

CMSI RESEARCH BRIEF

Daughter of Campesinos: Understanding the Challenges and Experiences of Latinas at Hispanic Serving Institutions

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Executive Summary

California's Central Valley is home to one of the country's largest economies. The agricultural sector has attracted many migrant workers since the early 1960s through the Braceros Program, today; this sector continues to bring in migrant workers from Mexico and Central America who work as Campesinos in the fields of the valley. Many of these migrant workers have settled amongst different rural communities establishing their families and their own definition of the American dream. This research hopes to highlight the stories of children of migrant Campesinos who despite their obstacles, economic background and first-generation status, persevered and attended college. By focusing on five Latina women who were raised in Avenal, California, this study hopes to highlight their challenges and experiences while attending a Hispanic Serving Institution. To gain a better understanding of the challenges and experiences, the research analyzes the various components that make up the Central Valley, the current literature, the limitations and overall common themes found amongst the interviewees. In doing so, the study proposes recommendations and raises awareness of these women's stories and proposes ways in which we can better serve this population in the future.

Latino/a undergraduate enrollments have more than doubled over the last few years. According to the U.S. Department of Education, from 2000 to 2015, there has been an increase from 22 to 37 percent of total enrollments of Latino/a students in colleges and universities, and these numbers are expected to grow within the next few years (McFarland, 2017). In addition to the current enrollment rates, the overall continuous rapid increase of Latino/as in this country make this ethnic group one of rising importance. It is essential to acknowledge and understand the obstacles faced by this group, especially when thinking about how we can best support these students. Several institutions, specifically Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), have taken on the task to serve this population by seeking to improve student services, retention, and graduation rates. This paper begins by understanding the current role of HSIs within the scope of higher education. I focus on the influences and challenges of Latino/a students at HSIs and derive data from interviews that I've conducted across Latino/a students who have attended HSIs located in California's Central Valley. In this paper, I analyze the current literature in the hopes of understanding the influences and challenges in order to improve the current resources offered to future Latino/a students.

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Maricarmen was born and raised in California's Central Valley. As a first-generation college student and woman of color, she has been influenced by her upbringing and educational barriers to develop a passion for understanding and supporting student retention and educational success. She obtained her B.A. in International Development and Chicano/a Studies from the University of California, Los Angeles and her M.S.Ed. in Higher Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Maricarmen hopes to highlight the stories of often marginalized groups and people of the Central Valley to emphasize the beauty and importance of these communities. Currently, Maricarmen works for Wonderful Education, helping youth in the Central Valley with college preparation.

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California's Central Valley

Driving through California's Interstate 5, there's a clear divide between the Northern and Southern parts of the state, but often, Central California seems to be left out as many individuals fail to recognize the small rural towns that are often isolated in this area. Avenal, California, is one of those towns. Located in the heart of California, Avenal is southwest of Fresno and approximately four hours from Los Angeles and San Francisco. Avenal's current population is close to 13,000; this estimate includes the inmates that populate the state prison leaving the actual town population to estimate 9,000. The majority of the population consist of Hispanic or Latino/as who make up 82% of the current population. Like many surrounding towns, Avenal is driven by agriculture. Many individuals who work in this sector serve as Campesinos or within the factories that produce the most substantial economic revenue for the U.S. economy. Despite the sizeable economic industry, individuals who work in this sector are often underpaid. The current median household income is \$34,638 in comparison to California's average household income which is close to \$68,000. Nearly 36% of Avenal's population lives under poverty, the majority of which belong to the Hispanic ethnic group ("Avenal, CA," n.d.).

