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"Si Se Puede": Latinx/a/o Students Thriving at a Selective Historically White Institution

Melisa Alves

"SI SE PUEDE": LATINX/A/O STUDENTS THRIVING AT A SELECTIVE

HISTORICALLY WHITE INSTITUTION

A Dissertation Presented

by

MELISA ALVES

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ABSTRACT

"SI SE PUEDE": LATINX/A/O STUDENTS THRIVING AT A SELECTIVE

HISTORICALLY WHITE INSTITUTION

August 2023

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The prevalence of whiteness at selective Historically White Institutions (HWIs) creates hostile and oppressive environments for Latinx/a/o students. Consequently, Latinx/a/o students face racialized barriers that impact their ability to thrive at these institutions. Yet, despite these racialized barriers, Latinx/a/o students have found ways to thrive at selective HWIs. Thriving is a transformative process through which one confronts and copes with challenges but is able to flourish. As part of the process, the transformation happens when one moves beyond the original level of functioning and grows psychologically despite the trauma experienced. The objective of this study was to move beyond the racialized barriers that Latinx/a/o students face and understand how Latinx/a/o students thrive at selective HWIs.

To move away from deficit-based ways of looking at Latinx/a/o student experience, this study integrated three Latinx/a/o-focused, asset-based theories to understand how Latinx/a/o students thrived. LatCrit, community cultural wealth (CCW), and validation theory were utilized in this study. The author examined how seven Latinx/a/o co-creators thrived at a selective HWI in the northeastern United States, employing a phenomenological approach to discover the essence and nuances of thriving for Latinx/a/o students. Initial findings suggest that (a) Latinx/a/o student thriving is connected to various elements not defined by academic success; (b) Latinx/a/o students tap into community cultural wealth, validating agents, and institutional spaces to overcome racialized barriers; and (c) Latinx/a/o student thriving is subjective and episodic at selective HWIs. Overall, these findings illuminate the complexity and nuances of Latinx/a/o student thriving at selective HWIs. The findings also suggest that internal agents at selective HWIs need to be aware of the subjective and episodic nature of thriving for Latinx/a/o students and understand the conditions and elements that can support Latinx/a/o student thriving.

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PROLOGUE

A LATINA HAS NO HOME IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Positionality Statement

My study sought to understand the experiences of Latinx/a/o students thriving at selective Historically White Institutions (HWIs). Using a phenomenological approach to explore the concept of thriving, the study centered the experiences of Latinx/a/o students to not only elevate their voices and experiences but also understand the changes higher education institutions need to make to deconstruct current practices that oppress Latinx/a/o students. The inspiration for this study was based on my experiences as a first-generation college Latina, daughter of immigrants from the Dominican Republic, who attended HWIs for both my undergraduate and graduate degrees. My parents immigrated to the United States with the hopes and dreams of many immigrants. They were searching for a better life that included access to education and social mobility for their children. Often, when I think about my struggles as a Latina being educated in a system that does not see the worth of people who look, think, or hold values like mine, I pause to think about my parents' experiences: the courage it took them to take the little they had, leave their entire family behind, and travel thousands of miles to a new country where their language, brown skin, culture, and Latinx/a/o identity were not valued and where they often experienced overt discrimination and oppression. A country that, similar to the institutions I attended, forced them to

assimilate to be able to progress but in ways that would not disrupt the system that upheld

white supremacy and devalued anything different. Their struggle was a battle within a system

created to limit the social mobility of immigrants and people of color.

But my parents dealt with the oppression and discrimination because it meant

securing opportunities for their children. Though my parents could not help me with my

homework, education was not optional in our home. My parents understood little about the

education system in the United States, yet they understood it was a pathway to a life different

from the one they left behind in the Dominican Republic. They valued education and held

strict expectations regarding schooling for my siblings and me. They accepted nothing less

than A's or B's. We had to respect and not question our educational experience, including

our teachers. The expectation was that you did well in school no matter what it took. There

was no time for extracurriculars or activities that children enjoy at a young age. During the

school year, my life consisted of attending school and coming home afterward to care for my

younger sibling and do homework. Family and education had to be my priorities.

While I enjoyed learning, I always felt disconnected from the material that was being

taught to us. I spent so many years reading and learning about subjects where I did not see

myself reflected, where my doing well seemed like a surprise to some of my teachers, and

where I often did not see myself reflected in my teachers or peers. I spent my entire

educational experience straddling two very different worlds: In one, my native language, my

rice and beans and *platanos*, my bachata and merengue, my curly hair and curvy figure kept

me connected to my Dominican roots; in the other, my accent, my food, my music, and the

way I looked were a daily reminder that I was different and at times invisible.

From a young age, I recall never seeing the history of *mi gente* reflected in history books or the stories of our experiences in English classes. It was always the stories of Christopher Columbus and Ferdinand Magellan that were told. The only accounts of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) were those of Indigenous people and enslaved Black people—but always from the perspective of the colonizers. The stories of BIPOC were never told from their point of view. Most years, our schools did not even bother celebrating National Latinx/a/o Heritage Month, the one month each year when there might have been an opportunity for Latinx/a/o students like me to see prominent Latinxs/as/os, hear their stories of success, and embrace a piece of our culture.

Throughout most of my K–12 education, my teachers were white women. Most were nice and caring but were not culturally competent or did not care to recognize that the Black and Brown students in their classrooms did not feel a sense of belonging. Like most kids, I had my favorite teachers growing up; still, my connection to them was always based on their level of support and engagement rather than on my ability to feel that they fully understood who I was and where I came from. In high school, I remember the microaggressions (McCabe, 2009) masked as compliments—"You are a smart Latina," because apparently Latinxs/as/os are not intelligent. I was once told by a white peer that I was the "whitest" Dominican she knew, as if she was making herself feel better because I was the only Latina hanging out with the white girls at that moment. I remember ignoring her comment, yet there sat a pain in my stomach as she tried to render invisible my Latinidad, as if it was not written in the curls on my head, my Brown skin, and my accent when I said certain words. While my peers brought their peanut butter and fluff sandwiches to school, I never dared bring my rice, beans, and Dominican food. I avoided questions about what I was eating and what that smell

was because their sandwiches never smelled of anything when they opened their lunch bags. I continued to navigate two worlds with two groups of friends: my Latina group and my white friends. It was Aventura with one group of friends and NSYNC with the other.

College was no different, except as I got older, I was no longer complacent and did not have to be for the sake of my parents, who often reminded me that I was lucky to have access to education and that I needed to value the opportunities. This was their way of saying, "Don't mess it up." I worked extremely hard to get into "a good college," a standard that my parents based on what they understood to be a "good college" in our hometown. As immigrants, their measures were not the same as those of white America. They could not dream of Harvard or Yale for me because they had no idea what Ivy League institutions were and represented in American society. Truthfully, neither did I at that age. At the end of the day, I got into college, and like many Latinx/a/o students, I stayed close to home. By "close," I mean a five-minute drive home.

The pressure of being the oldest child in my family and a first-generation Latina and daughter of immigrants was at its highest when making my college application decisions. The expectation to stay close to home was one I often heard throughout my senior year in high school. Being close to home meant I could still support my family when they had to deal with any situation requiring English to be spoken or navigating systems like buying a home or dealing with racialized barriers that my mom experienced at her job. In those moments, I served as a representative for my family, as if I had the knowledge and experience of a homeowner or a lawyer. At the same time, being close to home meant I could quickly find the comfort of family and mi communidad, which I held on to by working primarily with

Black and Latinx/a/o youth where I grew up, attending my local church on Sundays, and spending time with my family at home.

However, my first introduction to college had me fooled because of an orientation program that made it seem like my college experience would be less alienating. I started college in a 2-week orientation program for African American, Latino, Asian American, and Native American, or ALANA, students—a new label for identifying me. While the orientation program served as a bubble to protect us from what was to come, my experience in college would have been even more isolating were it not for the people I met during the orientation program. There, I met some of my best friends who also identified as Domicanas, my first peer mentor—a Latina student who helped me navigate some of the complexities of higher education by connecting me to resources on campus—and my class dean, who was also Latina and would become a mother figure for me on campus and a future mentor. For the first time in my educational experience, I was surrounded by people who shared my cultural values, language, and stories. Even if it only lasted for a few weeks, I saw my home life and school life overlap for the first time.

It did not take long to learn that my college was a historically white institution like the K–12 schools I had attended. I dealt with racism like being called "the black dot" in the main dining hall, the phrase our white peers used for BIPOC students when we sat together for meals. I was reminded that I only represented about 9% of the campus student body when I was often the only or one of very few BIPOC students in classes led by white professors. Again, I returned to navigating two worlds—this time between being in community with friends I met as part of the orientation program and the world where a sea of white surrounded us. White students, white teachers, white staff, course material centered on white

people's experiences, and institutional systems that upheld whiteness, from the food we ate in the dining hall, to the music at school events, to the paintings of white people that decorated our hallways.

The difference this time was that being surrounded by so much whiteness made me even more attuned to my culture and Latinx identity. In college, I learned to become an expert in code-switching (Carter, 2006), learning how to straddle two cultural worlds, and for the first time in my educational experience, I had some limited autonomy to seek what I culturally felt most connected to. While I often had to code-switch to survive and check part of myself at the door at times, I no longer allowed that to be my only option. In my room, I proudly displayed my huge Dominican flag and loudly played Aventura and other Dominican artists. Any chance I got, I picked up Dominican food, brought it back to campus, and ate it in the residence hall.

I no longer cared what others thought. I sought spaces and people on campus that helped me feel like I belonged. I joined the Latin American Student Organization and was a peer mentor and student leader for programs that supported BIPOC students on campus. I majored in Spanish because I felt connected to the faculty in the Spanish department, who mainly were Latinx/a/o. I read course material in my language and learned the history and stories of mi gente. For once, I saw some representation. In these areas of my college experience, I no longer felt alone. When I found these people and spaces, I was able to begin not only embracing my ethnic identity but also navigating college successfully. I created a bubble where I could pull from the limited resources, people, and spaces on campus that shared similar experiences.

Yet, looking back at my college experience now, I cannot ignore how my institution failed me and how those few resources that helped me get through were only a small slice of the proverbial pie. I accepted so little because I did not know anything different. I survived college and graduated, but looking back now, I was not given the opportunity to thrive in college. My college failed us as Latinx/a/o students because, while there were small pockets within the institution where our experiences and culture were valued, the institution as a whole did not embrace our cultural values, knowledge, and experiences. We were recruited into an HWI grounded in Eurocentric systems. Despite wanting to represent its growing diversity, the institution did not look at how its policies and practices might be failing Latinx/a/o students, did not focus on recruiting more Latinx/a/o faculty, did not change its classroom pedagogy or curriculum to reflect the voices and experiences of Latinx/a/o students, and did not change its programming to center the experiences of Latinx/a/o students and to empower us. With so few of us, the institution mostly ignored us, focusing on surface-level changes and making it *seem* like progress was being made toward our inclusion and belonging in the college community.

My current epistemology, one that theories like critical race theory have molded, has reinforced what I already knew: that colleges in the United States, especially HWIs, have failed the growing number of Latinx/a/o students entering higher education and will continue to fail Latinx/a/o students unless they begin deconstructing the policies and practices that center whiteness and devalue Latinx/a/o epistemologies and ways of being. As a first-generation Latina and daughter of immigrants whose entire higher education experience has taken place at HWIs, I know these experiences and my identities have impacted why I have chosen to study Latinx/a/o student experiences at selective HWIs. My experiences have left

me with more questions than answers—questions I explored through this study. As a scholar-practitioner, I hope my research can elevate the voices of the many Latinx/a/o students who today are still struggling to thrive because the selective HWIs they attend continue to leave them at the margins and fail to see their resilience and capital as well as the assets they bring to their college communities.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Between 1999 and 2016, the percentage of Latinx/a/o high school graduates ages 18–24 enrolled in college increased from 32% to 47% (Gramlich, 2017), leading to a record 3.6 million Latinx/a/o students enrolled in college, up 180% from the 1.3 million enrolled in 1999 (Krogstad, 2016). Latinx/a/o college student enrollment has significantly outpaced that of any other racial/ethnic group. But while enrollment in postsecondary education has increased substantially, the same cannot be said about degree completion. As of 2014, among Latinxs/as/os ages 25–29, only 15% have a bachelor's degree or higher (Krogstad, 2016). This enrollment–completion gap is particularly troublesome given that Latinx/a/o people comprise the second largest racial/ethnic group in the United States and are expected to represent 31% of the total population by 2060 (Santiago et al., 2015). Bachelor's degree completion rates for Latinx/a/o students still lag, with only 42% of Latinxs/as/os completing their bachelor's degree in 6 years (Carnevale & Fasules, 2017). Because Latinx/a/o communities value education and recognize it as a tool for social mobility, scholars have suggested inequitable access and completion for Latinx/a/o students can be attributed to institutional issues around accessibility and low retention, not Latinx/a/o community values (Acevedo-Gil, 2017). Often, the barriers Latinx/a/o students face in higher education result

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from institutions' inability to center and acknowledge the experiences of Latinx/a/o students

while continuing to uphold whiteness[1] and perpetuate oppressive practices that hinder

Latinx/a/o student achievement (A. González, 2016). This is especially true at selective

Historically White Institutions (HWIs).[2]

Whiteness at HWIs and the Negative Effects on Latinx/a/o Students

Selective HWIs can no longer continue centering whiteness and must dismantle the

Eurocentric foundation upon which they were created to better serve the growing numbers of

Latinx/a/o students. More specifically, HWIs need to examine Latinx/a/o student experiences

to better understand why they are disproportionately failing to enroll and graduate the second

largest racial/ethnic group in the United States (Santiago et al., 2015). Given that HWIs

represent a large portion of 4-year higher education institutions, it is important that these

institutions understand the needs of Latinx/a/o students and how to best support their success.

Additionally, HWIs need to consider how they fail even the relatively small number of

Latinx/a/o students who do graduate from their institutions by not creating more inclusive

and culturally relevant environments for Latinx/a/o students in their communities. While

completion rates serve as an indicator of academic success, it is important to note that

completion rates do not always equate to positive and successful college experiences for

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[1] I have chosen not to capitalize *white* in this dissertation as a form of counter resistance to the power structures that continue to uphold whiteness and white privilege. Historically, the capitalizing of the letter W in white/whiteness has been used by white supremacists to uphold whiteness as separate and superior. Additionally, white references skin tone, while Black or Brown describes a common set of experiences and culture.

[2] According to Bonilla-Silva and Peoples (2022), historically white colleges and universities are those "with a history, demography, curriculum, climate, and a set of symbols and traditions that embody and reproduce whiteness and white supremacy" (p. 1491). For the purposes of this study, I used the term *Historically White Institutions* to move beyond demographic make-up to consider how whiteness permeates the whole institution, including its history, demographics, curriculum, campus climate, symbols, traditions, and values.

Latinx/a/o students (K. González, 2002; Hall, 2017; Jones et al., 2002). The presence of whiteness in higher education often leads to negative college experiences for Latinx/a/o students. Whiteness systemically manifests itself throughout institutional policies, practices, pedagogy, and interpersonal interactions inside and outside the classroom that negatively impact Latinx/a/o students.

Latinx/a/o students experience racism and discrimination as a result of policies and practices centered on whiteness that do not take into consideration the needs and cultural knowledge they bring to HWIs. Whiteness is defined as a normative social structure in society that marginalizes Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)[3] and privileges white people (Cabrera et al., 2016). Whiteness frames the racial climate and culture of higher education institutions and allows white people to assert superiority over BIPOC individuals (Gusa, 2010). According to Gusa (2010), whiteness is not based on complexion but instead on "socially informed ontological and epistemological orientations" (p. 468). In higher education, an example of whiteness can be seen in the underrepresentation of Faculty and Students of Color, which often leads to the tokenization of these individuals. While Latinx/a/o communities represent the second largest Community of Color, whiteness in higher education does not center their experiences, leading to hiring and admissions processes that value the experiences of white applicants over those of Latinxs/as/os. These practices only uphold the status quo, continuing to create space for white experiences. It is important to understand that racism and whiteness are historically embedded in the creation

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[3] BIPOC refers to non-white individuals, including Black, Indigenous, Latinx/a/o, and Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. I utilize *BIPOC*, *racially minoritized*, and *Students of Color* interchangeably to refer to individuals from racially and ethnically minoritized backgrounds.

and foundation of HWIs, as well as the structures and policies that guide the daily practices of college life (A. González, 2016; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

The prevalence of whiteness at HWIs has created significant barriers for Latinx/a/o students. Scholars have shown that campus climates at HWIs negatively impact the experiences of Latinx/a/o students (Hall, 2017; Jones et al., 2002; Nelson Laird et al., 2007). Prevalent campus norms, values, and practices are designed to serve white students and, as a result, create unfriendly and hostile environments for Latinx/a/o students (Cerezo & Chang, 2013; Chang, 2002). These norms, values, and practices often include the erasure of Latinx/a/o perspectives in the curriculum and the lack of Latinx/a/o representation among students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Research has suggested that the representation of Latinx/a/o people and their experiences can positively influence the academic success of Latinx/a/o students (K. González, 2002; Robertson et al., 2016; Villalpando, 2004); thus, their erasure at HWIs can be detrimental. Whiteness also creates hostile environments in which Latinx/a/o students experience microaggressions and other forms of racism in and outside the classroom (K. González, 2002; Lewis et al., 2000; Robertson et al., 2016), posing additional challenges and barriers that can impact their academic success.

