008; Turner, 2010).

Analysis
The primary researcher first engaged in *epoché* (or bracketing), the process of setting aside and attempting to avoid having assumptions or predispositions influence the research before starting the research project. This process continued throughout the research study (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The interpretivist/constructivist nature of the method influenced the research analysis from the start by embracing the position of the researcher as coconstructor of meaning (Ponterotto, 2005). Transcendental phenomenology's core definition as the scientific study of a phenomenon as it appears to the participant and the researcher (Moustakas, 1994) suggests that despite the method calling for setting aside predispositions, the underlying theory is constructivist in that there is room for coconstructed meaning of the participants' experiences.

The researcher began analysis by reading through each interview transcript once to get a feeling for what was said about the phenomenon before engaging in line-by-line coding (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher then engaged in line-by-line coding where she began deeper analysis of the data by combing through the data more closely in an attempt to gain detail about the phenomenon being studied and extract emerging themes (Glaser, 1992). Significant participant statements and phrases related to the lived experiences of transferring from a community college to a 4-year university were identified, as well as ways in which participants discussed overcoming academic challenges, a process called *horizonalization* (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). Once identified, significant statements were defined by the researcher and clustered into themes. The researcher then formulated meanings of these themes through synthesizing significant statements into composite textual and structural descriptions. Textual descriptions are a description of "what" was experienced, and structural descriptions are "how" it was experienced (Moustakas, 1994, p.10). The textual and structural descriptions of the experiences were then synthesized into the essence of academic resilience (Moustakas, 1994), or a comprehensive summary of the phenomenon. To increase trustworthiness, the researcher also engaged the second author to discuss areas where the researcher may have overinterpreted in order to stay close to participants' words (Hill et al., 2005).

Results

Five overarching themes emerged from the interview data associated with academic resilience: Overcoming Challenges in the Transfer Process, Mentor Support, Maturity Through Experience, Finding Community, and Desire to Pay It Forward. Each theme included two–three subthemes to further describe participants' experiences. Definitions and descriptions, as well as exemplary quotes from participants for each of the subthemes are presented in the following section.

Theme 1: Overcoming Challenges in the Transfer Process
Overcoming challenges in the transfer process was defined as obstacles faced by a student pre-, during, and/or posttransfer. Subthemes that encompassed the challenges participants described included First-Generation College Student Identity, Financial Worries, Adjusting to Change, and Cultural Considerations.

Many participants alluded to the first-generation college student identity being a challenge due to being the first in their families to pursue higher education. For example, Yessica stated, "Just being the first one in the family you're just trying to figure out things, on my own, and yeah, that's one of the hardest things because it's like I have to reach out and ask for the help . . . and that is one of the hardest things for me . . ." Participants often described this unique experience as part of their difficulty in staying motivated. For example, Salma stated:

I guess, like, one of the biggest challenges is like keeping like motivated . . . because, like I said it's hard to do it when there's no one that has done it, or like no one that's like telling you, "okay after this, you do this and okay you are doing it you're fine" or like an older sister, or even your parents that have done it before so that's, that was like a big challenge.
At times participants suggested that while being a first-generation college student was a challenge, it was also a motivator. For example, Zoe said, "Well, first of all I knew I wanted to graduate from college, like obviously because of my family and because I knew I could do it, first in the family all of that good stuff." The first-generation college student identity seemed to drive most participants' motivation to persist and continue navigating through higher education in the study, despite the barrier of being the first in their families to attend college.

The subtheme of financial worries was expressed by many of the participants interviewed and was defined as instances in which they described being worried about money during their community college or 4-year college experience. Jennifer said, "It was more financial purposes because I knew it was going to be cheaper and I feel like I just was not ready for a university," said Jennifer. Alan said, "So, it was a struggle at first. The first year, I had many times I wanted to drop out and just focus on school because I didn't feel that I was getting benefits. I didn't feel that school was worth it, especially because I had to send money to my mom." Salma also said:

Right after high school I got a job and I was working to help my parents, too. I've always seen them struggle with their job and everything . . . money is always tight so umm that was one of the biggest challenges I faced because I started working full-time [at community college]. So like, one of the hardest things for me when I transferred, I didn't have that full-time [job], like that income anymore, so I had to get use to not being able to give them money [family] for groceries or whatever. Or if they need money for the rent, like I cannot, I cannot do that anymore. So, that was one of the hardest things as well.
The reality for several of the students in this study is that attending a university is expensive. For several of the individuals in this study this meant being worried about not only the cost of attending a university but also the worry about being a financial resource to their families.