Avenal is one of the many rural towns that make up the Central Valley, like such, these also contain similar characteristics related to population, poverty, and economic revenue. Driven by agriculture, the Central Valley was once home to the Braceros Program of 1942 which sought to recruit Mexican peasants to work in the United States as migrant workers. As part of their contract, these men would work in the U.S. for a short period and would then return to their homeland for the rest of the year, continuing this cycle for several years (Mandee, 2014). Despite the discontinuation of the Braceros Program, migration continued, and many of these men adopted similar patterns finding jobs in the agricultural sector. Those who work in the campo or the fields of agriculture, often picking, producing, or packing produce are referred to as Campesinos. From the early development of the Braceros Program, there were many injustices documented by Campesinos related to low wages, lack of representation, and harsh working conditions (Mandee, 2014). Due to the continued conditions, Cesar Chavez would later help form what we now know as the

United Farm Workers movement and the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) to advocate for the rights and protection of Campesinos in the Central Valley (Shaw, 2008). Despite the continuous years of advocating for farm workers' rights, Campesinos continue to face low wages, lack of representation, and harsh working conditions in the Central Valley. Most often, parents who work in the fields make a strong emphasis on providing their children with better opportunities that they had, knowing that those who lack the English language, education and skills are often the ones who work in this sector. For children of Campesinos, this includes added pressure to attend college in the hopes of attaining a career beyond the fields.

Hispanic Serving Institutions

Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) emerged from the struggle and need to provide equal educational opportunities to minority students on their campuses. After long battles of various legislative policies, institutions that serve substantial minority populations have been able to develop into MSIs including Hispanic Serving Institutions, Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions, Predominantly Black Institutions and Native American and Non-Tribal Serving Institutions (Gasman, Nguyen & Conrad, 2015). The 1992 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 introduced the need for HSIs due to the rapid growth of the Latino/a population (Capt, 2013). The designation was granted in 1994 and allowed for qualifying institutions to receive funds to support the needs of this growing student population. Institutions that enroll over 25% of Hispanic/Latino/a students and have over 50% of low-income students can apply for federal grants and receive the HSI designation (Conrad & Gasman, 2015). In California alone, HSIs educate over 60% of Latino/a students and account for over 48% of the higher education institutions in the state (Boland, 2015). These institutions, amongst other MSIs, seek to provide diverse students with opportunities to learn. HSIs are responding to the growth in Latino/a population with the hopes of closing the gaps and challenging the traditional norms of educational opportunity.

Influences to Attend an HSI

Location Bound

A study conducted by Excelencia in Education (2007) traces Latino/a student college choice by providing insight into student reflections as to why they choose to attend their respective institutions. The study found that Latino/a student college choice is influenced by access, affordability, and familial ties. HSIs address these three components by being located in areas with large Latino/a populations. Proximity to home allows for students to commute. Although these students are often considered to be off campus, the accessibility and flexibility provided by these institutions allow for these students to be involved in campus activities and clubs, creating connections that make them feel a sense of belonging. The ability to commute often allows these students to save money on dormitory and on-campus expenses. The cost associated with attending a local institution is much less and outweighs the need for many low-income students to take out loans or place the financial burden on their parents. The ability to remain close to home allows for many of these students to retain their current jobs and continue to provide for their family and fulfill their various obligations. Participating students reinforced the importance of family as familism is an essential component amongst Latino/a culture. Although many students who enrolled at HSIs were not aware of their campus designation, these studies demonstrate that these students choose these institutions based on the benefits that such location would generate for them (Santiago, 2007).

Investment/Return to Community

Many Latino/a parents struggle with immigration status or low economic resources; therefore, they often share their personal stories of hard work and lack of educational opportunities to their children with the expectation that these will learn from their stories and surpass their educational attainment. Patterns show that many Latino/a students take this parental message as an expectation to attain a college degree and place a higher value on educational investment (Cross et al., 2019). Giving back to those who have supported you is highly valued in Latino/a communities, influencing the need to work hard to one day be able to give back to their community and repay their families and parents for their continuous support. In general, MSIs engage in community-centered

research projects and prepare their students to contribute to local communities. MSIs place a large emphasis on serving the regions around them. Attending a local MSI presents the opportunity to be involved with your home community, engaging in partnerships, development programs and events which are organized through the institution (Conrad & Gasman, 2015). The community partnerships offered through MSIs attract many Latino/a students who seek not only to gain from their educational investment but hope to acquire the tools to give back to their communities.