Whiteness rears itself in students' interpersonal relationships on campus as well as in what is taught in the classroom and how it is taught. Whiteness at HWIs perpetuates the oppression of Latinx/a/o students through racism and discrimination at an interpersonal level. As a result of their differences, Latinx/a/o students experience pressures to acculturate, feelings of isolation and alienation, and microaggressions, which cause added stress and hinder their ability to achieve (Hall, 2017; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Jones et al., 2002; McCoy, 2014; Robertson et al., 2016). Various studies have demonstrated that Latinx/a/o

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students feel unwelcome immediately upon arriving on campus, which often leads to experiences of isolation and alienation throughout their time in college (Hall, 2017; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Jones et al., 2002; McCoy, 2014; Robertson et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009). Further, Latinx/a/o students often feel pressure to assimilate at HWIs when confronted by discriminatory behaviors from peers, faculty, and staff who may target their identity, including their language (Lewis et al., 2000). For example, in response to overt attacks on their language and culture, Latinx/a/o students are forced to choose between being perceived as a foreigner or giving up a part of their identity and assimilating into white cultural norms. Studies have also shown that Latinx/a/o students experience microaggressions and other forms of discrimination from their peers, faculty, and staff (K. González, 2002; Hall, 2017; Harwood et al., 2012; McCoy, 2014; Robertson et al., 2016). McCabe (2009) defined *microaggressions* as "brief subtle and stunning encounters that are a frequent occurrence in the lives of subordinated groups and that impact views of the self" (p. 2). Though often invisible, microaggressions can significantly and powerfully impact the recipient's psyche (McCabe, 2009).

Research on student experiences at HWIs has demonstrated how the manifestation of whiteness leads to other problematic practices, including deficit-based pedagogies and curricula, which result in a lack of representation of Latinx/a/o voices, culture, and experiences (Delgado Bernal, 2002;, A. González, 2016; K. González, 2002; Robertson et al., 2016). Whiteness contributes to deficit-based thinking by privileging white, middle-upper-class experiences, resulting in a narrative that anything different is not of value. Deficit-based thinking frames the problem of Latinx/a/o student success and failure at HWIs at the individual level—that is, the student as a problem to fix—instead of the institutional or

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systemic level. Deficit-based thinking erases the assets or strengths that individuals and communities have to offer. Latinx/a/o students are often viewed as deficient or disadvantaged because of their minoritized identity (Villalpando, 2004), which contributes to their experiences of oppression at HWIs (Delgado Bernal, 2002; K. González, 2002; Lewis et al., 2000; Robertson et al., 2016; Villalpando, 2004).

By failing to acknowledge Latinx/a/o experiences and knowledge as assets, white people at HWIs diminish the resources Latinx/a/o students bring to their college communities. An example of an often diminished asset is Latinxs/as/os students' ability to speak and communicate in two languages. Often seen as a deficit because whiteness centralizes English as a primary language, Latinxs/as/os students' ability to process and communicate information in Spanish and English is not valued. Administrators and faculty at HWIs often correlate Latinx/a/o student underachievement with a perceived lack of knowledge and limited social and cultural capital when, in reality, they fail to see, honor, and value the knowledge and capital Latinx/a/o students bring to the institution (K. González, 2002; Villalpando, 2004).

Whiteness continues to reinforce white knowledge, experiences, and epistemologies. As a result of how whiteness at HWIs manifests itself in institutional policies, practices, campus norms and values, and interpersonal dynamics, Latinx/a/o students continue to be harmed by these institutions, despite their desire for education. Consequently, Latinx/a/o students are seen through a lens that does not account for and value their knowledge, experiences, and epistemologies, thus creating a narrative that they are deficient or disadvantaged. This often forces Latinx/a/o students to either assimilate into white cultural norms to thrive or become subject to hostile, discriminatory actions and behaviors because of

their differences. However, some Latinx/a/o students who have chosen not to assimilate have found ways to thrive in higher education, despite the barriers created by whiteness.

Latinx/a/o Student Thriving in Higher Education

Although research has shown that whiteness at HWIs means that Latinx/a/o students face racialized barriers that shape their ability to navigate their college experience, a small body of work has highlighted how Latinx/a/o students have thrived in these institutions (Morgan Consoli et al., 2014; Morgan Consoli, et al., 2015; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). Thriving involves students' ability to be fully engaged intellectually, socially, and emotionally (Paredes-Collins, 2012) and to face adversity, overcome it, and be functionally better off than they were when confronted by the challenge (O'Leary, 1998). But for Latinx/a/o students at HWIs, overcoming experiences of adversity and being able to thrive are not the same as for white students. Latinx/a/o students often must overcome experiences of adversity that are deeply rooted in racism and whiteness. Latinx/a/o students' ability to thrive often involves overcoming other layers of barriers that white students do not experience. For example, while all college students might experience moments of isolation when they enter college, Latinx/a/o students often experience isolation not only because of the transition to college but also because they are often underrepresented at HWIs. This isolation is also a result of being in spaces with peers, staff, and faculty who do not share similar ethnic backgrounds or cultural values.

Studies on Latinx/a/o student thriving in higher education have found various factors that support their success, including familial/social support, cultural values, faith/spirituality, and aspiration/goals, among others (Morgan Consoli et al., 2014; Morgan Consoli et al., 2015; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). While promising, more work is needed to fully understand what

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it means for Latinx/o/a students to thrive at selective HWIs and what thriving looks like. The literature has begun to highlight how other individuals, including family and institutional players, contribute to or hinder students' ability to thrive, but it has only scratched the surface of exploring how the various types of capital Latinx/a/o students bring to institutions support their ability to thrive. My study explored further how identity-based social capital, including native language, familial support, and ability to overcome inequities, can lead to Latinx/a/o student thriving. Additionally, my study sought to understand how intersecting identities, such as race, gender identity, and being a first-generation college student, impact thriving. My study also aimed to understand how Latinx/a/o students might lean on these intersecting identities to help them thrive. Lastly, my study sought to understand what institutional and community factors contribute to Latinx/a/o student thriving.

Research Questions

This study moved the focus beyond the racialized barriers Latinx/a/o students face at selective HWIs and adds to the growing body of literature that uses asset-based frameworks to understand how Latinx/a/o students thrive in higher education. Exploring how Latinx/a/o students successfully navigate selective HWIs might help practitioners recognize the underlying white norms, values, and logic that negatively impact students' experiences, flip the deficit narrative, and help them understand what institutional changes need to be made to support Latinx/a/o students in asset-based and culturally affirming ways. To explore Latinx/a/o student thriving, I aimed to answer the following primary question: How do Latinx/a/o college students experience thriving at selective HWIs?

To address this main question, I investigated four sub-questions (described in the following paragraphs) that were informed by three Latinx-focused, asset-based theories—

LatCrit (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Fernández, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Villalpando, 2003, 2004), community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), and validation theory (Rendón, 1994)—and by a review of the literature on barriers and thriving. I describe this scholarship and each theory in more detail in Chapter 2. Through the exploration of these questions, the study aimed to contribute to the growing asset-based literature on Latinx/a/o students that highlights the knowledge, values, and experiences Latinx/a/o students bring to higher education and deconstructs the deficit-based narrative often created by majoritarian ideologies and practices at selective HWIs.

Here, I describe briefly the connection between prior literature and my sub-questions. LatCrit maintains that racism is endemic, including in higher education institutions, and, as a result, Latinx/a/o students experience barriers that hinder their success (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This aligns with the research I described earlier about the barriers Latinx/a/o students face in HWIs. Thus, my first and second sub-questions focused on students overcoming racialized barriers as a condition of their thriving:

1. What barriers have Latinx/a/o students faced during their undergraduate experience at selective HWIs?

2. What strategies and community cultural wealth do Latinx/a/o students utilize to overcome barriers and support their ability to thrive at selective HWIs?

Question 2 was further informed by community cultural wealth (CCW), which was developed by Yosso (2005) and which used critical race theory to expand the understanding of social capital within Latinx/a/o communities. Yosso identified six forms of capital that students often arrive to college already possessing and that serve as a counternarrative to the deficit-based belief that Latinx/a/o students often lack social capital. Question 2 helped me

examine what, if any, types of community cultural wealth the students in this study leaned on when overcoming challenges and if any of the strategies they utilized to thrive stemmed from their Latinx/a/o identity-based social capital.

Question 3 was informed by CCW and Rendón's (1994) validation theory, which recognizes that institutional and community agents help Latinx/a/o students thrive. Rendón argued that internal agents can play an active role in validating Latinx/a/o knowledge and experiences in ways that create supportive environments for students both inside and outside the classroom. Both CCW and validation theory posit that agents can impact Latinx/a/o student experiences. Thus, my third question focused on the agents who might have contributed to the study co-creators'[4] ability to thrive:

3. What role do Latinx/a/o students perceive internal agents (college practitioners, peers) and external agents (family, friends, home community) playing in their ability to thrive?

The final sub-question accounted for the fact that Latinx/a/o student experiences are not monolithic, partly because other intersecting identities impact their experiences. LatCrit reminded me that Latinx/a/o communities often experience discrimination not solely based on race, but also toward other identities they hold. It was important to understand how these other identities can be sources of empowerment for students. Thus, Question 4 focused on the role intersecting identities might play in students' ability to thrive:

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[4] I choose to use the term *co-creator* instead of student participant because I believe that the students equally contributing to the study by sharing their experiences. In openly sharing their stories, they helped frame this study, and as a result, they are not mere participants; instead, they are co-creators whose knowledge, values, and experiences made a significant contribution to this study. A further explanation of why I use co-creator can be found in Chapter 3.

4. What, if any, dimensions of their Latinx/a/o identity and other identities have helped Latinx/a/o students thrive?

It was important to explore these research questions for a number of reasons. First, Latinx/a/o students represent a growing population of college-going students in the United States, especially in the region where I live and work. According to the Department of Higher Education (2019), in the state of Massachusetts, it is projected that by 2032, 1 in 4 high school graduates will be Latinx/a/o. As the number of Latinx/a/o students attending college increases, it is imperative for higher education institutions to understand the factors that help Latinx/a/o students thrive so that they not only graduate but also have positive and affirming experiences at the institutions they attend. From an equity lens, these questions were also important because they elevated the voices and experiences of Latinx/a/o college students and reframed their experiences through an asset-based lens. The voices of Latinx/a/o students are often silenced, especially at selective HWIs where they still represent a small percentage of the student population. This study has important implications for institutions, practitioners, and future research.

Significance of the Study

As the number of Latinx/a/o students attending higher education continues to grow, it becomes imperative to learn about the knowledge and experiences that Latinx/a/o students bring to institutions and how educators can support their needs. A study that enhances understanding around the factors that are important to Latinx/a/o students' ability to thrive can have a significant impact on various constituents within higher education. Beginning with Latinx/a/o students, this study may help lift and empower their voices. The voices of Latinx/a/o students are already present at selective HWIs, but further research is needed to

elevate their voices at these institutions so they can no longer be ignored. Additionally, this study can inform higher education practitioners, including faculty, staff, and administrators, by highlighting the importance of addressing racialized barriers that uphold white supremacy at HWIs and hinder Latinx/a/o student success. As the number of Latinx/a/o students increases at HWIs, this work is important for practitioners to incorporate in and outside the classroom.

This study informs not only practitioners working on the front lines with students but also administrators as they reevaluate practices and policies created to serve white students and develop new policies and practices that can support Latinx/a/o student success. Findings from the study can help administrators create more open and inclusive campuses grounded in Latinx/a/o values and community cultural wealth. To accomplish this, practitioners must first understand how Latinx/a/o students thrive and what selective HWIs can do better to validate, empower, and further support Latinx/a/o students at their institutions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The literature on Latinx/a/o students in higher education has shown that they face

significant barriers that challenge their success. These barriers include (a)

underrepresentation of Latinx/a/o knowledge and experiences at HWIs; (b) the lack of

Faculty of Color in higher education; (c) discriminatory campus climates; and (d) the

isolation that Latinx/a/o students experience on campus as a result of whiteness, which

continues to be upheld as the majoritarian experience at HWIs. HWIs continue to center

white knowledge and experiences, creating a deficit-based narrative for Latinx/a/o students

on campus. However, recent literature has examined how, despite these barriers, Latinx/a/o

students thrive in higher education. Additionally, this literature has examined how the

application of asset-based theories and frameworks, including Latino critical race theory

(LatCrit), validation theory, and community cultural wealth, are challenging how HWIs look

at the experiences of Latinx/a/o students and pushing for a shift away from centering

whiteness and deficit-based narratives.

Barriers Challenging Latinx/a/o Students at HWIs

Whiteness at HWIs creates barriers for Latinx/a/o students both on an institutional

and interpersonal level. Founded to educate white men and uphold the superiority of white

people, HWIs continue to uphold whiteness as the norm and, as a result, contribute to the

oppression and erasure of Latinx/a/o students' identities and experiences (Wilder, 2013).

This section discusses three areas that current scholarship has indicated are problematic and

hinder the success of Latinx/a/o students: (a) how whiteness at HWIs creates a deficit-based

narrative for Latinx/a/o students; (b) how the voices and experiences of Latinx/a/o people are

missing or not valued at HWIs, which furthers the centrality of white ideology; (c) how the

underrepresentation of Latinx/a/o faculty and students at HWIs also hinders Latinx/a/o

student success at HWIs; (d) how discriminatory campus climates disrupt Latinx/a/o

students' state of being; and (e) how isolation/alienation makes it difficult for Latinx/a/o

students to build community and a find a sense of belonging at HWIs. It is imperative to

understand that these barriers exist as they impact students' ability to thrive.

Problematizing Whiteness and How It Creates a Deficit Narrative for Latinx/a/o

Students

Institutional history, traditions, curriculum, and practices at HWIs are grounded in

white cultural ideology, which privileges and elevates whiteness by normalizing the

experiences of white, middle-upper-class men as the standard (Brunsma, 2012; Cabrera et al.,

2016, Gusa, 2010). This is often reflected in the student body, faculty and staff, institutional

symbols, such as building names, and the curriculum at HWIs, which excludes and

marginalizes any form of knowledge from BIPOC communities (Brunsma, 2012; K.

González, 2002; Gusa, 2010). Centered on whiteness, HWIs do not have to be explicitly

racist to create unwelcoming and hostile campus cultures. According to Gusa (2010),

"Unexamined historically situated White cultural ideology embedded in the language,

cultural practices, traditions, and perceptions of knowledge allow these institutions to remain

racialized" (p. 465). As a result, these institutions create alienating spaces for Latinxs/as/os in

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which white ideological practices and policies are sustained, and anything different is seen as problematic and devalued.

The majoritarian narrative is grounded in white Eurocentric norms. BIPOC students who do not manifest these norms in their behavior, academic work, and social practices are labeled "at-risk" or "disadvantaged," thereby feeding deficit-based narratives (Gusa, 2010). Anything different from this white standard is seen as a deficit (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Gusa, 2010; Yosso et al., 2009). Further, although Latinx/a/o students are holders and creators of knowledge, they are made to feel that "their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages are devalued, misinterpreted, or omitted within formal educational settings" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 106). As a consequence of deficit framing, BIPOC students can only become "normal" by feeding into the dominant culture and adopting white ways of being (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Gusa, 2010; Lewis et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009).

Deficit-based narratives at HWIs contribute to how faculty and students view Latinx/a/o people's experiences, which often leads to self-doubt for Latinx/a/o students (Cavazos et al., 2010; Robertson et al., 2016; Zell, 2010). In their qualitative study examining the challenges faced by 11 Latinx/a/o students, Cavazos et al. (2010) found that students often experienced low academic ability expectations from faculty members. One student in the study who sought out her professor for tutoring when she was struggling with her calculus course was told, "You will never get it because not only are you female, but you're Latina" (p. 310). Similarly, a student in Robertson et al.'s (2016) qualitative study of 12 students shared his experiences with self-doubt when a faculty member and classmates questioned his presence in the college accounting program. In the study, the student shared

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that "his classmates and professor doubted his ability to successfully matriculate through the institution's academically rigorous accounting program" (p. 726).

Low expectations from faculty and other students are also exacerbated by the perception that Latinx/a/o students are admitted because of affirmative action policies, which results in Latinx/a/o students also being seen as less qualified, discrediting their abilities and accomplishments (Lewis et al., 2000; Lopez, 2005). For example, in a qualitative study examining data from transcripts and small structured discussions with BIPOC students, including Latinx/a/o students, at a large research HWI, Lewis et al. (2000) found that many BIPOC students felt that "Whites often targeted them as 'affirmative action attendees' or tokens" (p. 77). Consequently, BIPOC students were often stereotyped by whites who assumed to know something about the academic abilities or inclinations of BIPOC students based on racial affiliation. These perceptions and applications of stereotypes based on deficit thinking often created afflictions among the BIPOC students participating in the study, which led to personal struggles about their identity and self-doubt about their abilities. It also pushed them to choose whether they wanted to conform to the notions held by their white peers. In another study, Lopez (2005) utilized a quantitative longitudinal approach and found similar results related to the experiences of Latinx/a/o first-year students at a highly selective private HWI. Lopez found that minoritized students were frequently perceived to have been admitted due to affirmative action, and, in turn, professors and students perceived them as less qualified. Though these Latinx/a/o high-achieving students were admitted because of their academic excellence in the context of highly selective HWIs, they were perceived to have been admitted because of their racial/ethnic identity, discrediting their hard work and accomplishments. Whiteness at HWIs allows space for these perceptions by white faculty

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and students by reinforcing the belief that if an individual is not white, they are only admitted because of their minoritized identity and did not have the academic abilities to attend that institution. These two studies affirm that whiteness, which manifests as deficit thinking about Latinx/a/o students, can lead to self-doubt and psychological strain, as well as create negative academic environments for students.