Adjusting to change was instances in which several participants described the process of becoming accustomed to a new environment and developing new ways of navigating the college system. Betty described, "I guess that was one challenge, not having a big support system or someone who is really advising you and helping you out" and "when I got here I didn't know anyone and anything." The adjustment and level of difficulty was highlighted in that she felt that, "at the beginning I was like oh my God, I can't do this. It's scary, like I'm going to drop out I'm going to do this . . . I can't handle this, but then at the end I was like, yeah its hard but like I just gotta do it.

There's no other choice I just got to do it." Adjusting to change seems to incorporate an aspect of becoming independent and leaving one's cultural resources behind to enter into the new university culture for many of the participants. This adjustment includes feelings of fear and also the sentiment that it must be done in order to obtain the degree. Similarly, in the following themes we see the students in this study describe the idea of adjusting to a new culture and contemplating their ethnic identities.

Cultural considerations described instances in which a participant discussed how their ethnic identity or values influenced their college experience. For example, Salma indicated, "Another challenge is like, I think also, it's because it's hard as like Latinos . . . I kind of had to earn my independence. I had to earn my right to leave the house and come out here." Jennifer said, "I am not ready to just go farther it just like I am very close to my family and I've always been like that, so it was just very hard for me just getting out there. It's really hard for Latino families, just to break that." Yessica talked about experiencing culture shock at her new university and said, "most of my friends were Latinos. I felt comfortable with that, so when I came over here it was kind of like culture shock a little bit." These examples highlight the student and cultural contexts that influence these individual students' lives and adjustment to different times during their transfer process. The importance of culture and ethnic identity for these participants provides an example of the internal process experienced by some when transferring from a local community college where they have access to their families to a 4-year university where the access may not be so readily available.

Theme 2: Mentor Support

Mentor support was defined as encouragement, advice, and guidance, as well as challenge and opportunities from formal and informal mentoring relationships. Subthemes that captured the forms of mentor support that participants described include Academic Counselors, Faculty, and Academic Programs. All participants mentioned encouragement or guidance from one of these relationships. Mentors within these played an important role in the most all participants' transfer process. For example, for academic counselor, Salma stated, "there was one counselor that I met that, he was like the one person at City College that did care . . . he like slapped me around a little and he was like, 'okay, you are going to take these classes, this class, this class and you're going to be ready, to transfer'." Yessica shared a similar experience. She said, "It was a counselor that told me, like, 'you can do better than that. You can go to (west coast public university) if you want to.' He's the one who encouraged me to . . . I never had a counselor like that, just he really cared, and he pushed me. He'd say, 'you can do better' and I needed that." The guidance of at least one counselor was critical to the academic trajectories of these two participants. As described, the counselors of these two participants not only offered academic planning but also offered encouragement.

Faculty were also described to be very influential. Several participants described feeling supported by faculty members through the guidance they offered and feeling connected to their professors. Paco exemplified this when he stated:

I made a really good connection with one of my professors in the sociology department. He's like my mentor still, even though I'm here. He'll send me emails, so we still keep in touch . . . He was very different. So, he doesn't like to be called Dr. He's like, "call me Tony." He dresses very simple, jeans, a t-shirt and tennis shoes. Never irons his clothes. He's a French dude, so yeah, he's just super awesome.

Faculty also helped with networking and helping some students build connections with other mentors, as Alan describes:

For instance, Professor G, she helped me out a lot. She helped me write statements for scholarships, apply to internships, and she was always right there. If I needed help with my essay for my English, she was right there. If I needed help with my other courses she was right there. And she introduced me to other mentors and people who were willing to do the same thing. So, I think that's the best part, it's essential to students.