Challenges

Finances

For many students, college is unaffordable. Financing an education while having little to no resources can result in a financial burden and barrier to educational success for many. One of the most frequently reported challenges amongst Latino/a student was related to money. Many students enter college unprepared with little understanding of the cost and benefits of receiving an education. Most often, Latino/a students are less likely to receive financial aid due to their lack of knowledge involving loans, scholarships, and financial assistance. The lack of funds increases the probability that these students will have a job while in school creating a challenge between balancing work and academic life. Studies show that financial struggles amongst Latino/a students involved not having enough money due to other bills or having to be the financial provider for their household (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017). A study conducted by McCabe and Jackson (2016) analyzes the pathways students take to finance their education, the study focuses on class and race to highlight that despite having little to no social capital, students of color rely heavily on themselves to surpass these financial hurdles. Due to their family's inability to provide these funds along with their lack of experience navigating college, students are forced to figure it out on their own (McCabe & Jackson, 2016). Finances become a burden for many Latino/a students who are often overwhelmed with the cost of attending college and their inability to afford these fees.

Academics

Most often, education is taught through traditional lens that often leave out low-income minority students. Many of these students come into these institutions feeling unprepared. Latino/a students are often underprepared for college given the high schools that they have attended. For many, college turns out to be a whole new world. When entering college, these students find themselves in a drastic academic transition that places them in remedial courses due to their inability to comprehend college-level work (Conrad & Gasman, 2015). Remedial education is determined through performance standards and placement tests that do not necessarily qualify whether or not they possess the required skill set to succeed in college. Nearly 45 percent of Latino/a students enrolled in remedial courses placing them at a disadvantage that often creates a significant setback for achieving their academic goals (Jimenez et al., 2016). A qualitative study on the academic factors affecting Latino/a students found that academic challenges faced by Latino/a students were centered around content difficulty, adjusting to different teaching methods, the workload, the inability to assist study/tutoring groups and their lack of English language skills (Bitew, 2015). Experiencing a challenging academic experience can negatively impact students and their future aspirations related to transferring or graduating on time.

Support Services

Additional challenges at HSIs include the diversity within these institutions. This reinforces the idea that not all HSIs are the same as each requires different resources and funding, yet, they are treated within the same spectrum. Each HSIs has different programming and support systems for students; unfortunately, for many HSIs these are lacking or underfunded. One of the main issues revolved around HSIs is the debate of Hispanic enrolling versus Hispanic serving, just because an institution is given this designation does not mean that they are providing adequate resources for this population (Nuñez, Hurtado & Galdeano, 2015). In relation to Latino/a students, many students report feeling alienated on campus due to the small population of faculty who look like them or programs that specifically address their culture. Institutional agents play a crucial role in helping students navigate through college. Studies show that

students who build connections with individuals at their institution, these can be staff, students, and/or faculty members, have higher tendencies of feeling supported and valued at their institution. The same patterns occur when students engage in specific campus resources, mentoring, and organizations on campus. This goes to show that faculty, counselors, and support services play a decisive role in impacting student success (Tovar, 2015). When these services and support systems are lacking, many Latino/a students experience a lack of support and feelings of belonging.

Why HSI Experiences Matter

The fast-growing numbers of Latino/as in this country, as well as the rapid increase of college enrollments, calls for the acknowledgment and more in-depth dive into understanding Latino/a student experience. Despite the increase in enrollment, Latino/as continue to have the overall lowest rate of college enrollment and college attainment. Many factors influence this outcome, yet, it is important to understand that these challenges cannot be used as guiding principles for all Latino/as. When comparing Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Mexican student experiences, results show that there are varying expectations, aspirations and challenges faced by each group (Bohon, Kirkpatrick Johnson & Gorman, 2006). These experiences vary across generation, socioeconomic status, ethnic groups, and geographic location. Although there is an assumption that all Latino/as are facing academic and financial challenges when attending college, it is important to recognize that each group has specific experiences, and these are not generalizations. Educational outcomes can be improved if we begin to understand each specific population, their needs and specific need for resources; these facts can better help colleges understand how to support each student and improve these statistics.