If HWIs continue to uphold whiteness that creates a deficit-based narrative about Latinx/a/o students, these students will continue to experience oppression on campus because the prevalence of whiteness leaves no space for Latinx/a/o students' lived experiences, knowledge, and resources to be seen as assets in the campus communities of which they are a part. This is often most prevalent in the ways Latinx/a/o experiences and knowledge are missing in the curriculum at HWIs.

Missing Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Epistemology

In addition to manifesting through deficit-based thinking at HWIs, whiteness leaves no space for Latinx/a/o knowledge, experiences, and ways of knowing. The literature has demonstrated that Latinx/a/o knowledge and experiences are often missing from the curriculum at HWIs, an erasure that silences Latinx/a/o voices and perpetuates whiteness by upholding white people as the primary creators of knowledge (K. González, 2002). This lack of representation in the pedagogy, ontology, and epistemology prevents Latinx/a/o students from finding cultural nourishment in the form of knowledge constructed by Latinx/a/o faculty and courses (K. González, 2002). In a space where the curriculum could be culturally and racially reaffirming, for many Latinx/a/o students, the lack of representation is instead culturally and racially denigrating (Lewis et al., 2000; Robertson et al., 2016). Robertson et al. (2016) found that the omission of literature reflecting Latinx/a/o knowledge and

accomplishments transmits a message to Latinx/a/o students that their history, knowledge, and experiences are not valued. In their study examining the experiences of 13 Latinx/a/o students at an HWI, the lack of Latinx/a/o courses or representation of Latinx/a/o knowledge within their majors contributed to psychological stressors that negatively impacted the students' adjustment, matriculation, and sense of belonging.

Current pedagogy and epistemology centered on whiteness at HWIs fails to teach students about the contributions of diverse cultural groups and fails to promote understanding of racial and cultural diversity (Lewis et al., 2000). As a result, white people fail to acknowledge Latinx/a/o lived experiences, knowledge, and resources as assets to the campus community. For example, K. González (2002) found that students in his study were marginalized by the lack of courses that centered Chicano experiences in the classroom. Additionally, the study found that the overrepresentation of white culture in the physical campus, including in buildings, sculptures, and murals, further devalued and marginalized the Chicano student experience on campus, rendering Chicano culture as not relevant enough to take up physical and intellectual space. Whiteness does not allow space for physical, epistemological, and ontological Latinx/a/o representation at HWIs, further hindering the students they claim to serve. Latinx/a/o-centered courses can help create a more welcoming environment for Latinx/a/o students and can contribute to a sense of cultural validation through academics (Cerezo & Chang, 2013; K. González, 2002; Villalpando, 2004). K. González (2002) found that these courses help nourish a need that Latinx/a/o students often have due to the scarcity of Latinx/a/o knowledge in the curriculum and pedagogical approaches. However, finding a sense of connection within the curricular, pedagogical, and epistemological world on campus is not always enough. Who teaches these courses can also

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have a significant impact on Latinx/a/o student persistence at HWIs since faculty,

specifically Faculty of Color, serve a critical role in the educational experiences of Latinx/a/o

students.

Underrepresentation of Latinx/a/o Faculty

Another form of evidence of how HWIs continue to uphold whiteness is seen in the

underrepresentation of Latinx/a/o faculty at HWIs. The underrepresentation of Latinx/a/o

faculty is detrimental for Latinx/a/o students who center family and community and value

Latinx/a/o faculty as sources of instrumental support (K. González, 2002; Yosso, 2005;

Zalaquette & Lopez, 2006). While other Latinx/a/o community members like staff, students,

and faculty could provide a sense of belonging and support at HWIs, their

underrepresentation makes it difficult for Latinx/a/o students to build any familial capital on

campus. Specifically, studies have found that faculty can play a critical role in Latinx/a/o

student success (Gonzales et al., 2015; Hernandez, 2000; Yosso et al., 2009). Faculty support

can be particularly critical for Latinx/a/o student academic and institutional adjustment

(Schneider & Ward, 2003), as Latinx/a/o students have a more positive perception of the

university environment when mentoring relationships exist with faculty. One study showed

that students perceive mentors with the same ethnic background as significantly more

supportive in furthering their personal and career development (Santos & Reigadas, 2002). In

a survey study of 32 Latinx/a/o students participating in a university mentoring program,

Santos and Reigadas (2002) found that having a mentor with the same ethnic background

was important to Latinx/a/o mentees, suggesting that the shared values, expectations, and

background enhance students' perceptions of the support and benefits of a mentoring

relationship.

Yet, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), as of fall 2020, Latinx/a/o faculty only represented 6% of faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions. The lack of hiring of Latinx/a/o faculty in higher education prevents Latinx/a/o students from building mentoring relationships with faculty who share their lived experiences and cultural beliefs, which is linked to Latinx/a/o persistence in higher education (K. González, 2002; Robertson et al., 2016; Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Yosso et al., 2009). Yosso et al. (2009) considered this lack of representation as a form of institutional microinvalidation, diminishing Latinx/a/o undergraduates within the institution's community. As a subset of microaggressions, institutional microinvalidations are "racially marginalizing actions and inertia of the university evidenced in structures, practices, and discourses that endorse a campus racial climate hostile to People of Color" (p. 673). The failure to recruit and retain more Faculty of Color leaves Latinx/a/o students feeling disregarded and insignificant and makes it difficult for Latinx/a/o students to build the community necessary for Latinx/a/o student retention at HWIs (Yosso et al., 2009). In their study, Robertson et al. (2016) noted that the underrepresentation of Faculty of Color at HWIs sends the message to Latinx/a/o students that the institution does not value the experiences Latinx/a/o faculty would bring to the role. While the underrepresentation of Faculty of Color who could serve as social support systems for Latinx/a/o students continues to be a problem, the discriminatory campus environments at selective HWIs are another barrier students have to navigate.

Discriminatory Campus Climates

While whiteness manifests itself in deficit-based thinking and the underrepresentation of Latinx/a/o people at HWIs, one of the most detrimental impacts on Latinx/a/o students is

the racism and discrimination they experience because they are different. By upholding white ideologies and ways of being, HWIs contribute to how racism and discrimination are perpetuated interpersonally between students and their peers, faculty, staff, and administrators. Current scholarship has indicated that Latinx/a/o students experience racism and discrimination in the form of microaggressions from peers and campus members and from isolation and alienation by their peers and faculty (K. González, 2002; Hall, 2017; Jones et al., 2002; Lewis et al., 2000; Lopez, 2005; Oseguera et al., 2009; Pérez, 2014, 2017; Robertson et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009). These experiences may have a detrimental impact on Latinx/a/o student success at HWIs, disrupting their state of being and causing hypervigilant awareness and stress associated with being labeled the racial "other" (Yosso et al., 2009). In their study of campus racial climate, Yosso et al. (2009) found that Latinx/a/o students experienced three types of racial microaggressions: interpersonal microaggressions, racial jokes, and institutional microaggressions. As a result, Latinx/a/o students doubted their academic merits and capabilities, felt their ethnic identity oppressed and cultural knowledge dismissed, and felt like they were disrupting the "natural state of being on campus" (p. 667).

Other studies have documented more overt forms of discrimination (K. González, 2002; Lewis et al., 2000; Robertson et al., 2016). While there is nothing prohibiting Latinx/a/o students from speaking Spanish, students who do are made to feel like foreigners or are aggregated to represent one Latinx/a/o ethnic group. K. González (2002) found that students who spoke Spanish received a message from their peers through social interactions "that Spanish was a language not of the campus culture but rather was something foreign and strange" (p. 204). These experiences caused Latinx/a/o students to feel like foreigners. Robertson et al. (2016) found that students who spoke Spanish were automatically believed

to be Mexican. In assuming Latinx/a/o ethnic identity is the same because of a shared language, the perpetrators failed to recognize the ethnic diversity of being Latinx/a/o in the United States.

Latinx/a/o students often experience racism and discrimination based on other identities like gender, socioeconomic status, race, and immigration status (Pérez, 2017; Pyne & Means, 2013). In an in-depth case study of a woman Latina student during her first year at an HWI, Pyne and Means (2013) found that the Latinx/a/o student's nationality and immigration stories were invisible. When community members inquire, "Where are you from?" this question often refers to a city and state in the United States. Pyne and Means (2013) called this a form of colorism that silences the diverse perspective of Latinx/a/o students. In addition, they found that the student in their study often sought to mask her socioeconomic identity to avoid the stigma and discrimination that comes from a low-income background while working to maintain a sense of belonging and acceptance. Similarly, Pérez and Sáenz (2017) found that Latinx/a/o students at two HWIs experienced gender-based microaggressions. In navigating the queer and Latinx/a/o communities, one student spoke about having to debunk negative stereotypes about both communities and prove himself as one of the few openly queer Latinx/a/o men on campus. Expending energy to address microaggressions results in less focus on their academic and social success at HWIs. Whiteness at HWIs continues to contribute to the erasure and invisibility of not only Latinx/a/o students' racial/ethnic identity but also other intersecting identities that cannot be compartmentalized since these identities often play a significant role in how Latinx/a/o students navigate and see themselves in the world.

Isolation and Alienation

The literature has shown that discriminatory campus climates make Latinx/a/o students feel unwelcomed and "othered" by their peers, leading to feelings of isolation and alienation (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hernandez, 2002; Jones et al., 2002; Lewis et al., 2000; Lopez, 2006; Pérez, 2014, Pérez & Sáenz, 2017; Robertson et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009). While Latinx/a/o students value community and family, whiteness at HWIs strips them of the opportunity to build family-like relationships when they are pushed to the margins by white faculty and peers. For example, Hernandez (2002) found that not having access to defining aspects of their cultural identity, such as Latinx food, impacted Latinx/a/o students' experience of "not fitting in." For other students, the lack of representation created additional expectations and pressures around getting involved on campus. In a study of the experiences of BIPOC students at HWIs, including 11 Chicano/Latinx/a/o students, Jones et al. (2002) found that BIPOC students "expressed a responsibility and a sense of obligation to represent and voice themselves to make a difference in the community" (p. 29). This sense of obligation can contribute to the tokenization of Latinx/a/o students who feel the pressure of having to show up for their community even while being isolated by their peers and the institution.

Although family is important to Latinx/a/o students, at HWIs, they often have a hard time building familial types of relationships and finding community (K. González, 2002; Hernandez, 2002, Pérez, 2014, Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). For example, Burciaga and Erbstein (2012) found that, for most participants in their study, family ties promoted persistence. To avoid experiencing isolation and alienation, Latinx/a/o students look to build family-like

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relationships, or familismo, to sustain their academic and social motivation. According to Lopez (2006),

>*familismo* represents the beliefs and attitudes that operate within a family system. Intertwined with *familismo* are the values of respect (*respecto*) and trust (*confianza*). Family provides reciprocity or mutual support and is viewed as one of the foundational structures of the culture. (p. 211)

These familial connections can be with peers, faculty, and staff on campus that resemble relationships with siblings or godparents (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007).

While most studies have shown that Latinx/a/o students look to build a sense of family on campus, Lewis et al. (2000) found that some students further distance themselves from white peers. This is often a response to the exclusion Latinx/a/o students experience, adding to the sense of isolation at institutions where they are already underrepresented. The alienation and isolation students often feel can lead to pressures to assimilate into the dominant culture to experience belonging and a sense of acceptance. Ultimately, the current literature reminds us that whiteness does not center Latinx/a/o ways of being. While Latinx/a/o students value family and community, whiteness at HWIs does not allow Latinx/a/o students to build those types of relationships that would help sustain them during their time in college, leading to feelings of isolation. With so little representation of Latinx/a/o people at HWIs, Latinx/a/o students are not able to build family-like relationships with others who hold similar values and are even less likely to find it with the white students, faculty, and staff who represent the majority of the campus population.

Summary of the Literature on Barriers and Factors That Impact Latinx/a/o Student Thriving

Scholars have shown that HWIs continue to fail Latinx/a/o students through various overt forms of discrimination and oppressive practices. By upholding and centering whiteness as the primary form of knowledge and experiences, HWIs fail to validate Latinx/a/o student knowledge and experiences and contribute to the deficit-based narrative that white community members hold about the Latinx/a/o community (Brunsma, 2012; Cabrera et al., 2016; Cavazos et al., 2010; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Gusa, 2010; Lewis et al., 2000; Robertson et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009; Zell, 2010). The lack of Latinx-centered courses and courses highlighting Latinx/a/o scholars contributes to this deficit-based narrative by stripping Latinx/a/o students of opportunities to learn about their history and accomplishments and see themselves reflected in what they are learning (K. González 2002; Lewis et al., 2000; Robertson et al., 2016). This forces Latinx/a/o students to believe that their knowledge and experiences are not important. Without enough Latinx/a/o faculty representation, Latinx/a/o students have limited opportunities to learn from and be mentored by people who share similar backgrounds and values and who could serve as a form of family for Latinx/a/o students on campus (Gonzales et al., 2015; Hernandez, 2000; Robertson et al., 2016; Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Schneider & Ward, 2003; Yosso et al., 2009). The added layers of dealing with racism and discrimination often lead to feelings of alienation and isolation for Latinx/a/o students. The microaggressions they experience only further perpetuate this feeling and add pressures and stressors that white peers rarely—if ever—have to deal with. Table 1 offers a summary of the barriers Latinx/a/o students experience at HWIs.

Table 1

Barriers and Factors That Impact Latinx/a/o Student Thriving

Barriers That Latinx/a/o Students Experience	Factors That Shape Latinx/a/o Student Thriving
Underrepresentation of Latinx/a/o Faculty and Peers: The underrepresentation of Latinxs/as/os at HWIs makes it difficult for Latinx/a/o students to connect with community members who share their background, values, and experiences. This negatively impacts their representation in the classroom as well as opportunities to build mentorship relationships with campus members from similar backgrounds.	*Family and Community Support:* Social support from family and community members have helped Latinx/a/o students overcome adversity throughout their college experiences. Additionally, some students thrive when they can offer support/give back to others with similar backgrounds.
Isolation/Alienation: Latinx/a/o students value family and close-knit relationships, which are often difficult to establish at HWIs where Latinxs/as/os are underrepresented. As a result, Latinx/a/o students often experience isolation and alienation at HWIs.	*Spirituality:* Latinx/a/o students will often lean on their faith and spirituality to help them overcome challenges and thrive while in college.
Whiteness/Deficit-Based Views: The narrative that is often upheld and perpetuated by whiteness at HWIs devalues Latinx/a/o student knowledge, values, and experiences. Whiteness creates no space for Latinx/a/o experiences, often perpetuating a belief that white is superior and Latinx/a/o is inferior.	*Cultural Pride:* Latinx/a/o students utilize cultural pride often stemming from connections to other Latinxs/as/os to help them thrive.
Missing from the Curriculum: HWIs center whiteness throughout all areas of campus, including in the classroom. As a result, Latinx/a/o voices, knowledge, and experiences are not found in the curriculum at HWIs.	*Aspirations/Goals:* Often, the hopes and goals that Latinx/a/o students establish for themselves and for their families help them thrive in college.

Though limited, alongside the literature on existing challenges and barriers, newer scholarship on Latinx/a/o students' ability to thrive in higher education might help higher education practitioners better support Latinx/a/o students. I review this scholarship in the next section.

Thriving in Higher Education

A major problem with the literature on Latinx/a/o students at selective HWIs is the overwhelming focus on the disadvantages they are believed to bring to the institutions, the racism they face, and how institutions are currently not serving Latinx/a/o students. This overabundance of literature centered on Latinx/a/o students as "at risk" has resulted in a lack of research and literature mapping the totality of their experience and focusing on their success and ability to thrive. The concept of thriving extends beyond survival in college and includes factors that contribute to academic success and retention. Thriving students are fully engaged intellectually, socially, and emotionally, and they experience a sense of community and psychological well-being, all of which contribute to overall student success (Paredes-Collins, 2012). O'Leary and Ickovics (1995) used the term *thriving* to refer to a person who experiences a physical or psychological downturn in response to adversity but is able to not only return to their previous level of functioning but actually surpass it. According to O'Leary (1998), "Thriving represents the ability to go beyond the original level of psychosocial functioning, to grow vigorously, to flourish. Through the process of confronting and coping with challenges, a transformation occurs" (pp. 429–430). While some people who face stressors experience a loss of functioning or return to their original baseline, others are able to adapt and grow psychologically despite the trauma experienced (O'Leary, 1998).

It is important to clarify the difference between the concepts of resilience and thriving, as resilience does not move a person beyond their original state of being before the traumatic experience, while thriving does. In simple terms, Carver (1998) suggested that resilience denotes a return to a prior condition, while thriving refers to being better off afterward. Thriving through a stressful event can be associated with benefits or gains,

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including the development of new skills or knowledge (Carver, 1998). These acquired skills and knowledge can then be applied to future problems. Along with the development of new skills and knowledge, navigating through a painful experience can come with a sense of confidence. This greater sense of confidence can make it easier to approach and deal with subsequent experiences. Thriving can also have social consequences as one experiences a traumatic event but is able to find support from others, resulting in a strengthening of those relationships.

Within higher education, the concept of thriving helps explain the difference between students who survive college and those who flourish. Students who thrive move beyond meeting minimum requirements and make the most of campus opportunities. More recent research has connected thriving to student success in higher education (Kinzie, 2012). Thriving is "a holistic approach to student success that epitomized students getting the most out of their college experience—being intellectually, socially and psychologically engaged" (Schreiner, 2014 p. 10). Thriving moves beyond traditional definitions of student success, which have concentrated on factors like GPA and graduation rates. A new vision of student success focuses on students getting the most out of their college experience (Schreiner, 2014). This new vision considers other outcomes, including quality of experience, the content of the learning environment, how students develop in college, attainment of educational as well as personal objectives, and students' perceptions and behaviors (Kinzie, 2012).