Betty and Zoe discussed their participation in their community college The Puente Program, a support program that prepares students for transfer to a 4-year-university by providing mentor-like support for academic achievement. Zoe said being in such program allowed her to make connections with administrators and counselors, who helped her gain an administrative job on campus where she "got to work behind the scenes." This job gave her easy access to administrators and counselors with knowledge to share about the transfer process. In addition, Betty explicitly said, "there was one professor that I had for three different classes and he was . . . he's really nice and he would always just give advice on like just go and find, find something. He would say, 'You can do it, like don't let money be an issue'."

In the above descriptions, examples are provided in which counselors and faculty realized these students had the potential to succeed, fostered their resilience, and motivated them to continue their educations. Having someone believe in their academic abilities convinced them they could be successful in transferring to a university. Thereafter, these mentors invested their time to guide these participants in their transitions from community college to the university through moral support and sharing information about 4-year institutions. Critical components of mentorship described by many of the participants were genuineness, relatability, and tangible resources from their mentors.

Theme 3: Maturity Through Experience

Maturity through experience was defined as personal growth throughout their community college experience to prepare them for transfer. Subthemes included Sense of Independence, Clarity of Goals, and Increased Confidence Through Life Experience. Many participants suggested that the passing of time allowed them to prepare and feel more confident in themselves to move to another city and attend the university. This also led them to feel like they would not have been prepared for a 4-year university if they had not attended community college. Sense of independence was described as participants developing the feeling of being able to handle being on their own and self-sufficient. Jennifer summarized it best:

I think 3 years for me was the perfect time because once I graduated I felt ready to move on. It really helped me mature. When I went to college, community college, I was able to work so I was able to get that little work experiences that helped me to go into the university more mature because usually, I think, other kids that go there [4-year university] from the start they've never had a job, they do not have that kind of life experience.
Managing a job during her community college years allowed Jennifer to become financially responsible and she slowly learned what it means to become independent and self-sufficient.

The subtheme of clarity on goals highlighted students' community college experience as a time for them to understand what they want to accomplish in regard to major and career goals. Zoe explained, "it was hard to get all my classes together and keep my grades up so I could get the early registration but my motivation was I want to graduate in 4 years from college, and I want to transfer to a good school and umm I just knew right away that I didn't want to take more than 2 years." Paco described:

I didn't have the grades as a high school student to be accepted here. I'm thankful that I didn't come to [university] because I wouldn't have been prepared. Community college gave me everything that I needed. It geared me to be a good student, gave me the tools necessary. And it also gave me 2 extra years to mature before transferring and being away from home. Having a clear idea of individual and academic goals helped most participants feel confident in their ability to transfer from community college to a 4-year university. Jennifer explained that it was clear to her that she wanted to pursue an English major, "I remember meeting with my counselors. We talked about classes I needed and what kind of jobs or careers or majors that would apply toward what I wanted to do . . . I was confident in my major that I wanted to do, to graduate with." It seemed that having a direction, like an intended major and timeline, aided the transition from one institution to another.

Similarly, many expressed "reaching maturity" as proving to parents and themselves that they could be independent. Many participants described increased confidence through life experience by saying that maturing helped them become confident and ready for the transition to a 4-year university, as was true for most participants in the study. For example, Salma explained:

It kind of helped me feel more independent and more ready because I feel like if I had come out of high [school] . . . I would've like maybe not felt as confident or felt as ready. I bought my car, like I had money that I saved up. I guess I had to prove to them [parents] that I could be independent, and, I could handle it. So, I think they were like a lot more supportive of me, like, doing it and they understood that it was like, basically I had no option, like if you want me to get my degree like I have to go.

Each participant explained that reaching a new level of maturity prepared them for transfer. A few times throughout the interviews, they compared themselves to students who had enrolled at the university directly from high school. They described feeling more mature than their peers who started a 4-year university after high school graduation because they had to learn how to manage school, work, and family responsibilities.