Latino/as are enrolling in college and aspiring to achieve academic success. The federal government along with other policymakers have acknowledged the disparities that persist with these groups and have therefore created grants to assist institutions who serve large numbers of these populations. Institutions who meet HSI criteria should have the upper hand in assisting this population primarily because they are receiving money to do so. Nonetheless, students who attend HSIs continue to

face challenges that prove to be setbacks to their educational success. Understanding the experiences faced by individuals at an HSI pinpoints the issues that students bring with them and affect their outcomes, if these are not addressed within the larger scope of the institution. These experiences matter as they are often less visible within our society and within the realm of higher education which seeks to provide an equitable and accessible educational trajectory for all.

Through a series of interviews conducted with HSI students that attend institutions in California’s Central Valley, there was a strong presence of

prominent themes including the need to attend a local institution to give back to their community as well as the challenges faced while at these institutions. The authors presented in this literature review support many of the themes across these interviews concluding that there needs to be a deeper understanding of the student experience and intersectionality that makes each student unique based on generation, socioeconomic status, ethnic groups, and location. Approaching Latino/a student success at HSIs by better understanding student experiences will allow for these institutions to thrive and generate future programs to better serve these populations in the future.

PARTICIPANTS

MELISSA

Born in Salinas, California, Melissa moved to Avenal at a very young age as her parents were attracted to the job availability for Campesinos in the Central Valley. Melissa’s parents were born in Jalisco, Mexico where they attained a sixth-grade education before migrating to the United States. Influenced by her oldest sister’s college attendance as well as her familial expectations, Melissa decided to enroll at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she studied sociology and received her bachelor’s degree in 2018. Thinking back on her college journey, she highlights the difficulty of navigating college and appreciates the struggle as it has helped her remember the importance of community building and remembering your roots. Currently, Melissa is a political organizer for the Central Valley and hopes to pursue a master’s degree in education to become a future teacher.

STEPHANIE

As the oldest of three siblings, there was a constant pressure to set an example of what a college path would look like. Nonetheless, Stephanie’s trajectory was non-traditional, she attended West Hills College and in 2017, transferred to Fresno Pacific where she is currently a part-time student in the field of child development. As a first-generation college student, daughter of immigrant parents with elementary school education who work as Campesinos, attaining a college degree has been challenging, yet, she is continuously influenced by her younger brother and her family to keep working hard. She currently works for a program called Orton Gilligham, where she teaches Avenal elementary school students’ phonics and how to read. Her current and previous experience navigating the K-12 system has influenced her to become a kindergarten teacher and work in low-income communities such as her own.





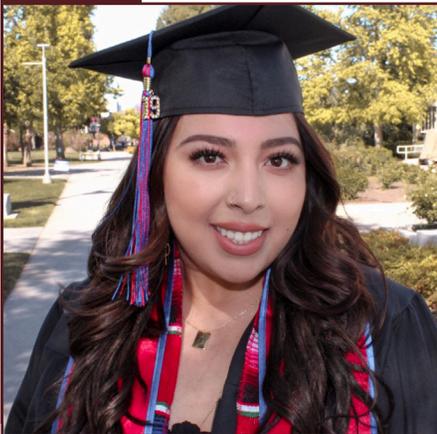
ASHLEY

As a student at Fresno City College, Ashley is currently working on obtaining her associate degree to transfer to Fresno State University and pursue a degree in Kinesiology. Born in Hanford, California, Ashley has lived in Avenal, California her entire life. She is the daughter of Mexican immigrants who've worked in agriculture for over 25 years through truck and tractor driving. Ashley's biggest motivation derives from her parents, seeing them consistently work hard to provide her everything she needs, has influenced her to do the same for them now that they are getting older. Despite her non-traditional college trajectory, Ashley has never given up and continues to strive to be a first-generation college graduate. In the future, Ashley hopes to become an athletic trainer and eventually transition into a physical therapist. She hopes that her drive and her passion will not only help her family but influence the rest of her community.