Though the current literature on Latinx/a/o student thriving is scant and often combined with a focus on resilience, some studies have illuminated this topic (Morgan Consoli et al., 2014; Morgan Consoli et al., 2015; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). In a quantitative

study of 121 Latinx/a/o undergraduate students at a West Coast university measuring predictors of resilience and thriving, Morgan Consoli et al. (2015) found that some predictors were associated with resilience and thriving while others were only related to thriving. For example, while hope was a significant predictor for both resilience and thriving, spirituality emerged as a predictor for thriving only. Further, cultural pride was only a significant predictor for thriving and could be linked to a feeling of interconnectedness, which, in the case of this study, meant being part of a cultural group or community (Morgan Consoli et al., 2015). Surprisingly, and contrary to other literature regarding the role of family and familismo in the experiences of Latinx/a/o students, this study found familismo had a less significant impact than the other variables in the model. The authors concluded that although familismo is important to Latinx/a/o students, hope, spirituality, and cultural pride are also helpful in overcoming adversity.

In a qualitative study utilizing semi-structured interviews of seven undergraduate Latinx/a/o students who felt they had overcome adversity and were better off after the challenge, researchers found various themes related to Latinx/a/o student thriving. Unlike the previous study, Morgan Consoli et al. (2014) found that social support, including family, community, and mentors, assisted participants in overcoming adversity. Other methods that helped participants overcome adversity included faith/spiritual beliefs, cultural values, external resources, and perseverance, among others. Participants in the study also highlighted experiencing improved self-concept or view of oneself, healthier interpersonal relationships, and an increased appreciation of their culture. Other participants experienced an increase in wanting to help others, while most of the participants disclosed aspirations of hope and goals

that were influenced by their experience. In addition, all participants discussed learning new information or tools through the adversity they experienced, which demonstrated thriving.

Similar to the previous studies, Pérez and Sáenz (2017) found that aspirations/goals and interpersonal relationships with family, peers, and faculty supported the ability of Latino men to thrive at selective HWIs. The most salient theme in the study was the participants' motivation to succeed and achieve their academic goals. Important to achieving their goals was access to support networks, including relationships with peers and faculty. Pérez and Sáenz (2017) determined that while Latino men were able to thrive academically, the extent depended on the support they received from peers, faculty, and staff. As it relates to interpersonal thriving, in addition to familial support, the participants in the study recognized the importance of social connectedness with other Latino peers to their thriving. Participants joined student organizations that served Latinos where they developed a sense of "moral support" or a sense of extended family. Similar to Morgan Consoli et al.'s (2014) findings, Pérez and Sáenz (2017) also found that Latinos equated success with the ability to serve others. Latinos in the study experienced a desire to support their families, peers, and communities. Some served as peer counselors for their peers, while others built their own educational aspirations around those of their immigrant parents who did not have the same educational opportunities they did.

Recent literature has also shed light on the phenomenon of student thriving in higher education, which is important to explore even though it has not focused specifically on Latinx/a/o students (Hill et al., 2020; Nguyen, 2021; Tichavakunda, 2021). This literature is important because it offers insights on how thriving can manifest on college campuses for students from marginalized backgrounds and might have significance when understanding

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how Latinx/a/o students thrive. One example is Tichavakunda's (2021) qualitative study of how Black joy at HWIs manifests in spaces and how it can be collective and relational due to the group-based nature of racialized emotions. Specifically, he investigated how 18 Black students found joy through involvement in ethnic student organizations, celebrations sponsored by the Black Cultural Center on campus, and Black parties hosted by Black affinity groups. These spaces and celebrations created moments of joy that contributed to the study participants' sense of belonging and thriving. Tichavakunda concluded that if institutions are committed to the success of their Black students, they must help create spaces for Black celebrations that facilitate Black joy instead of inhibiting them through policies and historical practices that only centralize positive and joyous experiences for white students. This literature has identified that spaces at HWIs and celebrations can play an important role in the joy that students experience. This joy is then connected to their sense of belonging and perhaps their ability to thrive. Similar to the Black students in Tichavakunda's study, Latinx/a/o students are likely left on their own to create culturally relevant spaces and celebrations that bring them joy. When these spaces and celebrations exist, they nurture the emotional and psychological well-being of Latinx/a/o students, which can be connected to their ability to thrive.

Hill et al. (2020) also highlighted the phenomena of Latinx/a/o student thriving in higher education. Their qualitative study of 60 LGBTQ+ students found that individual experiences and institutional climate contributed to their positive experiences on campus. More specifically, they concluded that LGBTQ+ students thrive when they experience support for the multiple identities they hold, can manage their identities, and are able to make "LGBTQ+-specific contributions to their communities, connections and curriculum" (p.

268). In being able to manage their identities in ways that allowed them to make decisions

for themselves on how to navigate unwelcoming campus climates, students maintained more

positive views related to wielding awareness of their identities. Additionally, by finding

supportive communities through spaces, groups, and networks that affirmed their multiple

identities, LGBTQ+ students were able to cope with institutional environments. Hill et al.

also highlighted the importance of supportive on- and off-campus communities comprising

LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ peers, faculty, advisors, and family. Finding supportive

communities also included connecting with an institution's LGBTQ+ community through

student organizations. Students in the study also noted the importance of engaging with

LGBTQ+ content within their classes. Hill et al. concluded that these areas all supported

LGBTQ+'s ability to thrive in college. Similar to the students in Hill et al.'s study, Latinx/a/o

students often hold multiple marginalized identities. For Latinx/a/o students to thrive,

institutions must be aware of their intersecting identities and work toward creating supportive

environments that embrace and value those identities. Latinx/a/o students must have the

opportunity to find support in community-based spaces, such as student organizations, and

see their multiple identities engaged in the classroom. As with the students in Hill et al.'s

study, Latinx/a/o students need autonomy to make decisions about navigating campus

climate.

Another area of new literature that is important to this study has explored how low-

income students thrive in college environments (Nguyen, 2021). Similar to the previous two

studies, this literature does not focus on Latinx/a/o students but has implications for how

practitioners define college student thriving in higher education. In a qualitative study of 30

students at one institution, Nguyen (2021) found that low-income students thrived by "(a)

asking for help, (b) seizing career-oriented opportunities, and (c) integrating financial implications and knowledge" (p. 6). Nguyen found that the majority of students in his study sought help to address academic and psychological needs. For some of the students, this involved overcoming the perceived negative stigmas attached to asking for help and reframing help-seeking in a positive light. Asking for help contributed to thriving. Additionally, students' ability to capitalize on career-related opportunities also contributed to their thriving. Research experiences and participation in student organizations served as opportunities to explore career interests and social connections. These opportunities helped students feel socially connected and supported their ability to thrive on campus. In addition, numerous students in the study connected thriving to new financial behaviors that helped manage their finances and outlook for postgraduation. Similar to the students in Nguyen's (2021) study, Latinx/a/o students, especially those from working-class backgrounds, might also thrive when they are able to ask for help to address academic and psychological needs. But to do so, Latinx/a/o will also need to overcome the stigma often associated with asking for help in Latinx/a/o communities. Additionally, similar to the students in the Nguyen (2021) study, Latinx/a/o students are likely to experience thriving when they are able to build social connections through involvement on campus, including with identity-based student organizations or other leadership roles.

All three pieces of literature mentioned earlier offer new insight into factors that contribute to student thriving in higher education. Nguyen (2021) illuminated the importance of asking for help. While previous literature has highlighted the importance of support networks, none has specifically shown how asking for help can lead to thriving. All three studies demonstrate that there are common concepts around students being able to find

supportive on- and off-campus communities that value and affirm their identities. Additionally, similar to prior literature on Latinx/a/o students, Hill et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of identity-based content within the coursework offered at a student's institution. This literature is also important because it highlights the importance of students' autonomy around managing their identities and engaging in advocacy to navigate unwelcoming racialized campus environments. To conclude, while these three pieces of literature do not focus on Latinx/a/o students, the findings around student thriving can be connected to Latinx/a/o students. My study investigated further some of the concepts that contributed to student thriving in these studies and explored potential connections to Latinx/a/o student thriving at selective HWIs.

Summary of the Literature on Thriving in Higher Education

Often, the "one size fits all" approach to thriving utilized by college campuses does not work for Latinx/a/o students. Recent studies on Latinx/a/o student thriving in higher education have indicated that institutions need to have a better understanding of the various factors that shape the ability of Latinx/a/o students to overcome adversity on college campuses (see Table 2 for a summary). Familial and social support, spirituality/faith, aspirations/goals, and the opportunity to serve others are prominent themes related to Latinx/a/o student thriving in higher education. Additionally, new literature examining the thriving of other marginalized student populations has explored how emotional well-being is connected to thriving and how factors like spaces, celebrations, support networks/communities, and asking for help can impact student thriving. Understanding how these and other factors contribute to Latinx/a/o students' ability to thrive in higher education has important implications for institutions, including selective HWIs. This new literature on

thriving has begun shedding some light on how Latinx/a/o students overcome the barriers created by whiteness (described previously in this literature review) and offering new knowledge that, if valued and utilized by institutions, can lead to better experiences for Latinx/a/o students. More research is needed to examine specifically how Latinx/a/o students thrive at selective HWIs.

Table 2

Summary of Latinx/a/o Student Forms of Thriving

- ***Validation of student Latinx identity-based knowledge***, values, and experiences by peers, faculty, and staff
- ***Sense of accomplishment*** regarding academic and personal goals
- ***Sense of community and familia on campus***
- ***Greater sense of self*** and pride in Latinx/a/o identity
- ***Sense of purpose*** and enthusiasm for the future
- ***Recognizing racialized barriers as temporary setbacks*** and noticing a development of new skills and knowledge after overcoming adversity
- ***Experience of joy*** after overcoming adversity
- ***Sense that they are taking advantage of their college experience*** and getting the most out of it as a Latinx/a/o person
- ***See the value of their academic*** and learning experiences
- ***Ability to advocate*** for oneself and Latinx/a/o campus community
- ***Ability to ask for help*** or support

After reviewing the literature on thriving, it is important to note the difference between students who survive at their institutions and students who thrive. Thriving involves moving beyond resiliency and coming out on the other end of an experience having learned or developed a new skill, built relationships, or gained confidence in one's abilities. How and what this looks like for Latinx/a/o students at HWIs needs to be further explored. The literature has also suggested that there are different factors that can lead to thriving; however,

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it remains unclear if thriving is a permanent state once achieved or if it is situational and dependent on context, including how, when, and where they are thriving. The existing literature has also indicated that Latinx/a/o students might experience thriving due to the support of family members and that thriving can be the consequence of aspirations and goals with which students enter college. Yet, while the literature has begun scratching the surface of how Latinx/a/o students experience thriving, my study more deeply investigated how Latinx/a/o students used their identity-based values and support systems to thrive. I also explored the personal, social, emotional, and psychological attributes that might lead to thriving, as well as whether and how students were able to experience thriving while also struggling. Based on the current literature, there is also a need to explore how Latinx/a/o students thrive to identify practical changes that need to happen at HWIs to help promote greater success for all Latinx/a/o students at those institutions.

Lastly, other recent literature that has moved away from the barriers Latinx/a/o students experience because of whiteness in higher education and that has started to center their knowledge and experiences has drawn on asset-based theories. Asset-based theories help scholars and practitioners understand the experiences of Latinx/a/o students through a lens that removes students as the problem and instead focuses on how the barriers they face are a result of systemic racism and discrimination that permeate the college experience (Rendón et al., 2014). Understanding these asset-based theories might provide another avenue for challenging whiteness and changing the negative experiences of Latinx/a/o students at selective HWIs. The next section outlines three asset-based theories that served as the basis for my conceptual framework for studying Latinx/a/o student thriving at selective HWIs.

Conceptual Framework

Latinx critical race theory, Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth, and Rendón's (1994) validation theory served as theoretical lenses for this study. LatCrit, CCW, and validation theory were selected for various reasons. First, they aligned with the cultural and ethnic identity of the Latinx/a/o student population that comprised the focus of this study. Additionally, all three theories center and elevate the voices and experiences of Latinxs/as/os, taking an asset-based approach to understanding Latinx/a/os experiences and thus providing a counternarrative to traditional theoretical lenses that center white experience. LatCrit, CCW, and validation theory offer important concepts that help frame Latinx/a/o student experiences as a form of transformational resistance, whereby Latinx/a/o students have self-agency and opportunities for self-liberation from the deficit-based narrative that HWIs continue to uphold. In the following sections, I outline each theoretical lens and discuss how elements from each theory related to my study. Lastly, I discuss how the lenses came together to shape my study.

Latinx Critical Race Theory

Latinx critical race theory is a conceptual framework that was developed in the legal field but can be used to understand issues related to social justice and racial inequality in education (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Fernández, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Villalpando, 2003, 2004). Referred to as a "close cousin" of critical race theory (CRT; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), LatCrit is supplementary and complementary to CRT and shares theoretical similarities (Villalpando, 2003). Having derived from CRT, LatCrit addresses Latinx/a/o-specific realities not addressed by CRT. As Villalpando (2003) noted, LatCrit encompasses "the assumptions and underpinnings of CRT,

but extends toward a progressive coalitional Latino/a pan-ethnicity" (p. 622). LatCrit expands upon CRT by adding more dimensions, including language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Villalpando, 2004).

In theorizing these issues, LatCrit more fully addresses the multidimensional identities of Latinx/a/o students (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Villapando, 2004). LatCrit provides a lens through which the multilayered identities of Latinx/a/o students can be explored when challenging dominant ideologies. Through LatCrit, Latinx/a/o students' immigration status, language, gender identity, and cultural identity are seen as assets. Scholars have outlined five shared tenets of CRT and LatCrit that are important to education: (a) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, (b) the challenge to the dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the interdisciplinary perspective (Fernández, 2002; Robertson et al., 2014; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). For the purposes of this study, I explain the first four tenets.

The centrality and intersectionality of race and racism focuses on the need to accept that racism is embedded in the structures and policies that guide the daily practices of college life (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Additionally, while race is central within critical race analysis, it must also be viewed at the intersection of other identities. Latinx/a/o students often experience discrimination not only based solely on race but also toward other identities such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and immigration status. The centrality and intersectionality of race serves as a reminder that racism is systemically embedded and that the Latinx/a/o community experiences various types of discrimination against other marginalized identities they hold.

Another tenet of CRT and LatCrit that helps examine the experiences of Latinx/a/o students at HWIs focuses on challenging the dominant ideologies that lead to the racism and discrimination they experience. This tenet relates to how dominant ideologies, including "colorblindness, race neutrality and meritocracy," act as a cover for the "self-interest, power and privilege of dominant groups" (Villapando, 2004, p. 44). This LatCrit tenet pushes practitioners to question "false notions of racial objectivity and equal opportunity in the dominant ideology that guides everyday practices in higher education" (Villapando, 2004, p. 44). As discussed earlier, Latinx/a/o students are often perceived to have been admitted to HWIs due to affirmative action, not because of their academic abilities and accomplishments (Lewis et al., 2000; Lopez, 2005). Whiteness at HWIs perpetuates the narrative that Latinx/a/o students do not belong there; however, LatCrit and CRT challenge ideologies that continue to uphold whiteness as superior and entitled.

The third tenet of CRT and LatCrit focuses on the commitment to social justice. LatCrit focuses on social justice as a way to eliminate marginalization on the basis of race, language, class, sexual preference, gender, and generational status (Villalpando, 2004). At its core, this tenet focuses on the importance of institutions striving to provide educational equity for all students. It also allows practitioners to acknowledge openly that their work is driven by a desire to help eliminate marginalization in higher education (Villalpando, 2004). Focusing on Latinx/a/o student thriving is an act of social justice because it creates a counternarrative to previous research on Latinx/a/o students. Contrary to how whiteness frames Latinx/a/o students' experiences and knowledge, exploring how Latinx/a/o students thrive gives voice to a population of students that, for so long, has either been ignored or viewed from a deficit-based perspective in higher education.

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The fourth tenet of CRT and LatCrit focuses on centering the lived experiences of Latinx/a/o people, a core feature of this study. Instead of viewing their experiences through a deficit lens, this tenet of LatCrit values Latinx/a/o experiences and values Latinx/a/o people as creators and holders of knowledge (Villalpando, 2004). Practitioners who use LatCrit when working with Latinx/a/o students understand the importance and values of their home knowledge, including their "bilingualism, biculturalism and commitment to communities," as a "critical tool that has helped them navigate through educational obstacles, go onto college and make a positive difference to others" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 115). Viewing their experiences through this lens means not operating from a traditional Eurocentric epistemological framework, which sees Latinx/a/o students' home knowledge as invalid, lacking, limited, and inferior (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

A final important element of CRT and LatCrit is the use of narratives or counterstories to give voice to BIPOC students (Robertson et al., 2014). In lending credibility to the lived experiences of Latinx/a/o students, LatCrit creates opportunities to challenge dominant practices and policies. LatCrit is useful in examining issues around race and inequality at HWIs since it provides a framework for examining Latinx/a/o student experiences and how HWIs perpetuate racial inequalities that hinder Latinx/a/o student attainment. In examining policies, practices, and structures at HWIs through a LatCrit lens, scholars and practitioners can better understand the areas that need improvement for HWIs to better support Latinx/a/o students. Additionally, by centering the experiences of Latinx/a/o people, LatCrit challenges whiteness in higher education. Lastly, scholars have utilized CRT and LatCrit to develop new frameworks that, through storytelling, capture the diverse forms

of capital that Latinx/a/o students bring to institutions. One of these frameworks is Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth.

Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth

Another asset-based theory that guided my study was Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth, which uses CRT to oppose deficit-based thinking about Communities of Color (Guzman et al., 2018; Yosso, 2005). Yosso's framework expands upon traditional notions of capital and examines various types of social capital found in Latinx/a/o communities. Yosso identified six dimensions of capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital (Guzman et al., 2018; Yosso, 2005). CCW acknowledges the capital and knowledge that Latinx/a/o students bring to college from their lived experiences, countering the deficit-based thinking adopted by dominant groups at HWIs. To better understand how these six dimensions apply to Latinx/a/o students, it is important to define them by applying a lens focused on Latinx/a/o communities.

Aspirational capital refers to the social capital Latinx/a/o students bring through their ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future (Guzman et al., 2018; Yosso, 2005). Even when facing both real and perceived barriers, Latinx/a/o students maintain resiliency and hold on to the hopes and dreams their parents and families have instilled in them.

Linguistic capital incorporates the intellectual and social skills students gain through their communication experiences and the benefits of speaking more than one language (Guzman et al., 2018; Yosso, 2005). CCW resists the deficit-based framing of bilingualism that is common at HWIs and instead centers the assets associated with speaking multiple languages. CCW acknowledges that Latinx/a/o students arrive at school often speaking multiple languages through which they have developed important communication skills.

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Additionally, drawing on LatCrit, this form of capital values storytelling, that is, "listening to and recounting oral histories, parables, stories (cuentos) and proverbs (dichos)" (Yosso, 2005, pp. 78–79). Latinx/a/o students often come to college having developed skills like vocal tone, memorization, and attention to detail, among other skills associated with linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005).

Familial capital refers to the cultural knowledge that Latinx/a/o students nurture through familia, which connects to the concept of familismo, discussed previously. Yosso (2005) stated that this form of capital engages a commitment to family and community. In a study drawing upon research conducted using a transdisciplinary mixed-methods approach, Burciaga and Erbstein (2012) examined the experiences of six Latinx/a/o young adults incorporating community cultural wealth. Burciaga and Erbstein (2012) found that most participants spoke of family ties that promoted persistence. One student in the study spoke about how her parents supported and encouraged her: "I mean they [family] were always supportive. It was never really stated. Like I realized from the way my dad was so happy when I got awards" (p. 30).

The fourth dimension of CCW examines social capital and relates to Latinx/a/o students having a variety of social networks, including individuals within and outside their families and community resources (Guzman et al., 2018). Social capital examines how Latinx/a/o students utilize their social networks to gain needed information and resources and how these supportive networks, including institutional and validating agents, help students overcome adversity (Yosso, 2005).

The fifth dimension, navigational capital, incorporates the skills that Latinx/a/o students acquire when navigating social institutions (Guzman et al., 2018). These skills

encompass how Latinx/a/o students maneuver through institutions that were not created with Communities of Color in mind, like higher education. This form of capital acknowledges the importance of "individual agency within institutional constraints, but it also connects to social networks that facilitate community navigation through" social institutions (Yosso, 2005, p. 80).

The last dimension of CCW is resistant capital, which refers to the skills and knowledge Latinx/a/o students have fostered through oppositional behavior (Guzman et al., 2018; Yosso, 2005). According to Yosso (2005), "This form of cultural wealth is grounded in the legacy of resistance to subordination exhibited by Communities of Color" (p. 80).

CCW has been used as a framework for several empirical studies related to Latinx/a/o students in higher education. In his qualitative phenomenological study, which utilized surveys and semi-structured interviews, Pérez (2014) applied CCW "to understand how alternative forms of capital enhance the academic and social experiences of Latino male" (p. 748) college students. Pérez found that participants used various forms of CCW, including linguistic capital, to lessen the negative effects of racial microaggressions. Participants relied on linguistic capital to create diverse peer networks that helped nurture other forms of capital. Participants also applied resistant capital to dismantle negative stereotypes about Latinx/a/o people and to raise awareness among various campus community members. They homed in on navigational skills through their interactions with diverse peers, which was important as they navigated an environment where they were highly underrepresented. Ultimately, Pérez concluded that there is a connection between Latinx/a/o students' community cultural wealth and their ability to thrive at an HWI.

In another study examining the experiences of Latinx/a/o students at two public universities through survey responses, Peralta et al. (2013) demonstrated various forms of persistence for college students as a result of CCW. One student shared how the loss of a parent and her other parent's suffering from a physical disability gave her the strength she needed to push forward and persist. Her mother's survival, story, and sacrifices served as a source of aspirational capital for this student, who aspired to earn a doctoral degree and become a professor. For many students in the study, their parents were sources of familial capital that often provided them the strength to persevere. Though their parents did not always understand their educational experiences, their parents served as a source of support. Ultimately, the use of navigational, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital demonstrates how Latinx/a/o students employ various forms of capital to achieve favorable college outcomes and, in turn, dismantle the deficit-based narrative about Latinx/a/o student thriving in college. Latinx/a/o students grow and flourish by tapping into the various forms of capital they hold.

Rendón's Validation Theory

A final asset-based theory that guided my study was Rendón's (1994) validation theory, which examines the impact external and internal agents can have on validating students both academically and interpersonally. According to Rendón, higher education institutions should play an active role in fostering validation (Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). Validation theory has helped practitioners and researchers make sense of marginalized student experiences in ways that help support their success in college (Gildersleeve, 2011). The theory also examines the impact agents can have on validating students both academically and interpersonally, which can impact thriving (Morgan Consoli,

et al., 2014; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). As I discussed earlier, internal agents can help Latinx/a/o students stay motivated and feel valued and appreciated by offering systems of support.

According to Rendón (1994), higher education institutions should play an active role in fostering validation. Doing so involves "faculty, counselors, coaches, and administrators actively reaching out to students or actively designing activities that promote active learning and interpersonal growth among students, faculty, and staff" (p. 44). In its simplest form, validation theory can be used to guide the creation of a supportive process in which in- and out-of-class agents help create and foster student academic and interpersonal development (Rendón, 1994). To understand validation theory, one must understand how it can be applied academically and interpersonally. Academic validation comes from in-class activities and stems from students receiving support and validation through their academic work, effort, and achievement (Gildersleeve, 2011). Faculty members, teachers' assistants, lab instructors, and classmates can all play an active role in academic validation. Rendón found the following examples of in-class academic validation to be highly important to Latinx/a/o student success:

a. Faculty who demonstrated a genuine concern for teaching students

b. Faculty who were personable and approachable toward students

c. Faculty who treated students equally

d. Faculty who structured learning experiences that allowed students to experience themselves as capable of learning

e. Faculty who worked individually with those students needing extra help

f. Faculty who provided meaningful feedback to students. (p. 40)

Rendón also found that faculty were not the only in-class validating agents; classmates could also serve as agents of validation.

In the absence of in-class validating experiences, Rendón (1994) found that out-of-class academic experiences served as sources of validation for Latinx/a/o students. While academic validation tends to happen in the classroom setting, interpersonal validation can happen inside and outside the classroom (Gildersleeve, 2011). Through interpersonal validation, agents help foster students' personal development and social adjustment (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). Interpersonal validation can come from activities recognizing and celebrating Latinx/a/o students' cultural and social traditions. Ultimately, Rendón and other scholars who have applied validation theory as a framework in their studies have found that in- and out-of-classr agents have a significant impact on Latinx/a/o student persistence in higher education.

Rendón's (1994) study, which utilized open-ended interviews with 132 first-year students at mostly HWIs, found that faculty can play an important role in fostering academic validation. Students in the study felt most validated when faculty were personable, understanding, and demonstrated a sense of caring and concern. Another qualitative study that applied validation theory as a guiding framework found that validating faculty interactions had the "potential to increase Latinx/a/o community college students' sense of belonging, persistence and academic self-concept" (Alcantar & Hernandez, 2020, p. 3). According to Alcantar and Hernandez (2020), seven of the nine students interviewed expressed instances of in-class validation with faculty when faculty members provided them with resources and assisted them during difficult times such as when students wanted to drop out of college. The study found that these interactions with faculty "supported students'

academic and social adjustment and improved their academic confidence and self-esteem" (p. 9.).

Other studies have demonstrated how counselors can also serve as agents of validation (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015). In a qualitative study utilizing semi-structured interviews and CRT and validation theory as frameworks, Acevedo-Gil et al. (2015) found that agents could provide validation for Latinx/a/o students in community college English and math developmental education courses by referring to participants' identities. One student in the study shared how his counselor reinforced his ability to meet his academic goals. Specifically, the student noted that his counselor, who also identified as a Person of Color from his same neighborhood, sat him down and told him, "'Look, I'm from where you're coming from … I'm from South Central too. I came from right there too … And I'm Black and you're Hispanic. You're Mexican … If I could do it, you could do it too'" (p. 113). By aligning himself through the identities he shared with the student, the counselor provided reassurance that the student could academically succeed, just as he had.

Studies have also found that peers can serve as a source of validation (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015; Rendón, 1994). One student in Rendón's (1994) study shared how a peer reminded them, "'You're going to do this'" (p. 41). Similarly, Acevedo-Gil et al.'s (2015) study found that peers served as a source of validation and support for Latinx/a/o students. One student spoke specifically about the financial struggles she faced, which made it difficult to access the book she needed for her math course. Her partner in the class made copies of the pages she needed, which allowed her to complete the independent work assigned by her faculty member. The student's partner provided academic validation by providing her with the resources she needed to complete the course.

Rendón (1994) also found that external agents outside the institutions—including family, friends, and significant others—played a significant role in supporting students in college. For example, one student recalled the important role that her mother played in supporting her college goals. Similarly, Acevedo-Gil et al. (2015) found that external agents like significant others served as agents of validation for Latinx/a/o students. One undocumented Latinx/a/o student in the study recalled how her boyfriend was a major source of support and motivation. When at times she felt frustrated due to barriers she faced, her boyfriend reminded her of her strengths and provided academic validation that was reaffirming for her despite the challenges she faced as a low-income, undocumented Latinx/a/o student.

Rendón (1994) concluded that, if initiated by in- and out-of-class agents, validation can be an "enabling, confirming and supportive process" fostering "academic and interpersonal development" (p. 44). When validation is present, students feel they can learn and establish a sense of worth about themselves and everything that they bring to the university; without it, students feel silenced, apprehensive, and subordinate to their peers. The application of a validation lens empowers Latinx/a/o students, often reminding them of their strengths, assets, and ability to succeed. Validation theory may help HWIs better understand why interpersonal challenges, such as pressures to acculturate, isolation and alienation, and discrimination, can be extremely detrimental to Latinx/a/o students. Additionally, it can provide HWIs with a better understanding of why the concepts of familismo and community are important to Latinx/a/o students and serve as sources of support and motivation throughout their college years. The application of validation insights enables a more nuanced exploration of how family and internal agents at an institution can

shape Latinx/a/o student thriving. Internal and external agents can help Latinx/a/o students feel heard on campus by validating their experiences and the knowledge and skills they bring to HWIs. Validating their experiences can build a sense of belonging whereby Latinx/a/o student experiences are seen as positive experiences that bring value to the campus. This source of validation can serve as an empowering step toward thriving for Latinx/a/o students at selective HWIs.

Connecting LatCrit, CCW, and Validation Theory

In summary, LatCrit, CCW, and validation theory center the voices and experiences of Latinx/a/o students. LatCrit provides a lens that can help practitioners at HWIs better understand the racism and microaggressions that Latinx/a/o experience. LatCrit could also help practitioners at HWIs understand that policies, practices, and structures are the reasons why Latinx/a/o students struggle at HWIs. As part of LatCrit, counterstories uplift the Latinx/a/o voices that already exist at HWIs, while the theory as a whole helps pave the way for other asset-based frameworks and theories, including CCW and validation theory. Both CCW and validation theory not only help researchers and practitioners understand the cultural wealth Latinx/a/o bring to HWIs but also provide a greater understanding of the role that faculty, staff, peers, and external agents like parents and mentors can play in empowering Latinx/a/o students. These theories could help create a better understanding of how Latinx/a/o students can succeed and thrive and how HWIs can better value and center Latinx/a/o student knowledge and experience.

The concepts from LatCrit, CCW, and validation theory incorporated into this conceptual framework work at different and at times multiple levels, namely the student, college practitioner (i.e., faculty, staff, administrator), community, institutional, and further

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outside the institution at the macro-social level. For example, according to both CCW and validation theory, external and internal agents can impact Latinx/a/o students' experiences. In this case, familial/social capital and validation from external and internal agents work at both the community and practitioner levels. Similarly, the tenet of racism as endemic works at multiple levels, including at the macro-social and institutional levels and the systems within. One such example relates to higher education institutions adopting white American standards, including the use of the English language as the primary language even though there is no official language in the United States. As a result, Spanish is devalued, and individuals who solely speak Spanish or speak with a Spanish accent are perceived as having a deficit. Understanding how these concepts are interrelated and how they work at different levels was important to the aim of this study.

This study sought to contribute to the growing knowledge base around how Latinx/a/o students succeed and thrive in higher education. The study's conceptual framework provides a basis for exploring their unique experiences and better understanding how the phenomenon of thriving occurs for Latinx/a/o students at HWIs.

1. Racism as endemic: LatCrit maintains that racism is inherent within the foundation of the United States and the institutions that comprise it, including higher education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The LatCrit tenet of racism as endemic provided a lens in the study that allowed me to fully understand that barriers exist and to identify the strategies that Latinx/a/o students utilize to overcome them. There needs to be an understanding of racialized barriers to understand how Latinx/a/o students are able to thrive after facing adversity.

2. Counterstorytelling/capital: Latinx/a/o students arrive at selective HWIs with a wealth of identity-based knowledge and experiences, but prior literature has shown that institutions fail to see these assets (Yosso, 2005). To fully understand Latinx/a/o student experiences, there must be knowledge and recognition of these forms of capital and an understanding of how counterstorytelling shifts power away from institutions and puts it back on students to be able to share their own stories and identify the capital they bring to institutions. For the purposes of this study, CCW and counterstorytelling provided an opportunity to understand Latinx/a/o student experiences through their own stories and voices that could inform practice at selective HWIs.

3. Intersectionality: Latinx/a/o students often experience not only racialized barriers but also barriers related to other identities they hold, including their gender, immigration status, socioeconomic status, and generational status, to name a few. Identity-based barriers and the social positions Latinxs/os/as are forced to occupy result in different levels of oppression that Latinx/a/o students must navigate and find strategies to overcome to thrive. In this study, LatCrit provided a lens for better understanding how other identities that students hold impact their ability to thrive. Applying this lens offered a more in-depth understanding of Latinx/a/o students' experiences.

4. Commitment to social justice: This study sought to minimize the focus on the role racism plays in the experiences of Latinx/a/o students by highlighting how Latinx/a/o students successfully navigated racialized barriers. Additionally, the study aimed to provide institutions with the knowledge they can utilize to

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dismantle racialized barriers and create space for greater Latinx/a/o student success. As such, LatCrit's commitment to social justice provided an important perspective for this study.

5. Community/internal agents: Prior literature on Latinx/a/o student experiences has indicated that familismo and community are important to Latinxs/as/os (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Perez, 2017; Perez & Taylor, 2016; Rendón et al., 2014; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). The concepts of familial/social, community capital, and external/internal agents are important for understanding Latinx/a/o students' support systems and how they lean on them to overcome the racialized barriers they face within higher education. As such, CCW and validation theory provided an important lens for this study.

In sum, this study's conceptual framework was guided by Latinx/a/o-focused, asset-based theories and frameworks that deconstruct and decenter traditional research lenses that have reinforced deficit-based narratives by framing Latinx/a/o students as problematic. By contrast, my framework combining LatCrit, CCW, and validation theory focuses on the strengths of Latinx/a/o students to understand how they thrive at selective HWIs that were not created to value their knowledge, values, and experiences. Together, the three theories frame the problem as HWIs' continued centralization of whiteness and erasure of Latinx/a/o experiences and ways of knowing; LatCrit positions the problem from both a macro-systemic perspective as well as on a micro level, while CCW and validation theory provide insights into that factors that shape Latinx/a/o student thriving at selective HWIs.

Summary

While there is a growing body of asset-based literature, there is a need for more scholarship on how Latinx/a/o students use their identity, community, and identity-based capital to overcome racialized barriers and thrive in HWIs. This problem is important to study not only because Latinx/a/o college student enrollment continues to climb but also because research must transition from a focus on racial-inequity scholarship to scholarship with a racial justice lens. Previous literature has identified the barriers that Latinx/a/o students face and how higher education institutions continue to fail Latinx/a/o students. Though this literature is important, it overwhelmingly suppresses narratives about Latinx/a/o student thriving in higher education. This study sought to shift the focus away from racialized barriers and deficit-based thinking to center on how Latinx/a/o students thrive and what institutions can do to support their ability to thrive.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Latinx/a/o students and the factors that had contributed to their ability to thrive at a selective HWI. As noted in Chapter 1, this study was guided by the following overarching research question: How do Latinx/a/o college students experience thriving at selective HWIs? To address the overarching research question, the study explored the following sub-questions:

1. What barriers have Latinx/a/o students faced during their undergraduate experience at selective HWIs?

2. What strategies and community cultural wealth do Latinx/a/o students utilize to overcome barriers and support their ability to thrive at selective HWIs?

3. What role do Latinx/a/o students perceive internal agents (college practitioners, peers) and external agents (family, friends, home community) playing in their ability to thrive?

4. What, if any, dimensions of their Latinx/a/o identity and other identities have helped Latinx/a/o students thrive?

The study used a qualitative phenomenological methodology, with data collected through a survey, interviews, and focus groups. In this chapter, I describe and provide the rationale for

these methodological choices and the strategies I utilized to strengthen the study's validity and trustworthiness.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6). Qualitative research focuses on how meaning is constructed and how individuals make sense of their lives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The role of the researcher is to then "uncover and interpret those meanings" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 25). Given that the purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Latinx/a/o students and the factors that had contributed to their ability to thrive at a selective HWI, a qualitative research design was appropriate for this study, which sought to understand the *how* and *why* of the phenomena of interest, not the *what* and *whether*, which are correlated with quantitative studies.