Theme 4: Finding Community

Finding community was defined as having a sense of belonging through social or academic groups with similar goals who identify ethnically similar, and/or think alike. Subthemes includes Student Organizations and Academic Programs, which were the two outlets that provided this community for many of the participants in the study. Student organizations were student-led groups that participants described helped them feel a sense of belonging on campus. Salma described, "finding support groups that have similar values to me, for example Hermanas and EOP and even transfer student groups, and this year even my psychology lab, those have helped a lot." She continues to explain what was true for many in the study:

It took me a little while to make friends and luckily, I knew people here who were from my hometown. I knew people here who were also in Hermanas and because of them I started like making more friends. One of them is also a psychology major so she kind of started helping me like transition into the major by helping, like "oh I took that class, this is how you study for it." I started meeting more psychology majors and they were like, "yeah, this is how you study for it" type thing you know. So, by the end of my first year here, I felt a little more comfortable and I passed all my classes and I got into the psych major. I struggled really hard, but I did it because I started reaching out to my resources, I guess.

Participants in this study described difficulty connecting with peers upon transferring to their 4-year universities. Some explained that many peers had already established their friend groups, thus feeling a part of a group was hard at first, but finding similarities with others helped. In addition, it seemed like a willingness to ask for help from peers also helped many participants succeed academically and develop friendships through some of these specific student group organizations.

Academic programs, formal university-run entities and campus resources, seemed to be very influential in the students' ability to feel like they belonged and had a community of support. Alan described:

I interact with the people I feel comfortable with that I meet, so I think that is one of the great things. The Transfer Center is a great place to come. And I didn't know that they had this place here, and [the first-generation college student center], EOP, multicultural resources. Yeah, I feel comfortable coming to these places . . . it feels that I could become successful, I could excel, and it feels like I am home.

Zoe also described finding community in her research lab:

Now that I am a research assistant for a psych lab I feel like that helps a lot because all the girls were like in all the same classes together, so we are like, "okay, how did you study for this, how did you study for that?" It took a while but, I feel like now I'm really happy with like my experience, but at the beginning it was really, really hard.

We see the importance that academic programs played in the lives of these two individuals in helping them feel like they found a home at the 4-year institution. Jennifer describes how she wished she would have become

involved and alludes to the importance of finding community at any college, "I could have graduated with a better GPA, and I would have just gotten a better experience . . . like how to umm be involved in a school, because I've never really joined anything. That's one of things that I am like, I need to, next year, just join something."

In sum, finding community was important to most participants' sense of belonging. Important agents for supporting participants in finding a community were through academic programs and student organizations. These outlets also seemed to provide the participants with a group or a campus resource they could go to and feel safe and recognized for some of their more salient identities (i.e., transfer student, first-generation college student).

Theme 5: Desire to Pay It Forward
Desire to pay it forward was defined as taking advantage of an opportunity to do good for others (i.e., family and friends) and one's future. Subthemes include Aspiration to be a Role Model, Be a Resource to Other Students, and Give Back to Family. Participants described giving back to others who do not have the opportunity to pursue a college education because of finances or other responsibilities. It also can entail thanking family, friends, and mentors for their support. Moreover, they shared a deep desire to use their access to higher education as an opportunity to do good for others.

For example, Betty spoke of circumstances which fit into be a resource to other students, "Now that I am here, I can't waste it. There's like so many more people who would like just, like want to be here but they can't because of their lifestyle, life choices, or whatever." She continued by speaking about a group of friends that did not transfer at the same time she did, but with whom she remained in contact. Betty helped guide them through the transfer process. Since she had already transferred, she was able to provide information she wished she had known. Another form of paying it forward was expressed by the desire to go back to their community college and help other students as a career, like Darlene:

I want to get my master's in social work. Or I do not know exactly, but part of me wants to go back to my community college or my high school to be a counselor . . . talk to the students because the population in my city is mostly Latinos, and the percentages aren't high there. So, I would want to go back there to help out raise those number of people graduating, and people going to community college, of them transferring and just continuing.
As described by some of the participants in the study, being a resource to another student also incorporates an aspect of giving back and paying it forward to others in their community of similar ethnic backgrounds and culture.