DAYANA

Born in Michoacán, Mexico, Dayana was brought to this country at a very young age. Although she entered this country undocumented, she was fortunate enough to be naturalized as a citizen a few years later. Her parents, attracted to the economic living of the Central Valley, decided to move to Avenal. Dayana's parents were also born in Michoacán, Mexico where they attained an eighth-grade education before migrating to the United States. Due to the lack of education her parents received, education was often emphasized in her household. Her brother's college attendance influenced her to pursue an education and enroll at California State University, Fresno. Dayana graduated in May 2019 with her bachelor's degree in sociology. Learning about the inequalities she faced growing up, has encouraged her to bring awareness to her community and wishes to work with more rural communities in the future. Dayana currently works for the Dolores Huerta Foundation.



MABEL

A product of two Mexican immigrants who migrated from La Piedad, Michoacán, Mabel is the second of three daughters who were born and raised in Avenal, California. While in Mexico, Mabel's father received a middle school education and her mother was unable to finish elementary school. When they arrived in Avenal, Mabel's parents began to work in agriculture, yet, her father encouraged her mother to attain a degree instead. Mabel's mother's degree completion trickled down to her children who were then influenced to do the same. Mabel was unsure if college was the path she wanted to take and struggled to make the decision of whether or not to attend. Despite her non-traditional journey, she was able to transfer to Fresno State where she received her bachelor's degree. While at Fresno State, Mabel joined a dual credential program to receive multiple subjects and special education credentials to become a special education teacher. In the future, she hopes to teach in her hometown.

Methods

Participants

Participants in this study included five self-identified Latinas who were raised in Avenal, California, a small town located in the heart of the Central Valley. All of the women are daughters of Campesinos, having either one or both parents who work in the Central Valley's agricultural sector. The ages of the participants extended from 22 to 27 years old. Participation in this study was voluntary, yet, all participants were required to have enrolled in an HSI at the time of the study. Despite the participant's similar background and upbringing, they varied in educational institution attended, some of which included West Hills College, Fresno State University, Fresno Pacific University, Fresno City College, and the University of California, Santa Cruz. Along with institution, there was a range of years for degree completion, and class standing including individuals who will graduate this year, have graduated, transferred or are still on the road to graduate.

Procedure

After receiving informed consent from each of the participants, I collected data through semi-structured interviews. The interviews focused on the participant's background, including their upbringing, family, and education. Additionally, I delved deeper into their education, expanding on their decision to attend a particular institution, their academic and financial challenges, along with the support services they encountered at their HSI. I conducted the interviews in-person over a one week period. I then transcribed the interviews and coded for common themes to generate an analysis of the findings.

Findings and Discussion

This study originated from a need to highlight the stories of college students from small rural communities that are often forgotten. As first-generation college students, from low-income backgrounds and rural communities, it often feels as though their voices and experiences are seen as inferior to others. For the five participants, college has not been a four-year direct trajectory, many have transferred, taken a leave of absence or taken

longer than expected to graduate. What we don't know is why – why they choose to stay close to home, why they decided to return home, or why they struggled financially and academically. Through this study, I sought to uncover some of these reasons by examining the support services provided by each of their respective institutions to better improve how they serve low-income, Latino/a students in the future.

“I was able to commute the first year, so that made it easier on myself just to not be paying rent and stuff like that.”

Location Bound

Despite Avenal's rural community, poverty, and isolation, the five participants decided to stay relatively close to home or return after graduation. The study conducted by Excelencia in Education (2007) shows that many students based their college decision on access, affordability, and familial ties, this was the case for Mabel, knowing very little about college, she decided to pick West Hills Community College as this was the community college that was closest to Avenal and often reinforced by her high school counselors. In addition, she was influenced by familial ties as her parents constantly encouraged her to attend West Hills. Reflecting upon her experience, she understands that despite this being the only college she considered, she knows this was her only option as it was the most accessible and feasible. For Dayana, affordability played a significant role when it came to college, “I was able to commute the first year, so that made it easier on myself just to not be paying rent and stuff like that.” Commuting from home allowed her to save money on dormitory and on-campus expenses. Relying heavily on affordability, Fresno State became her top choice given its proximity to Avenal.