The study explored the lived experiences of Latinx/a/o students to understand the phenomena of how they were able to thrive and what contributed to their ability to thrive. Additionally, according to Creswell (2007), qualitative research is conducted "when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants of the study" (p. 40). This was a key element of this study since I sought to not only answer the research questions but also, in the process, elevate and empower the voices of Latinx/a/o students, who are often ignored or suppressed at selective HWIs. Additionally, I recognized my role as researcher and hoped to eliminate, as much as possible, any power dynamics between myself and the students. Also recognizing the potential disturbance the study could cause the students as

they reflected on their experiences with racialized barriers, I wanted to ensure that the students felt seen and validated and that their experiences mattered. For the purposes of the study, I refer to students who participated as "co-creators" instead of participants because of the significant contributions they made to this research. (Moving forward, I will reference the students who participated in my study as co-creators.) Recognizing the students in the study as co-creators had a notable impact on them, with the students indicating that the study's approach felt personal. (I introduce the co-creators in Chapter 4; Jairo and Veronica [pseudonyms], whose quotes I include here, were two of the co-creators). For example, Jairo shared,

> I definitely feel like a co-creator in this study because I feel like in past studies [I've] been a part of or participated in, it's been very much like I feel like the subject, that kind of lab rat just like answering questions. Like the questions you had, but the way they were structured but also like the style of interviews that you did, I think that that made it feel more personal and as if I was sharing my story with you, walking [with you] through everything.

Veronica also shared the following about the importance of being seen as a co-creator, not just a study participant:

> But I think that's like a really good way to frame it, like co-creators. I immediately think about, I'm a theology major, so like God co-creation and things like that. And I think the power that creation has and us in putting our own experiences is very meaningful for research, for students, for education and stuff like that.

Rationale for a Phenomenological Approach

The specific qualitative approach I utilized in researching Latinx/a/o student thriving at a selective HWI was phenomenology. The concept of phenomenology was first introduced by Kant in the mid-1700s, but Edward Husserl (1859–1935) is credited with being the father of phenomenology (Hays, 2012). Phenomenology values subjective experience and the connections between the self and the world. A phenomenological study "seeks the individual's perspectives and meanings of a phenomena or experience" (Mertens, 2020, p. 255). It seeks to explore the meaning, essence, and structure of the lived experience of the phenomenon being studied. In phenomenological research, "the aim of the researcher is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 44). The goal is to understand and describe lived experience from the point of view of the co-creators. Through a detailed examination of the experiences of this study's co-creators, I hoped to describe the essence of the phenomenon of Latinx/a/o student thriving at a selective HWI.

More specifically, the study followed a hermeneutical phenomenology approach. Stemming from transcendental phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology was first proposed by German philosopher Martin Heidegger (Laverty, 2003), who believed it was important to study ordinary life and the concept of being (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). He believed humans can only be aware of who they are by exploring their actions to determine their intentions (Wilding & Whitford, 2005). Importantly, a phenomenological study considers the experiences of the research co-creators in an attempt to "bring to light" something that has not received much attention and for which not much is understood. This study sought to illuminate the experiences of Latinx/a/o students who are thriving in higher

education by moving away from previous literature (presented in Chapter 2) that has focused solely on the challenges and oppression they have experienced. While it is important to understand their historical marginalization, there is a need to understand how Latinx/a/o students have thrived and how the experiences of those who are thriving might resonate with other Latinx/a/o students in higher education.

Further, according to Moustakas (1994), in a phenomenological study, "the researcher has a personal interest in whatever she or he seeks to know; the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomenon" (p. 59). As a Latina who attended HWIs and experienced all the negatives and some positives they had to offer and who currently works in higher education with a passion for understanding the experience of Latinx/a/o students and lifting the voices of my community, I have a personal connection to this study. Hermeneutical phenomenology allows the researcher to engage with the study through a process of self-reflection. According to Laverty (2003), "The biases and assumptions of the researcher are not bracketed or set aside, but rather are embedded and essential to the interpretive process" (p. 28). The researcher is invited to reflect on their own experiences and claim the ways their experiences relate to the issues being researched. In Chapter 4, I describe how my first-hand experiences both as a student who graduated from a selective HWI and as a Latina who has worked in higher education at selective HWIs were important and served as assets for this study.

Institutional and Co-Creator Sampling

In this section, I outline the institutional and student criteria utilized to identify a research site and student co-creators. One of the most common sampling strategies in qualitative research is purposeful sampling, which, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2015),

"is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 96). This means the researcher selects individuals and sites for the study because they purposefully inform the research problem and the phenomena being studied (Creswell, 2007). For this study, I used a purposeful sampling strategy called "criterion sampling," which requires that the "researcher … set up a criterion and then identify cases that meet that criterion" (Mertens, 2020, p. 350). I established specific criteria for sampling a selective HWI and for sampling Latinx/a/o co-creators, which I discuss in the next section.

Research Site: Sampling and Description

The setting for this study was a selective historically white institution in the northeastern United States. The study focused on one research site to allow for a more in-depth exploration of the experiences of students at that institution. Focusing on one institution minimized variation in racial campus climate, services, and support, which can differ across institutions and can impact the experiences of students in different ways. Additionally, keeping the context the same across co-creators helped to better understand the nature of whiteness at that one institution and how Latinx/a/o students at that institution experienced whiteness and thriving—if at all—in the context of that institution. Finally, my goal was to gather as much of the data in person; thus, for pragmatic reasons, it was important to focus on one institution.

For this study, the institution had to be a 4-year HWI, meaning that over 50% of its student population identified as white and that its practices were "structured around the dominance and normalcy of whiteness" (Bourke, 2016, p. 16). A selective institution was defined as an institution that has an admissions rate of 40% or less. It was also important that

Latinx/a/o students were underrepresented at the institution, as this impacted their experiences and sense of community at the institution. The Latinx/a/o student population had to represent less than 20% of the student population since institutions with a Latinx/a/o student population above 25% could be considered Hispanic-Serving Institutions. Additionally, the focus was on 20% or less to avoid limiting the number of institutions that could be considered for the study in the Northeast.

Based on these criteria, I identified Harbor College (HC), a 4-year HWI in the northeastern region of the United States. It is important to note that I have used a pseudonym for all names in my study, including institutions, co-creators, staff, centers, programs, and student organizations. Over the last 2 years, HC has maintained an average 22% admissions rate and an enrollment of over 50% white students and 11% Latinx/a/o students (NCES, 2022). On average, approximately 85% of students live on campus. HC was also accessible for the in-person walking interviews and focus groups that I describe in more depth later. Additionally, as a selective institution, HC maintains a culture that is competitive and driven strongly by academic achievement, which is how higher education institutions, especially those guided by white heteronormative values, often define student success and thriving. To gain access, I reached out to HC's Institutional Research (IR) Office. Having already gone through the IRB process at UMass Boston, the HC IR office did not require me to complete a separate IRB application to gain access to the institution. Once I was granted access, I started recruiting student co-creators.

Student Co-Creators: Sampling, Recruitment, and Description

For this study, student co-creators had to meet several criteria. First, they had to identify as Latinx/a/o. Second, they had to be enrolled as a full-time undergraduate and be at

least a sophomore, with preference given to juniors and seniors. It must be acknowledged that Latinx/a/o students face challenges from early in their college experience (even prior, through the admissions process) and must overcome them to survive and thrive. I chose, however, to focus on students who had been at the institution for at least 2 years since students who were further along in their studies potentially had to overcome more barriers and had more time to understand how they had successfully navigated those barriers and been able to thrive. Finally, students had to recognize that they had previously experienced racialized barriers related to their Latinx/a/o identity and saw themselves as thriving at the institution. In line with Creswell's recommendations (2007), the individuals in the study needed to have experienced the phenomenon being explored and be able to articulate their experiences. As I recruited students, I was mindful that they held one or more marginalized identities, including but not limited to socioeconomic status, immigration status, and gender identity.

I sought to recruit 6–10 student co-creators, a range consistent with other phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2007; Mertens, 2020). To recruit co-creators who met the study criteria, I utilized a short survey with a combination of demographic and experience-related questions (see Appendix B). The purpose of the survey was to collect student demographic data as well as data for identifying students who met the study criteria. I collaborated with a number of college administrators who worked closely with Latinx/a/o students at the institution to distribute the survey to students. Additionally, I reached out to representatives of a Latinx/a/o identity-based student organization who shared the study flyer (see Appendix C) and survey link with students in the organization. As I started identifying an initial pool of student co-creators, I engaged in snowball sampling to identify other

potential co-creators. This type of sampling is often used by qualitative researchers to grow their list of names through a referral process (Mertens, 2020).

In total, 38 students submitted survey responses. In my initial effort to narrow the list of potential co-creators, I removed students who did not completely fill out the survey. I then narrowed the survey respondents by removing those who shared that they had not experienced racialized barriers. I then removed students who did not show aspects of thriving based on their survey responses. I further narrowed the list by removing students who were graduating in May and would not be in the region afterward. This helped me narrow the list to under 10 potential co-creators.

Seven student co-creators participated in this study (see Tables 3 and 4 for a summary of their self-reported demographic information). To protect the confidentiality of the co-creators, I use a pseudonym for each individual. All identified as Latinx/a/o and named other marginalized identities. Additionally, the co-creators noted in the survey that they experienced racialized barriers while at HC but saw themselves as thriving. All had been enrolled for at least 2 years at HC at the time of data collection. Four were women, and three were men. At the time of recruitment, two were seniors, and five were juniors. While all co-creators in the study identified as Latinx/a/o, their ethnic breakdown consisted of two Dominican-Americans, one Ecuadorian-American, one Salvadoran-American, one Mexican-American, one Puerto Rican (born and lives in Puerto Rico), and one who identified as Dominican/Puerto Rican-American. Two of the seven identified racially as Black and one identified as white. The others listed their race as Latinx/a/o, and one student chose not to answer this demographic question. All the students were between the ages of 20 and 21 and were full-time undergraduate students pursuing a bachelor's degree. All students had some

level of engagement with organizations and programs, which they referenced in interviews (see Table 5 for the organizations and programs they named), and all but one was working a job. Five of the seven were pursuing a major in the humanities, one in the sciences, and one in business. Six of the seven identified their sexual orientation as heterosexual, and one student identified as gay. Five of the seven identified as first-generation college students and came from a working-class background. Each co-creator received a $100 gift card for their contribution to the study which was distributed at the end of the study.

Table 3

Co-Creator Self-Reported Demographic Information—Academic Related Characteristics

Co-Creator (Pseudonym)	Class Year	Major	GPA	First-Gen
Ana	2023	Applied Psychology/ Human Development		
Gabriel	2023	Sociology	2.8	Y
Jairo	2022	Business Management	3.1	Y
Maria	2022	Applied Psychology/ Human Development	3.8	Y
Ricardo	2023	Biology	3.8	N
Veronica	2023	Theology/Applied Psychology	3.2	Y
Viviana	2023	Psychology	3.7	N

Table 4

Co-Creator Self-Reported Demographic Information—Social Identities

Co-Creator (Pseudonym)	Age	Ethnicity	Race	Gender	Sexual Orientation	SES
Ana	20	Dominican	Black	F	Heterosexual	Lower
Gabriel	21	Dominican/ Puerto Rican	Black	M	Gay	Lower
Jairo	21	Ecuadorian	Latinx	M	Heterosexual	Lower
Maria	21	Salvadorian		F	Heterosexual	Lower
Ricardo	21	Puerto Rican	Latino	M	Heterosexual	Middle
Veronica	21	Mexican	Hispanic	F	Heterosexual	Lower
Viviana	21	Dominican	White	F	Heterosexual	Middle

Table 5

Spaces and Organizations Referenced by Co-Creators

Space/Organization	Description & Role in Supporting Students
Center for Diversity, Equity and Social Justice (DESJ)	Supports HC community, with a focus on BIPOC students.
Beacon Center	Supports students with the highest level of financial need on campus. Provides access to social events on campus.
Harbor1st Center	Focuses on supporting first-generation, working-class, and underrepresented students at HC.
Latin American Student Organization	Largest Latinx/a/o cultural organization at HC. Focuses on promoting the needs and goals of Latinx/a/o students at HC.
Dominican Student Organization	Latinx/a/o cultural organization focusing on teaching the HC community about Dominican culture.
Mexican Student Organization	Latinx/a/o cultural organization focusing on teaching the HC community about Mexican culture.
Freedom Scholar	Hosted by the Harbor1st Center, students in this program are provided with support to pursue graduate education, with a focus on the attainment of a doctoral degree.
Peer Advocates	Student leadership role within the DESJ center that helps promote and carry out the mission of the center.
Emerging Leaders Program	First-year program focused on introducing students at HC to elements that will be foundational during their years at HC. Program features, speakers, events, projects, presentations, and discussions that facilitate student development.

Data Collection

The study was conducted over an 8-month period from May 2022 to December 2022.[5] In addition to the survey described earlier, which collected demographic information and co-creator experiences with racialized barriers and thriving at HC, I used several types of interviews. Qualitative researchers frequently utilize interviews as a data collection method (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Mertens, 2020). In phenomenological studies, interviews are a method for exploring the phenomenon of interest. Since the goal of this study was to understand the phenomenon of thriving, interviews allowed me to understand how co-creators had thrived by exploring their lived experiences. The interview questions were informed by insights from my conceptual framework. The study incorporated three types of interviews: (a) traditional sit-down, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews (over Zoom, May–June 2022); (b) one-on-one walking interviews on campus (in person, July–October 2022); and (c) focus group interviews (in person, December 2022). The gap between the Zoom interviews and walking interviews, and between the walking interviews and the focus groups, allowed for initial rounds of analysis (discussed in more depth later) and to create the focus group protocol. I describe each of the interview types in the following sections.

Individual Sit-Down Interviews

The first round of interviews consisted of semi-structured, sit-down interviews conducted over Zoom. The purpose of the first interview was to gain a greater understanding

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[5] At the time data collection began, the process was not impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. HC had returned to campus early in the pandemic, allowing students to reside on campus while taking online classes. While the pandemic had a significant impact on many higher education institutions and on students, by the time I started my data collection, many pandemic-related restrictions were no longer impacting campuses, and students had returned to a campus life that was more similar to that prior to COVID-19. The pandemic was not a factor incorporated into my study and barely came up in conversation with the co-creators, having little impact on my research.

of the students' lived experiences with racialized barriers, how they defined thriving, and what experiences they related to thriving (see Appendix D for the full interview protocol). The first interviews also helped build rapport with the co-creators. The interview protocol included questions related to barriers they experienced such as, "Can you tell me how racialized barriers have challenged your own Latinx/a/o identity?" and "How have racialized barriers challenged other identities that you hold?" These questions related to the LatCrit dimension of my conceptual framework as they focused on the intersectionality of the co-creators' identities. Additionally, LatCrit maintains that racism is endemic in systems, including higher education institutions. This LatCrit tenet informed my questions on racialized barriers to help me understand the experiences the co-creators had with racism and marginalization at HC. The second half of the protocol focused on questions related to thriving and were guided by both Rendón's (1994) validation theory and Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework. Both validation theory and CCW view Latinx/a/o student experiences through an asset-based lens and recognize the capital that students bring with them to colleges. Questions in this part of the protocol included, "Can you tell me what, if any, institutional support system you utilized to overcome these barriers?" and "Can you tell me in what ways you feel a greater sense of community and/or belonging after overcoming these racialized barriers?"

Individual Walking Interviews

After the first round of interviews were completed with all the co-creators, a second round of interviews in the form of walking interviews took place. Walking interviews are newer to higher education studies but have been utilized as a research method in other fields and disciplines. The walking interview incorporates the benefits of sit-down interviews and

observations and builds upon these methods by using the environment (in this case, the HC campus) as a tool for promoting interaction, conversation, and reflection from the study co-creators (Harris, 2016). Given that phenomenological studies aim to capture the lived experiences of participants, walking interviews allowed me to accompany study co-creators in a "natural" outing. By asking questions, listening, and observing, I explored co-creators' experiences as they interacted with HC's physical and social environment (Kusenbach, 2003).

According to Harris (2016), "Walking interviews often produce rich, detailed data because the environment inspires participants' thoughts, memories, and actions" (p. 366). Walking interviews align well with phenomenological research because they explore the texts, including spaces and places, of students' lived experiences (Harris, 2016). I met with each co-creator for a 90- to 120-minute walking interview at HC. The walking interviews allowed me to ask follow-up questions as well as questions centered on the phenomenon of thriving (see Appendix E for the walking interview protocol). Questions like "What are places on campus where you have experienced moments of thriving?" and "What are places on campus where you felt supported and validated by your peers, faculty and/or staff?" reflected validation and CCW aspects of my conceptual framework.

Focus Groups

The final interview method I utilized was focus groups, which served as a final opportunity for data collection and for member checking (see Appendix F for the focus group protocol). Questions for the focus groups were based on data from the first two rounds of interviews and included the following: "In reflecting on your experiences of thriving at HC, would you say that thriving is temporary or a permanent state of being? Why?" and "In what

ways have spaces and resources (programs) represented both barriers and thriving for you as a Latinx/a/o student at HC?" Having started analysis of the first two rounds of interviews, I constructed questions that could provide further insight into early insights and themes. Additionally, as part of the focus groups, I shared Yosso's (2005) CCW model with the co-creators and asked them to reflect on the model via a series of questions. I asked questions like "How does understanding this framework shift your perspective of what you bring to the Harbor College community?" to prompt reflection on the Latinx/a/o identity-based assets that each co-creator brought and contributed to HC and how they could further utilize their community cultural wealth to thrive at HC.