For Salma, the best way to pay it forward is to support her parents financially: give back to family. She stated, "Like, that's what I want to do in the future, like, hopefully be able to support them that way." Zoe also articulated the reality for many community college students when she made the following observation and desire of paying it forward:

Eventually I want to take that all back to where I came from, which is my community college, and teach there [but] I've also seen a lot of transfer students kind of either have to switch majors or to kind of drop out because . . . it was too much for them. So, kind of seeing that I was like, I do not want that to be me and I am going to do this for the people who cannot do it kind of thing . . . like, I'm doing this for the people who cannot, you know or do not have the opportunity to.
Aspiration to be a role model was described Salma, "I guess like, the biggest motivation for me is always like, my family . . . I'm the oldest so I need to set that example." Not only is there a sense of responsibility, but there is an emphasis in the motivation to set an example and show others that they too, can persist. For Salma, family was a major motivator to achieve her goals. Salma expressed feeling that, as the oldest sibling, she carries the responsibility of being a role model. She is paving the path to higher education for her siblings. The aspiration to become a role model does not only stay in the immediate family, but also expands to extended family members. Betty explained:

My friends, my family, just the fact that I have people and also their support, but I also do not want to disappoint anyone. And I have my niece and nephew who are 10 and 7, they're going through a crappy situation. My mom is trying to get custody of them so (inaudible) I just trying to be a good example for them like showing them that no matter what you can do it.

The desire to pay it forward seemed multifaceted and other-centered. Many participants seemed to not only be concerned about achieving their own academic goals, but they also described concern for their impact on their families, communities, and larger society.

Overall Essence of the Transfer Phenomena

As required by Transcendental Phenomenology, the essence of the phenomenon must be extracted and described (Creswell, 2007). The transfer phenomena for the Latinx community college transfer students in this study was characterized by difficulty throughout their educational trajectories; however, they were able to move forward. Cultural considerations, such as the valuing of family, influenced their adjustment to a 4-year institution. Descriptions of their families as supportive of their educational endeavors also indicated an inability for familial help due to financial limitations and/or the family's lack of college experience or knowledge. Overall, it seems like family was a significant motivator to each participants' transfer process and degree goals in that the desire to help others (e.g., family, friends, future Latinx college prospects) also served as a mechanism to push forward. Additional aids were positive mentorship, having a clear set of goals, and confidence in their decision to transfer, which contributed to the academic resilience participants manifested before, during, and after transferring. The development of self-efficacy influenced by feeling supported by professors and guidance counselors was clearly part of the essence of their success. Managing academics, work, and family responsibilities incorporated elements of time management and resourcefulness that seemed to have also influenced many participants' abilities to overcome challenges in their transfer process. Feeling safe and at home through sense of community or feeling like they belong to a group or space on campus was particularly important for these individuals. Feeling safe and supported, by faculty, staff and peers in general, allowed for their ability to navigate their institutions and be academically resilient.

Discussion

Using a strengths-based resilience approach (Cortez & Castro, 2017; Sanchez & Morgan Consoli, 2016), this study makes a significant contribution to the literature in that it sheds further light on the lived experiences of 11 Mexican and Mexican American community college transfer students and provides information about what helped these individuals to be academically resilient. There were several unique findings that illuminate the things that helped these participants. For example, an influence across all participants' lived experience of the successful transfer process phenomena was overall feeling safe and supported by institutional agents (i.e., professors and staff), family, and friends.