“I want to come back and be some type of help for the young kids. Like, teach them about higher education so they have resources and they can become, not necessarily good students, but you know, better people.”

Investment/Return to Community

Giving back to those who have supported you along the way is highly valued amongst Latino/a communities. This particular theme resonated amongst all five participants who consistently reflected on those who helped them get to where they are, they mentioned their parents, siblings, teachers, mentors, and community. Reflecting on the lack of resources, poverty, and hard work from their parents has allowed them to realize that the only individuals who will make a change in Avenal are those who have the tools and genuinely care for this community. Melissa attended UC Santa Cruz and decided to return home after graduation to become a political organizer for the Central Valley to give a voice to small rural communities such as hers. "I want to come back and be some type of help for the young kids. Like, teach them about higher education so they have resources and they can become, not necessarily good students, but you know, better people." Melissa's goal is to educate the future generations of the Central Valley. Stephanie much like Melissa shares a similar passion as her current work with Avenal elementary school children has allowed for her to reflect on her past K-12 experience. The similarities between her experience and the children that she currently works with have allowed her to find the disparities in the education system. Stephanie hopes that her current knowledge and experience will help her provide her students with the tools they need to succeed. Both Melissa and Stephanie understand the value of giving back, yet, their particular focus is on the return of investment for their community and the children who are experiencing the same journey they had growing up.

"So, at first, I had to pay by a certain day, so I had to ask my parents for money, and I mean they helped me pay for my first semester, but they wanted me to pay them back because they needed the money."

Financial Challenges

Attaining financial aid can be a maze for many first-generation students who struggle with the paperwork and process given the little to no knowledge they and their family members typically have. Ashley was aware that she qualified for financial aid, "I think I applied for the Pell Grant

too, but I only qualified for financial aid." She never knew where to seek assistance and failed to continue to follow up with the process despite the probability that she would qualify for the Pell Grant considering her parent's income. On the other hand, Mabel stated, "I recently qualified for the Pell Grant and I received money, but up until this year I have never received any kind of financial aid from the state." In Mabel's case, attaining Pell Grant would signal financial need, yet, she's never qualified for financial aid which doesn't align with the overall purpose of qualifying for assistance but supports the idea that many students are unaware and find this process difficult to navigate.

McCabe and Jackson (2016) conclude that despite having little to no social capital, students of color rely heavily on themselves to surpass financial hurdles. This was the case for Melissa who was housing insecure for almost two years while living in Santa Cruz. She often found herself living in a garage or a living room due to the expensive rent and lack of student dormitories. On top of having to deal with the emotional distress of not having a home, there was an additional worry of having to think about taking out loans every year, having enough money to pay for books, pay for gas, and other expenses while continually checking her bank account. Although her parents provided her with as much financial support as they could, she knew her parents were unable to pay for all of her expenses and was forced to figure it out on her own. Due to Dayana's inability to receive financial aid, she was forced to pay her first semester at Fresno State out of pocket. "So, at first, I had to pay by a certain day, so I had to ask my parents for money, and I mean they helped me pay for my first semester, but they wanted me to pay them back because they needed the money." Dayana's family's inability to provide these funds forced her to work and maintain a balance between work and academic life finding it hard for her to keep up with the financial aspect of being a student.

"So, I just felt like I was never really pushed to my full potential. I was just stuck. So, I don't think it prepared me at all."