Recording Procedures

To capture the interviews, I used multiple types of recording procedures. With the permission of the study co-creators, the interviews and focus group were audio-recorded. The sit-down interviews took place via Zoom and were recorded using the Zoom platform recording feature. The walking interviews and focus groups were recorded using a handheld recorder. In addition to the recordings, I also took notes during the interviews. Lastly, I wrote reflective memos at various times throughout the data collection process. The Zoom interviews were transcribed through Zoom, and the walking interviews and focus groups were transcribed by a professional transcription service. Table 6 provides a summary of the data collection methods and the amount of time each co-creator contributed to each.

Table 6

Summary of Data Collection

Co-Creator (Pseudonym)	Data Collection Method	Time (Minutes)	Total (Minutes)
Ana	Sit-Down (Zoom) Interview	121	327
	Walking Interview	147	
	Focus Group	59	
Gabriel	Sit-Down (Zoom) Interview	147	424
	Walking Interview	142	
	Focus Group	135	
Jairo	Sit-Down (Zoom) Interview	56	244
	Walking Interview	129	
	Focus Group	59	
Maria	Sit-Down (Zoom) Interview	115	309
	Walking Interview	59	
	Focus Group	135	
Ricardo	Sit-Down (Zoom) Interview	113	369
	Walking Interview	121	
	Focus Group	135	
Veronica	Sit-Down (Zoom) Interview	56	255
	Walking Interview	140	
	Focus Group	59	
Viviana	Sit-Down (Zoom) Interview	133	389
	Walking Interview	121	
	Focus Group	135	

Storing Data

Several data-storage techniques were used in the study. My communications (e.g., emails) with the research site and with study co-creators were stored in an electronic folder within my email account, which was password-protected. Notes from meetings, interviews, and focus groups were stored in a secure location in my office. Student survey data were stored in a password-protected folder on a password-protected computer. Similarly, all digital recordings from interviews were filed using students' pseudonyms and saved within a

password-protected folder on a password-protected computer. Copies of digital files provided to the professional transcription service utilized the study co-creators' pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis are not linear; instead, they are simultaneous activities with emerging insights that direct the next phase of the data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This study used multiple rounds of data analysis throughout and after the data collection process. Specifically, data analysis began right after the administration of the survey that helped identify the study co-creators. Further, data analysis occurred after the Zoom interviews and walking interviews. Each of these rounds of data analysis provided guidance for the subsequent data collection process. Finally, once all data were collected, I analyzed the entire corpus.

According to Wertz (2005), "In phenomenological research, the identification of themes and any 'coding' or categorization of data is merely preparatory in that it organizes data conveniently for a more in-depth, structural, eidetic analysis that follows" (p. 172). I began my analysis with coding. Coding provides a system for organizing and managing data and involves assigning a designation or theme to aspects of the data, making it easier to retrieve specific pieces of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and to identify connections or gaps within the data. I used an inductive coding approach, which allowed me to search for meanings that emerged from the data and assign labels or themes that reflected that meaning. Using an inductive approach allowed me to develop meanings that might have aligned with the multiple theories and frameworks making up the study's conceptual framework.

I used two forms of inductive coding: open and axial coding. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), a researcher performs open coding at the beginning of data analysis. It

involves tagging units of data that are important to the study, while axial coding "is the process of relating categories and properties to each other, refining the category scheme" (p. 229). Using both coding approaches allowed for the organization of the themes into categories and subcategories. Additionally, open and axial coding allowed me to review the data through the data collection process, specifically the sit-down and walking interviews, to determine what themes emerged through the process while still being attentive to new themes that might emerge as the data collection process continued. I also utilized memoing to note some of the themes that emerged throughout the interview process.

Through open and axial coding, I developed an overall understanding of the data collected. I then engaged in phenomenological analysis using Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Creswell, 1998). This method presents a structured system of steps for analyzing data. I used this method to analyze the data that were collected from the seven co-creators in my study. Here, I offer a general description of the analytical steps I took; in Chapters 4 and 5, I show how I engaged these steps with my data and present the results of this process.

With all the transcripts in hand, I started selecting significant statements or passages from each transcript. These statements related to barriers, moments of thriving, support systems, or identity-based values utilized. In selecting these statements and significant passages, I followed the process of horizonalization, which refers to laying out all the transcripts and treating each statement made by a co-creator with equal worth and weight (Creswell, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). I then organized the data into clusters or themes. Next, as I worked through the data, I developed a list of statements that were nonrepetitive and nonoverlapping (Creswell, 1998). By grouping the significant

statements into broader units, also known as "meaning units or themes," I began providing a foundation for interpretation that created groups of larger overarching themes and removed repetition (Creswell, 1998). Once the statements were clustered into overarching themes, I drew from these themes to create a description of "what" the co-creators experienced around the phenomena of thriving. According to the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method, this is known as "textual description of the experience—what happened" (Creswell, 1998, p. 201). Doing so helped me draw commonalities among the co-creators' experiences and allowed me to create a detailed portrayal of how the Latinx/a/o students thrived at a selective HWI. Following the creation of the textual descriptions, I drafted a description of "how" the experience happened. This is known as a structural description, which allowed for reflection on the setting and the context, with a focus on the different perspectives on how the co-creators in the study experienced thriving. The final step involved drawing from both the textual and structural descriptions to refine the essence of their experience and write an overall description of the experience. The final step highlighted what the co-creators experienced around thriving and how they experienced it at a selective HWI.

Trustworthiness

I took certain measures to enhance credibility and trustworthiness in the study. One measure was triangulation. In qualitative studies, "triangulation involves checking information that has been collected from different courses or methods for consistency of evidence across sources of data" (Mertens, 2020, p. 282). Utilizing three different interview methods (i.e., sit-down, walking, and focus group interviews) offered co-creators multiple opportunities and ways to share their experiences and perspectives, and it provided me with a

variety of data to bring together to present the patterns and nuances of Latinx/a/o student thriving at HC.

A second trustworthiness measure I employed was member checking. Member checking can be formal or informal and ensures that the data collected and analyzed accurately reflects the co-creators' experience and reflections (Merten, 2020). I used member checking during the multiple interview rounds, first by sharing a summary of what each co-creator said and then near the end of the study as part of the focus groups. For the most part, the co-creators felt the summaries were accurate, but occasionally they would provide further context, such as when one co-creator, Viviana, elaborated on whether there was a difference between success and thriving. Initially, in my summary, I understood her to believe there was no difference, but she went on to share that, for her, success was a steppingstone toward thriving. In the focus group, the students also further clarified that, for most of them, thriving was not constant and was impacted both positively and negatively by the same people and spaces.

A third trustworthiness measure involves the researcher acknowledging their positionality or standpoint epistemology/critical reflexivity. According to Mertens (2020), "Researchers should acknowledge that all texts are incomplete and represent specific positions…. [T]exts cannot claim to contact all universal truth because all knowledge is contextual, therefore the researcher must acknowledge the context of the research" (p. 285). I engaged in critical self-reflection to clarify my own bias and to be transparent about my own assumptions and how they could impact the research. I present my self-interrogation in Chapter 4.

Fourth, I utilized peer debriefing with my committee chair and a doctoral cohort peer while I was conducting my data collection and analysis. Both my peer and my committee chair are fellow researchers who were familiar with my study and were able to pose searching questions. According to Mertens (2020), searching questions can "help the researcher confront his or her own values and to guide next steps in the study" (p. 281). Both my peer and committee chair helped me process what I was seeing in my data and consider next steps in my data analysis process. For example, in debriefing with my cohort mate about how the co-creators were experiencing thriving and how I was noticing that thriving was not constant, my cohort mate pointed out that thriving for them seemed to be episodic. This debriefing led me to pay attention to whether thriving was a constant state for the co-creators. I further clarified this with the co-creators by including questions in my focus group that elicited more data on the consistency of thriving or lack thereof.

Finally, I used thick description in the presentation of my analysis and findings in Chapters 4 and 5. Thick description entails providing sufficient details and careful descriptions of the time, place, context, and culture so that readers can understand the complexity of the research setting and co-creators (Mertens, 2020).

CHAPTER 4

PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION

To arrive at the essence of Latinx/a/o student thriving at a selective Historically

White Institution, I followed the process of phenomenological reduction, guided by

Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. Through

horizonalizing, every statement is given equal value and, over time, the statements that are

irrelevant or repetitive are deleted, leaving what Moustakas referred to as the "horizons." The

next step is to cluster the horizons into themes, which are then organized into a coherent

textual description of the phenomenon. In this chapter, I present the horizonal statements,

followed by the themes or larger meaning units, to show what the study co-creators shared

about the racialized barriers they experienced and how they overcame these adversities and

thrived at HC. Before doing so, I reflect on how my position as a Latina working in higher

education and my experience as an undergraduate student attending an HWI shaped my

relationship to the phenomenon of Latinx/a/o student thriving. I also introduce the study co-

creators.

Self-Interrogation in the Study

According to Moustakas (1994), "The method of reflection that occurs throughout the

phenomenological approach provides a logical, systemic, and coherent resource for carrying

out the analysis and synthesis needed to arrive at essential descriptions of experiences" (p.

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47). From the start, it was important for me to reflect on the numerous ties I have to this study's phenomenon of interest. Prior to beginning my study, I examined my positionality, as is common practice in phenomenological studies. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that "prior to interviewing those who have had direct experience with the phenomenon, the researcher usually explores his or her own experiences, in part to examine dimensions of the experience and in part to become aware of personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions" (p. 27). This process, known as "epoche," is meant to help the researcher put aside their own judgments. As Moustakas (1994) stated, "In the Epoche, the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and the phenomena are revisited" (p. 33). While I have a personal connection to the topic, examining my positionality before starting the research study reminded me of the lens I hold. This examined awareness helped me approach my study with an understanding that I am not the universal holder of Latinxs/as/os experiences at selective HWIs. Furthermore, while the study was inspired by personal factors, this does not negate an earnest phenomenological analysis. The following is a summary of my positionality as it relates to this study.

As a first-generation Latina from a working-class background and daughter of immigrants, I had my own experience attending a selective HWI. My experience as an undergraduate student shaped my career goals and ultimately my dedication to the topic of my study—as I shared in the Prologue. My positionality shaped everything from the research topic I chose to how I conducted my analysis. For my conceptual framework, I intentionally chose theories that are asset-based theories and that center Latinx/a/o experiences. I decided to utilize a walking interview data collection method because I thought it was important to not only hear the Latinx/a/o co-creators' experiences but also to experience them first-hand,

right next to them, as they described their lived experiences at HC. This decision was guided by my positionality because it allowed me in some way to walk briefly in their shoes. My positionality helped me feel a greater connection to the co-creators because their stories at times mirrored my own. Their experiences resonated with me in ways I do not think would have happened if we did not share similar identities. For example, when one co-creator, Maria, described the dynamics of her experience with her parents, who had immigrated to this country, I understood their relationship because that was the experience I had with my own parents. My parents' support was instrumental as an undergraduate, yet they never fully understood my experience because they never had the opportunity to experience college life.

As a Latina working in higher education at HWIs who has a passion for uplifting and empowering Latinx/a/o students to support them as they navigate higher education, I have first-hand experience with the context of what some of the co-creators described in their interviews. For example, as I discuss in more detail in this chapter and the next, some of the co-creators shared feeling tokenized or exploited by the institution. In these cases, the co-creators were involved with the student organizations or offices on campus as student leaders. The co-creators connected those leadership roles to thriving but struggled with knowing that the institution benefited from their labor with those groups. This resonated with me. As a student, I was highly involved with the Latin American Student Organization at my undergraduate institution. Our group put on multiple programs and events throughout the year, including a cultural show that required months of dedication and planning. As a student, my involvement with the group represented a space where I felt seen and heard and where I was in community with other Latinx/a/o students. The sense of belonging and community with the organization helped me navigate the isolation I felt when I first started

my undergraduate experience. Yet, looking back now as a practitioner, I see how the institution benefited from my labor—labor that often came at the expense of my academic coursework or well-being. For example, the institution used the yearly cultural show we hosted as a recruiting tool. The admissions office brought accepted BIPOC students who had yet to commit to the school to the show to help these prospective students see themselves at the institution, engage with the small BIPOC community, and make the decision to commit to my alma mater. While my Latinx/a/o student peers and I experienced community and joy in planning the annual event and rehearsing dances and skits that highlighted our culture, planning and hosting those cultural shows was exhausting and required considerable time and labor. Reflecting now, I was naïve to the exploitation because I needed that community. Sharing these experiences with the co-creators affirmed for me the importance of this study and deepened my understanding of their experiences.

I view my positionality as an asset to the study as it helped create a level of comfort and openness for the co-creators that perhaps would not have existed if I did not share similar identities and knowledge of their lived experience. I am also conscious of my own bias and made sure to question or take note of how my own subjectivity impacted my study. For example, during the data collection process, I found that I could easily summarize what the co-creators shared with me, or I found that I shared lived experiences with them. While this made it easy to summarize their experiences, I had to walk a fine line between being conversational with the co-creators to build rapport and sit in community with them, and ensuring that I was not leading the interview by possibly influencing what they would share. I refrained from sharing my own experience because I did not want my personal experiences to shape what the co-creators shared. I understood my relationship with the phenomena, but I

did not want it to shape the data. When I started the interviews, I wrote the following in a memo:

> I have found it hard to do the interviews without interjecting thoughts related to what the students are saying, especially when our experiences share so many similarities or when their experiences validate what I learned in my literature review about the racialized barriers that Latinx/a/o students face at HWIs.

While I struggled to walk that fine line, I knew I had to be careful and keep in mind my own relationship with the study and the phenomenon. I was aware that a proper phenomenological reduction of data required that I understand "the rhythm and relationships between phenomenon and self" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90).

Introduction of Co-Creators

In this section, I introduce each of the study co-creators. In addition to describing their self-reported background and demographic characteristics (see also Chapter 3, Tables 3 and 4), I offer a sense of each co-creator's experience at HC, focusing on the racialized barriers they experienced at HC as well as the people and places they associated with thriving.

Ana

Ana was a 20-year-old Dominican American AfroLatina. Ana was from Harlem, New York, and came from a working-class background. She identified as a first-generation college student. She was involved on campus with multiple organizations, including an identity-based student organization, and wanted to pursue a career in social work. Ana had a close relationship with her mother and sister, who served as support systems for her. During her time at HC, she had experienced microaggressions from peers, including white peers who

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sexualized her Latina identity. Despite the barriers she had experienced, she had remained

hopeful, finding joy in being around people who wanted to see her do well and succeed. She

credited some of her peers, including a peer mentor and roommate, as validating agents who

had helped her thrive. At HC, one of the spaces she connected to thriving was the academic

school, of which she was a part. Ana shared that while it still was not as diverse as it should

be, her academic school was one of the most diverse schools at the college, and she felt that

the professors, such as her academic advisor, were more liberal and progressive. As a

member of the school, she felt seen and saw her lived experiences reflected in the

curriculum.

Gabriel

Gabriel was a 21-year-old Dominican/Puerto Rican American. He identified as

AfroLatino, and his hometown was Providence, Rhode Island. Gabriel came from a working-

class background and identified as a first-generation college student. He enrolled at HC as a

biology pre-medicine major but would graduate with a degree in sociology. Gabriel

identified as gay and held multiple roles on campus. He served as a resident assistant,

orientation leader, and student ambassador, and was involved with an African roots dance

group on campus. While he did not have a close relationship with his father, his mother, aunt,

and grandmother had been his champions. At HC, Gabriel identified multiple spaces on

campus where he felt he thrived. One space Gabriel shared was a classroom space where he

felt validated and supported by the faculty who taught the class. While he struggled in other

classes, the professor in that class served as a validating agent for him, reminding him that he

was a strong writer. Another space he connected to thriving was the space where the

Dominican Student Organization held one of its shows. Gabriel associated elements of

thriving with that space, including experiencing cultural pride in sharing his Latinx/a/o identity with the campus, experiencing joy, and feeling comfortable. Gabriel was highly involved on campus with various identity-based groups. In part, this resulted from feeling like he was not fully accepted in any space on campus and needing to check some of his other identities at the door.

Jairo

Jairo was a 21-year-old recent graduate of HC and was starting graduate studies at another northeastern selective HWI in fall 2022. Jairo enrolled at HC as an accounting major but eventually changed his major to business management. He identified as Ecuadorian, and his hometown was Newark, New Jersey. Jairo came from a working-class family and was a first-generation college student. As a student at HC, he served as a mentor, freedom scholar, and student advocate. As a younger student at HC, Jairo did not feel accepted in spaces where first-year students tended to build community, including the lounges in the residence halls where students would often gather to watch games or be in community with one another. As a Latinx/a/o student on campus, he found community in self-created spaces, like one of the dining halls or one of the classroom spaces that served as a study space for him and a few of his peers. He experienced other elements of thriving in spaces like the Center for Diversity, Equity and Social Justice, where he felt that the administrators were more welcoming of his Latinx/a/o identity. He also experienced thriving in spaces like the Harbor1st Center, where he found validating agents, or the Beacon Center, where he served as a support system for other students who had significant financial needs.