A connection to community and sense of belonging helped students build their self-confidence, or self-efficacy, to participate in bridge programs, research opportunities, and student organizations, which all seemed to be important components to their transfer process and academic resilience. The bodies of literature on campus climate and students' sense of belonging capture the importance of safety and support, influenced by others, for Latinx college students and positive educational outcomes such that a hostile racial climate can make adjusting to college more difficult (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Latinx student sense of belonging in the college environment is a critical component to building community (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). A sense of community was very important for participants' sense of belonging, development of interpersonal relationships, and adjustment to their 4-year institution. Many participants described finding a safe place on campus or student organization that helped them feel connected with others and feel a sense of being home through connecting with people who identify ethically similar or had similar goals to them. Research suggests that peer-related support and involvement in student

organizations predicts higher adjustment in ethnic minority undergraduate students (Bowman, Park, & Denson, 2015; Museus, 2008; Schneider & Ward, 2003) and seemed to aid in building academic resilience in the process for the Latinx community college transfer students in the study. Participants' accounts of finding community is likely a result of all the barriers they faced that formerly eroded participants' sense of belonging. The human psychological need to belong and connect with others indicates the importance of finding a safe, "home-like" community on campus, particularly for Latinx students (Garcia & Dwyer, 2018).

Additionally, the importance of mentors was evident in this study as it was mentioned by all participants as significant to their success in transferring to a 4-year institution. Participating in academic support programs, mentoring, and faculty interest in a student's development can increase a Latinx student's sense of belonging (Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007), as well as have a positive impact on community college students' GPA and campus involvement (Tovar, 2015) and persistence in school (Bordes-Edgar, Arredondo, Kurpius, & Rund, 2011). While the participants in this study did not directly mention matching with a mentor on specific identity characteristics, their need for comfort and sense of belonging may point to value in mentors who are able to adapt their mentoring styles to take into consideration their specific needs while using a culturally sensitive approach. Several participants mentioned staying in contact with mentors after transferring, suggesting mentors were invested in the students as a whole and not solely in an academic sense, which may have had even more lasting impact. There seems to be greater benefits to more holistic and long-term mentoring.

The findings of this study, in many ways, are also consistent with previous research findings on challenges such as being a first-generation college student (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Phinney & Haas, 2003), worrying about educational expenses (Adams, Meyers, & Beidas, 2016; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Lopez, 2009), difficulty adjusting to changes in transferring from a community college to 4-year institution, and specific cultural factors like being Latinx at a predominantly White institution (Oseguera et al., 2009; Schneider & Ward, 2003; Solórzano et al., 2005). Additional findings highlight that the first-generation college student identity for the majority of the participants in the study also meant setting the example for friends and family. There seems to be an aspect of becoming a role model for others that helped participants manage and overcome challenges that concurrently functioned as a motivator. Connected to this was also the desire and commitment to offer information or share their experiences and what they had learned along the way to other students in the transfer process. Forms of "giving back" and "helping out," which in addition to serving as a positive contributor to academic resilience, seemed to be at its core about having a sense of purpose. Such a phenomenon has been described in prior research as the feeling of duty to help others with similar stories (Easley et al., 2012). This became a source of motivation to the transfer students in the current study, to attain a bachelor's degree in order to give back to family by financially supporting them in the future or helping students from their communities achieve higher educational goals.

Community college students using their time to prepare before transferring to a 4-year university is also consistent with the extant literature. The idea of community college participation allowed students to reach maturity in their personal and professional goals (Zell, 2010) reflected participants' feelings that their community college enrollment assisted in their development and allowed for an increased sense of confidence and independence, as well as clarity on personal, academic, and career goals. This seems to relate to students' development of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), which in an academic context relates to one's confidence in performing academic tasks to produce a desired outcome (Solberg, O'Brien, Villareal, Kennel, & Davis, 1993). Research links strong academic self-efficacy with better college outcomes because students with high self-efficacy perceive failure experiences as challenge rather than threats (Torres & Solberg, 2001). Furthermore, there is a positive relationship between levels of self-efficacy for education and cumulative GPA, suggesting greater self-efficacy is instrumental in promoting educational gains among diverse first-generation college students (Majer, 2009). This aligns well with instances in which some participants reported having to figure out

how to transfer on their own or with little guidance because of limited resources at their community college (e.g., impacted school, limited access to academic counselors) or given their first-generation college student identity (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012).