Academic Challenges

Many first-generation college students come into college unprepared given the little to no preparation they received in their K-12 schooling. Stephanie believes that her K-12 education was very repetitive as many of her teachers didn't consider her to be the smartest kid and often taught her the same thing over and over. "So, I just felt like I was never really pushed to my full potential. I was just stuck. So, I don't think it prepared me at all." Melissa believes that they could've done more, "they didn't teach us about life, and obviously, you learn as you go, but not in our school. So, when I got to college, it was like, what is this? Why am I here?" Although some of the participants found transitioning programs, these also seemed to undermine their lack of preparation and aspirations for the future. Despite being part of the Trio Program, Dayana feels like she should've known more about college in general. Also, the program didn't encourage her to transfer and continue her education leaving her to figure out her academics on her own. Once they entered college, academics became an obstacle. The content difficulty, adjusting to different teaching methods, the workload, the inability to assist study/tutoring groups and lack of English language skills are often the hardest academic challenges faced by Latino/a student's (Bitew, 2015). Ashley found herself taking remedial courses, not passing many of them or not knowing which ones to take due to her lack of mentorship for navigating the system. Mabel was put on academic probation and placed on academic leave for one semester. "I felt like the transition from high school to college was hard for me. I mean, I wouldn't say that I didn't take my classes seriously, but I just didn't know how to juggle the workload, especially being a full-time student and having to work, that was something I hadn't done in high school." The academic challenges and setbacks experienced by these women created a negative impact on their ability to transfer in two years or graduate on a four-year plan.

Lack of Support Services

"I never felt super welcomed or anything like that, nothing special about it. I was just like, your school, your class starts this day, you know, get to it."

From the five participants, none had ever heard the term "Hispanic Serving Institution" before, or it ever be used throughout their institution. "I understood that it was mostly Hispanics, but I don't recall West Hills ever like saying or announcing anything like that," says Mable, who was often unaware of the specific services they provided for this population. As a part-time online student, accessing student services that specifically cater to the Hispanic population or any in general, has been difficult for Stephanie. "I never felt super welcomed or anything like that, nothing special about it. I was just like, your school, your class starts this day, you know, get to it." Not visiting campus often has deterred her from joining any clubs or participating in any organization as these services are often not communicated to part-time students or those taking online classes. In terms of meeting the needs of the Latino/a population, Melissa stated that UC Santa Cruz enrolls a large number of Latino/a students in comparison to other UC's, it does a great job at providing resources that are centered around the Latino/a experience but often these were underfunded or kept at a smaller scale. Despite feeling some support, Melissa felt that if there had been specific programs that addressed her culture or experience, her first-year transition would've been less confusing and more welcoming. When there's a lack of programming or resources that cater to student needs, many students report feeling alienated on campus; this can also occur when there's a relatively small amount of faculty of color. At Fresno City College, the majority of Ashley's professors have been white; despite a large amount of Latino/a students in the class, unfortunately, these large populations do not reflect the faculty. Had there been more advertisement or services for Latino/a students as well as faculty of color, the experiences faced by these individuals could've possibly been different. Dayana feels that this would've been her case, "I feel like my experience could've been better if more programs catered to Latino/as just because your culture somehow gets lost because you are focused on trying to graduate and get a B.A." Had there been programs to alleviate the stress of navigating college, students such as Dayana would've been more involved or felt a stronger sense of belonging at their institution.

Limitations of Study

This study has potential limitations that should be noted. In no way are these interviews a reflection or representation of all the experiences

faced by students at Hispanic Serving Institutions. The sample was limited to five participants from the same area; all participants were women and asked to participate based on their availability and understanding of their college experience. The reflection of the current participants was based on their current and most recent memories which could potentially be different for an individual in their first year versus those who graduated from the same institution over ten years ago. The five themes that were analyzed in the literature review, as well as the discussion, were based on the collective responses given by the participants, yet, there are unique challenges and experiences for each based on their intersectionality that are not discussed throughout this study. Overall, the research focuses on a small sample that reflects the experiences that are unique to five Latinas who were raised in Avenal, California.

Recommendations

Recognize Non-Traditional Students

Throughout the interviews and after reflecting upon each individual's experience, it was clear that all of the participants were non-traditional students. By non-traditional, I mean nontypical. Not the typical college student that has college graduate parents, access and resources to college prep or college courses, not the average college student who moves away from home and lives in the dorms, not the typical college student who graduates in four years. Many, amongst other factors, make these individuals nontypical. By nontypical, I mean nontypical within the realms of what higher education is "supposed to look like." These norms and guidelines have been designed for rich white males. The idea that we still consider higher education to follow this pathway pushes away many non-traditional students from even applying to college. For first-generation, low-income, women of color, going to college is always going to be nontypical because these spaces weren't made for them in the first place. Despite the obstacles that many believed would hinder them from going to college and persevering, these five women have shown that they carry resilience and the drive to attain a degree. Therefore, institutions need to recognize the importance of non-traditional students, students who have created their nontypical journey and have set their own pace to achieve their college degree.

To generate a change, it's important to acknowledge intersectionality and the uniqueness and characteristics that make up every individual. These changes can start at a smaller scale with staff and faculty learning more about the students and communities they are serving. In the case of HSIs that are located in the Central Valley, it's essential to recognize the factors that attract students to these institutions as well as the families and communities where they come from as these factors shape the ways students develop throughout their college experience. At a larger scale, institutions can begin to cater their services to meet the needs of their students. The implementation of such change can take time as institutions vary by size and funding, yet, small initiatives that recognize the needs and uniqueness of each student goes a long way. With that in mind, the specific focus on daughters of Campesinos from Avenal who have attended an HSI was done with the intention of looking at a particular population and their unique stories. These women share many commonalities, yet, many differences that are often overshadowed by the generalization of what we often consider to be the trajectory of a typical college student.

Improve Student Services

The first step to improving student services starts by making students aware of the services that are provided. The five participants shared the same sentiment of not knowing many of the services that were available campus-wide or of particular services that catered to their needs. When they were asked whether or not they knew that their institution was Hispanic-serving, they answered with a similar response, they knew that there was a large population of Hispanic students, but none were aware that there was a designation or what the designation entailed. Although acknowledging the HSI designation can be problematic for other populations that are within the institution, as it seems to favor one group over another, the institution should let students know that they have this designation. Recognizing this designation doesn't prioritize one population over another. Instead, it reinforces the idea that these services are available for these students who might often be unaware that these exist.

When the participants were asked if they believed that having more services that cater to the Latino/a population would've generated a

different college experience for them, all participants answered yes. Interestingly enough, there was a sense of blame placed on themselves as each of them believed that the reason why they had failed academically or struggled throughout their college experience was due to their inability to seek out these services. These individuals blamed themselves for not doing more despite their current struggles and having to navigate these spaces on their own. Many students blame themselves for their failures rather than analyzing the institutional resources that are lacking. Shifting these student's mentality can take away the pressure of feeling like every individual is responsible for their educational outcomes and failures. At a smaller-scale, services can improve by continually taking in student feedback and adjusting the services to the needs of the students based on their demands. At a larger scale, student services can reevaluate their objectives, goals, and the students they are serving to create additional programs or provide further assistance for non-traditional students. Based on the interviewees and their experience, having a transitioning program that explained remedial courses, partnerships and internships with local communities, flexible tutoring services for non-traditional students who might commute or only be taking online courses as well as mixers with faculty of color could've positively impacted these individuals. Improving student services takes time and a significant financial investment, yet, these services will not only improve each experience, but they will also produce college students that feel motivated and a sense of belonging at their institution.

Conclusion

In generating this research, there was a need to highlight often marginalized groups; in this case, it was for daughters of Campesinos who are low-income, first-generation, Latinas who have attended a Hispanic Serving Institution. For these women, there is often little to no recognition. Instead, there seems to be a sense of failure for not attending a different institution, struggling academically or taking longer than four years to graduate. After analyzing their stories, we find commonalities amongst other first-generation Latino/a students and a uniqueness that pertains to their community and upbringing. The objective is not only to highlight these women but to influence future research when it comes

to generalizing and proposing future recommendations to better serve Latino/as students. As daughters of Campesinos, these women often faced the pressure of attending college to attain a better life and break the cycle of having to work in the fields. All of these five women have incredible stories that are often undermined, yet, when we take the time to analyze their stories, we find that despite coming from a rural community, encountering financial and academic challenges, these women have persisted, and their stories are worth being told.

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