The critical resilience paradigm not only served to understand the nuances of the lives of these Mexican and Mexican American community college transfer students through acknowledging inequalities and systemic barriers, but also revealed that there are rich nontraditional resources they used (Campa, 2010). For example, many students in this study talked about the strength and motivation that resulted from being the first in their family to pursue a higher education. Similar to other studies, this motivation extended to their desire to repay family for their support or investment in them going to college (Covarrubias, Landa, & Gallimore, 2020), as well the desire to go back to their local community to change the conditions for other Latinx and underserved populations (Campa, 2010; Cerezo, McWhirter, Peña, Valdez, & Bustos, 2018). Supportive familial and community networks, self-efficacy, and equitable access to resources have been shown to aid in higher educational success (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Cerezo et al., 2018). Specifically highlighted in this study, is that the sense of safety and support students felt in their participation in bridge programs and mentoring relationships was also critical to their ability to overcome challenges and be academically resilient. Overall, results suggest that their ability to successfully navigate the process of transferring from a community college to a 4-year university while exhibiting academic resilience was a communal effort that included family, friends, college and university personal, as well as other institutional supports.

Implications

These results have several potential implications. First, the findings of this study indicate that for these participants it would have been helpful for the institutions to be more aware of their specific needs and motivations. HIS-designated intuitions, in particular, may benefit from these findings given they are more likely to have higher Latinx student enrollment and need to focus on the academic success and retention of these student populations. Administrators and counselors should tailor programs to Latinx students based on their diverse, cultural, lived experiences rather than assume their needs and backgrounds are similar to all other students. For example, knowing about a students' individual personal and academic goals, including what motivates them, may help the counselor/advisor or instructor to understand more fully what will help the Latinx community college student to continue pursuing their higher educational goals, particularly despite outlined adversities. This in turn may help with understanding some of the barriers. For example, some participants discussed needing to work in addition to being a full-time student in order to contribute to family while being away at college. Staff and faculty who understand such responsibilities and how they fit into the context of the student's motivation can help validate their experiences, which will communicate support and help students attain their academic goals (Gandara, 1996). Inviting students to share their families' and cultural socialization messages, values, and beliefs about education may help counselors, in particular, to help students stay motivated to achieve their educational goals. Reframing some challenges as potential sources of strength for students may be especially important when they encounter adversities while in college.

Having mentor support also played a critical role in the academic success of these students; therefore, mentor figures should be cognizant of the impact of their roles on the student. This may entail making themselves accessible and as relatable as possible for encouraging and advising (whether formally or informally) these students. Understanding the unique positions of many of these students with regard to their family, culture, and student roles is critical. Two participants in the current study attributed their successful institution transfer to a bridge program. They expressed feeling supported by staff and mentors in these programs, as well as mentioned particularly liking being in a cohort-like program with other students similar to them. As a minority group, Latinxs encounter institutional and cultural racism (Hernández, Carranza, & Almeida, 2010), therefore it is very important to have role models and supporters who reflect the population, across political, economic, and social institutions

(Schwan, Negroni, & Santiago-Kozmon, 2013). Hispanic students seem to prefer mentors who understand their culture and values (Alcocer & Martinez, 2018) and from participants' experiences, centering mentoring relationships on increasing students' sense of safety and connectedness to campus communities is critical. A mentoring approach focused on fostering and increasing students' self-confidence and affirming their cultural identity as an inherent and valuable part of who they are is important for in students' sense of support (Laden, 1999).

Finally, mentors should realize the importance of the time in community college for transitioning to a later education. Participants discussed the fact that balancing the responsibilities at home and community college, while difficult, was helpful to them in their maturation and readiness for a 4-year college/university. Framing this time as an opportunity for growth and attaining new skills may help community college students appreciate their experience and time in community college as good preparation for later academic endeavors. Once at the 4-year institution, participants mentioned finishing their bachelor's degree in 2 years after transferring, yet participants mentioned feeling rushed. Receiving institutions could be more sensitive to the fact that transfer students who attend community colleges prior to transferring are often nontraditional students and may take longer than the standard timeline to complete their bachelor's degree due to other responsibilities or concerns. The individuals who did report financial stress during their pre- or posttransfer process often times mentioned a support program that helped alleviate these concerns with financial help and guidance (i.e., McNair Scholars Program, EOP, Puente Program), which reemphasized the critical role these institutional supports play in the lives of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Similarly, formal bridge programs can take into consideration some of the core culturally sensitive elements of other successful programs. Students seem to learn from experiences of other students who transferred from a community college to a 4-year university Community colleges and 4-year institutions should consider partnerships for pairing Latinx students preparing to transfer with successful Latinx transfer students for motivation and to help develop the belief that they too can overcome obstacles in the educational trajectory. Such programs should be recommended as peer mentoring could help demystify the myths about transferring and the intended transfer institution.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although this study provides valuable information about the phenomena of Latinx transfer students overcoming adversities and engaging in academic resilience in the university setting, it is not without limitations. All interviews were conducted in English, and all participants were English speakers, but some participants might have been more comfortable completing the interview in Spanish. In the future materials could be provided in both English and Spanish to allow participants to participate in studies in their preferred language. Research suggests in-depth qualitative interviews should last from 30 min to several hours (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), but depth is not necessarily about time spent (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher could have asked clarification and additional follow-up questions during interviews that were shorter in the current study to assure all participant's shared in-depth narrative.

Future directions could include extending this research to a longitudinal study, in which participants are interviewed at different stages of their academic careers, for example, while the student is enrolled at a community college, during the transfer process, after transfer, and/or after graduation. Additionally, it seems it would be informative to explore the perceptions of family members about students' academic resilience, including asking such questions as: "What do parents and siblings feel has helped their child or family member be academically resilient?" It is important to explore these questions to uncover effective ways of helping Latinx individuals overcome adversity in the personal and academic lives.

Conclusion

Latinx community college students face barriers to transfer and degree attainment that differ from those of students from other racial backgrounds or 4-year universities. This study has highlighted some of the important aspects of life and transition for Mexican and Mexican American transfer students that help them to succeed. In general, positive factors that counteract systemic negative influences and contribute to academic resilience for some Latinx community college transfer students are necessary and achievable. Counselors, faculty, and community college resources, such as college and career centers, could take a more culturally specific approach when working with Latinx students who intend to earn a bachelor's degree in order to assist these students more effectively and increase the transfer and degree attainment rates among Latinx community college students. These findings should be considered when working with Latinx community college students and facilitating opportunities (i.e., research programs, bridge programs) to help them be academically resilient. Higher education benefits are not limited to fostering economic development and providing opportunities for the educated individuals, but also extend to the promotion of betterment and cultural diversity in society (Marginson, 2010). Given that Latinx are a fast-growing population across the United States, it is for the greater good of society to prepare the next generation of mentally healthy and college educated citizens for the professional workforce by gaining a full understanding of what contributes to their academic resilience.

Footnotes

[1] The term Latino is broadly used to refer to people of Latin American descent, which encompasses many different countries and nationalities. The authors of this paper use the gender-neutral term, *Latinx*, unless cited studies present other terms. The original terms used by participants to self-identify themselves are preserved in the current study.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol
1. Tell me about your educational experience prior to attending this university.

(Prompts)

a) Tell me about the school(s) you attended.

b) Please share your opinions on teachers/professors in general (e.g., their availability, helpfulness) in your previous school,

c) Tell about the duration of your community college enrollment.

(Prompt) Can you tell me about the enrollment (quarter/semester) system at your previous institution(s)?

-How do you feel about the previous system?

2. What are your attitudes towards your community college experience?

3. How do you feel about the helpfulness of transfer resources at your previous institution?

4. Please discuss any adversities you may have experienced during your time at your previous institution(s).

a) How were you able to overcome these challenges?

5. Tell me about what has contributed to your academic success.

6. What where your motivations for transferring?

a) What are your motivations for graduating?

7. Tell me about your current academic experience at UCSB.

(Prompt) How do you feel about the current system?

8. How has your experience as a community college/transfer student influenced your academic/career goals?

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