Maria

Maria was a 21-year-old recent graduate of HC who was returning in the fall to pursue a master's degree. As an undergraduate, she enrolled at HC as a political science major but struggled with how male and white-dominated the major was, not only on the peer level but also in the makeup of the department faculty. She therefore changed her major to applied psychology and human development and eventually graduated magna cum laude. She identified as Salvadoran and resided in central Massachusetts. She came from a working-class family and was a first-generation college student. As a student, she worked multiple jobs as a research assistant and was involved as a freedom scholar. Maria found community with her roommates, with whom she shared various marginalized identities, including being Latina. With her roommates, she experienced a sense of comfort and home and felt like she could be her authentic self with them. They celebrated and lifted each other up, which was critical for her because this happened when they were isolated in their residence hall due to COVID-19 restrictions on campus. Maria also intentionally sought the support and mentorship of a professor on campus who shared her Salvadorian ethnicity. When she learned about his presence on campus, she sought him out, and even though he taught at the graduate school level, she managed to take classes with him and seek his mentorship. He was a validating agent for Maria, someone who she said helped her thrive at HC. At one point, Maria considered going into academia after graduating from HC. She applied and was accepted into multiple doctoral programs, but upon further reflection—including concerns about the whiteness in academia and the need to always "fight and prove [her] worth"—she decided to wait to pursue a doctoral degree. At the time of this study, she was pursuing another focus for her master's program.

Ricardo

Ricardo was a 21-year-old from Puerto Rico majoring in biology. Ricardo was a working student and was involved with one of the largest Latinx/a/o identity-based student organizations on campus. Though he identified as middle class, he shared that he faced the financial struggles of attending a selective HWI, where many of his peers came from wealthier backgrounds. Ricardo had a close relationship with his mother, who served as one of his support systems. He was working toward pursuing a career in medicine. Ricardo experienced microaggressions from some of his white peers in the residence halls. For example, he shared how they assumed he was Mexican or that he did not have a U.S. passport because he was from Puerto Rico. As someone who saw himself more as an extrovert, his ability to find community on campus was an important element that he related to thriving. He arrived at HC already knowing a few other students from Puerto Rico, but he found a community in the Latin American Student Organization, where he experienced joy and cultural pride and felt he could be his authentic self. Ricardo found a validating agent in his advisor and connected his relationship with him to his ability to thrive at HC.

Veronica

Veronica was a 21-year-old Latina from Atlanta, Georgia. She identified as Mexican and came from a working-class background. She was a first-generation college student majoring in theology and applied psychology. Her parents had immigrated to the United States and were undocumented for a time. Her parents were two of her biggest champions. She was involved in multiple leadership roles, including an identity-based student organization, and worked two jobs on campus. Veronica spoke to the importance of caring for oneself, especially as it relates to mental health. During her time at HC, she had had to

deal with the stigmas often associated with mental health in the Latinx/a/o community and moved beyond them to make sure she was caring for her own mental well-being. Veronica also connected with validating agents who shared her Latinx/a/o identity and who had become her champions, which she connected to her ability to thrive at HC. These agents not only connected her to the resources she needed, but they also served as mentors. Veronica also found that she thrived in leadership roles in which she could support other members of the Latinx/a/o community.

Viviana

Viviana was a 21-year-old Latina from Florida. She identified ethnically as Dominican and racially as white. She was from a middle-class family, and her father held two bachelor's degrees. She was studying psychology and planned to pursue a master's degree in the future. Ultimately, she was interested in working in the Latinx/a/o community back home. She enrolled at HC as a biology pre-medicine major. She had a close relationship with her family, especially her mother, who served as a strong support system for her. During her time at HC, she made the decision not to get involved with any identity-based student organizations because she was not sure if she would fit in. She was involved with multiple mentoring and leadership roles. Viviana connected her leadership role with the first-year experience program at HC to her ability to thrive. Through mentoring other students, she felt connected to her Latinx/a/o value of community. On-campus spaces she associated with thriving included the classroom where she served as a leader for the first-year program and the gym where she worked. For Viviana, the gym was a space where she prioritized her well-being, which she connected to thriving. Family was another critical element that Viviana associated with thriving; being with her family affirmed her Latinx/a/o identity. This was

important because at HC, she often struggled with feeling like she needed to check her Latinx/a/o identity at the door, not only in spaces with white peers but also in Latinx/a/o spaces. In white spaces, she checked her identity at the door as a form of survival; with the Latinx/a/o community, she felt that they often questioned her Latinidad because she was white-passing and did not speak Spanish. Viviana struggled to find the energy in either space to explain her Latinx/a/o identity to others.

Individual Experience to Non-Overlapping Horizonal Statements

To make sense of the interview data from the seven co-creators, I utilized Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of phenomenological analysis. Following multiple reviews of the interview transcripts, I followed the process of horizontalization to select significant passages from each transcript. I then reduced these statements to a list of 18 non-overlapping horizonal statements. This step was the most formidable of the analytic process due to the large amount of data I had collected from the sit-down and walking interviews and the final focus groups. With time, I discerned non-overlapping statements, some of which I had started to pick up on during the second round of data collection (i.e., the walking interviews). As I listened to one co-creator's experiences, I called to mind what another co-creator had previously shared. Memoing and peer debriefing throughout the interview process also helped me note some of the details that stood out during the data collection process. The 18 non-overlapping horizonal statements ranged in scope from racialized barriers the co-creators experienced to elements the co-creators connected to thriving, as well as individuals and spaces that impacted their ability to thrive at HC. Initially, there was no strategic sequence to how the statements were presented. With time, I began rearranging the statements based on potential relationships to form larger

meaning units. In the following sections, I describe the 18 non-overlapping horizonal

statements, which I reinforce with direct quotes from the co-creators.

Co-Creators Experienced Racialized Barriers, Including Microaggressions, Lack of

Representation, Being Othered/Feeling Like They Did Not Belong, and Isolation

The co-creators in my study affirmed what I had learned from prior literature on

Latinx/a/o student experiences in higher education institutions. Similar to the experiences of

past students, the co-creators experienced various racialized barriers, including lack of

representation, microaggressions, feelings of invisibility and not belonging, and isolation

(Delgado Bernal, 2002; K. González, 2002, 2016; Hall, 2017; Harper & Hurtado, 2007;

Jones et al., 2002; McCoy, 2014; Robertson et al., 2016). These barriers were experienced in

relation to peers as well as faculty and staff. While my study was not meant to focus on the

racialized barriers the co-creators shared, it is important to highlight specific incidents the co-

creators dealt with to emphasize that there is a culture of racism at HC. Additionally,

overcoming barriers is part of thriving. In this case, showcasing the racialized barriers

highlights the racism and whiteness at HC and shows how these barriers are connected to the

phenomenon of interest. The following are examples of racialized barriers the co-creators

experienced.

Ana recalled the microaggressions and sense of being othered that she experienced

during an interaction with a white peer on campus. As Ana was walking across campus, a

white student she did not know approached her. The white student used his phone as a

microphone and started interrogating her. That day, Ana was wearing a hoodie with an image

of Bad Bunny, the Puerto Rican rapper/singer. She was walking around campus with her

headphones on when a white student "just like comes into my face" and asked, "'Oh, are you

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a Bad Bunny fan?'" This seemingly "random" exchange then became explicitly racialized, as the white student played a "guessing game" with her racial/ethnic identity. Ana explained,

> So I remember at one point he just assumed my ethnicity. He's like, "Oh so you are Puerto Rican?" I'm like, "No." I was like, "I'm Dominican." He was like all like, "Latina mami like you're so spicy" and I was like I just walked away and like his friend is recording like everything that's happening. So, that's been like one instance that has happened on campus where it's kind of made me feel uncomfortable because he was putting me on the spot as well as recording without my consent. Recording me trying to like guess my ethnicity as if like I'm like some like exotic creature like, "Oh, my God, he's never seen a Dominican before." So, he decides to, just like, you know, act out of bounds … like, "What is she? Is she this or is she that like let's play a guessing game?" Which I'm kind of just standing there like um, you know, it's very awkward for me and it makes me feel uncomfortable cause I'm not a guessing game. Like my identity is not something to guess, and to like play around with, because, you know, with identities as well with Hispanics is very much like, we always go through identity crisis, so to be able to like be mistaken for something else and to like have those like I said, these people like guess and feel as if like, oh, like it's okay, just like ask you off the bat or assume like who you are that has always happened to me being on the HC campus.

Like Ana, Ricardo shared an interaction in which he was microaggressed by one of his white peers. This happened in the residence halls during Ricardo's first year at HC. Ricardo shared,

> I remember a time in my freshman dorm. We had one [student] in that hall that was super problematic. He came out like drunk one night, and I was going to the

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bathroom, and he was like, "¡Órale, güey!" [Mexican colloquial term meaning "Okay, man"] and he just went out. Not Mexican. Thank you. And it's that type of thing that it's sort of microaggressions like I feel there have been more hate crimes in general towards Black people. There are still, there could be, and there are still more microaggressions in that sense towards Latinos, and it's sad that that happens.

Other co-creators spoke about feeling invisible yet hyper-visible at HC as Students of Color. According to Maria,

I would say being a Student of Color at a HWI was simultaneously being seen and unseen at the same time. I obviously contrasted with the normal student body. I think it's so obvious that you are different, or you don't belong there. And then in that way it's a stark contrast, and at the same time, there's such a weird feeling of being invisible and unseen.

Finally, for some co-creators, the lack of racial/ethnic representation in classes was a barrier. Gabriel, for example, noticed that unless he took certain classes where he might find more BIPOC students, he was often the only AfroLatino student in classes. As the lone AfroLatino, he felt the pressure to serve as a representative for his marginalized identities, to give voice to his experiences. He explained,

Academically, in a classroom I usually am the only one that looks like me, unless I'm catering my course towards classes where I know more Black people will be, so that's an African diaspora class, a sociology class. Those separate classes tend to have more of people that looks like you, but when I'm not in those classes, I often feel the pressure to represent and to make sure that underserved populations voices [are] heard.

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These examples of racialized barriers tell a story about the type of environment the Latinx/a/o co-creators experienced at HC. As I show in subsequent horizontal statements, these racialized barriers impacted co-creators' mental health, their ability to seek help, and even their family relationships. As I also show, despite the racialized barriers, the co-creators found ways to thrive at HC and did not let the barriers they experienced define them.

Co-Creators Persevered Beyond the Racialized Barriers

While the racialized barriers impacted the co-creators' experiences at HC, co-creators moved beyond the barriers they experienced. How they did so might have varied, but they all persevered beyond the barrier. For example, Maria shared that finding community at HC mitigated the negative impact of not being seen and the feeling of not belonging as a Latinx/a/o student at an HWI:

> Part of it can be because of my Latinx identity and not feeling like I belong. But my freshman year in particular, that was a moment where I hadn't yet found my friend group and I hadn't yet formed those connections. And so, that definitely impacted my grades and so I didn't do as well, academically, my first semester. But I think once I got past that barrier, I think for me it was mostly about finding community. Once I found my community, and I was really only in my sophomore year. I can definitely see it reflected in my grades. I did better. And so, I think part of my academics not being so good my freshman year is because I was really lonely and depressed, and I couldn't be without that community. I didn't have the capacity or the drive to do well in my classes or to look for resources and go to office hours.

Similarly, Jairo shared that making connections with friends throughout his years at HC helped him move beyond the racialized barriers he experienced. In addition, those connections became sources of support that helped him confront future barriers. Jairo shared,

Eventually, like throughout the years I made my friends, and my friends were of many races. But eventually, when I made like those connections of like people that look like me and came from the same community as me, it was so much better of an experience. We would both, like let's say we both sit together in a classroom, and I'd be like, "Do you get this?" and they wouldn't get this. So, it would be like okay, "We both don't get this, let's help each other out." But obviously like when I was the only one, I was like, "Who do I turn to," and it looked like everyone knew what they were doing.

For Maria and Jairo, there was comfort in finding a community or people who shared similar identities with them. With time, they were able to move past the racialized barriers they experienced and navigate future barriers.

Co-Creators Experienced Stress Related to Academic Pressure, Leadership Roles, and at Times Their Latinx/a/o Culture That Made It Difficult to Care for Their Mental Health

In addition to the racialized barriers, co-creators struggled with stress and various mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, that they attributed to the competitive nature of HC and the pressure to excel academically. As Ana described, it was easy to get entangled with academic pressure and associate "success" with grades:

I think especially with HC being so competitive with grades and stuff, it's like you're in an environment where you feel that's all there is. But I have to look for myself, that

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there is more to it than just academics. And like I said, academics is very important,

like that is a top priority. But I tend to remember that there's other things about

college that I have to explore rather than just focusing on my academics. I think that

actually plays a role in that kind of development, especially coming in as a first year.

You would think that that's all there is. The stress and the pressure of that.

Gabriel was another co-creator who spoke about the academic pressures of HC while trying

to manage everything else apart from academics that he had going on. It is important to note

that the roles Gabriel held outside his academics were due to financial reasons but also

because he found joy and other elements of thriving in those roles. Gabriel shared,

It can also be that I have a lot of other things that are going through my mind that I

can't maybe focus on academics. And I wish that it would be easier for me to just

focus on my academics instead of worrying about the other things that I'm a part of.

So, for example, I want to say that like I have to work as like a non-negotiable, so

that's why I'm a Resident Assistant, and that's why I work at the museum and that's

why I'm gonna probably need another job because those two aren't even cutting it.

But I will say, it is also I need to step away from academics and work. And I need to

focus on things that bring me joy and bring me happiness. And when I feel

comfortable because I don't want to be isolated in a library or a room, because to be

honest, I'm not happy doing that. So that's when I go to organizations like the

Dominican Student Organization. Because when I'm around people and in that space

I do feel happy. So, I feel like it's a balance. But then again, it's not really a balance

because sometimes I can't prioritize my academics because I have to worry about like

my mental [well-being].

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Gabriel explained that while he struggled to balance academics, jobs, and student organizations, he needed the latter two to survive and feel joy and happiness at HC. If he had always put academics first, his mental well-being would have suffered. At HC, Gabriel had to think about how he was taking care of his mental well-being, which was impacted by everything he did. These pressures and barriers at times contributed to the co-creators' struggles with mental health or presented barriers to taking care of their mental well-being.

Additionally, co-creators sometimes questioned whether they could or should seek support in navigating the mental health issues they were struggling with, based on a belief that there is a stigma in Latinx/a/o culture around mental health. For instance, Veronica described how she struggled with feeling like she could not speak to her parents or family and how some Latinx/a/o peers minimized her mental health struggles:

Well, I feel like even though my parents, like, don't hold these beliefs, I feel like my family holds these beliefs that, like mental health isn't real, period. And like I've also talked to a lot of students here on campus who, like, are really scared of that or like don't know how to respond to that. And I remember before I started seeking treatment, I would tell one of my friends how I was feeling and she was like, "Oh, maybe it's just like a phase. Don't go on medication, like, you know, stuff like that isn't good." And I know she didn't have any, like, bad intentions with that, but it was just the way our culture is, you know? So, I feel like being able to have that experience of going to therapy and then being able to talk about that with other people, and like it showed me that just because our culture says one thing, that's not how it is. Like, just because we don't talk about our things too much in our Latin

culture doesn't mean we shouldn't. And I feel like if anything that just made me see the need for more mental health resources within the Latinx community.

HC Offered Various Resources, but Accessing Those Resources Was Left to the Student; HC Did Not Consider the Complex Dynamic That Students Can Have With Asking for Help or Seeking Resources

Some co-creators shared that it was difficult figuring out what resources were available to them at HC and that it took them some time before they knew and utilized the resources. For example, Maria shared,

> [I] always had to look for those resources, which I think is the downside with HWIs, even though a lot of those resources exist. But you really have to take the initiative to find them cause they're not presented to you, and so you really have to find them, and then you really have to learn how to advocate for yourself because I feel like, especially my freshman year, I didn't know that yet … but obviously after a while, I learned how to advocate for myself and learned how to reach out. And so, I didn't have a problem anymore. But the onus is definitely upon you as a student, which is a little bit unfortunate like it should just be there for you.

Challenges accessing resources at HC and not knowing or feeling confident seeking help and advocating for themselves impacted co-creators academically, socially, emotionally, and psychologically. Veronica explained that in a selective HWI like HC, where many students benefit from economic and educational privilege, *not* asking for help during her first class "cost" her:

> I felt like students here at HC were just, a lot of them were more privileged economically and educationally. They were able to receive a much better quality of

education. And it was just very apparent the moment I started my first class that I

didn't know how to best write a paper, or that I had to participate in my classes and

stuff like that. I didn't know those things beforehand. So, I feel like that made me just

embarrassed in a way to ask for help and to kind of seek that extra support because

everyone was clearly doing fine, and I felt like I was the only one that wasn't. So, I

feel like that cost me to just not form good relationships or form relationships in

general with my professors, or to understand that asking for help and not knowing

how to do things was also fine.

Co-Creators Resisted Whiteness and Cultural Norms to Overcome Barriers

Often without knowing it, Latinx/a/o co-creators tapped into their resistance capital

(Yosso, 2005) to challenge racialized barriers and Latinx/a/o cultural norms. Maria resisted

whiteness at HC by questioning her white peers' privilege because they can experience a

sense of belonging at HC that BIPOC students are not able to experience. Maria shared,

It's just like so obvious to me that, like, these spaces [were] not built for me and for

most students who are not white, wealthy, male, and rich.… [I'll] always have a

feeling that I don't belong or I'm not welcomed in this space.

In challenging the privilege her white peers experienced, Maria pushed back against

whiteness at HC and how it only creates spaces for white students, ostracizing anyone else

who does not hold that racial identity. Another co-creator, Veronica, also used her resistance

capital. Veronica found herself dealing with anxiety and depression during her first year at

HC. As she considered how to address her mental health, she was concerned about how

seeking counseling would be perceived by her family and peers. Veronica said that dealing

with depression is "not a conversation you have in some Hispanic households." But even

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when confronted with pushback from some family members and Latinx/a/o peers, Veronica challenged the stigma often associated with therapy in the Latinx/a/o community and sought support from the counseling center.

Even Though They Experienced Racialized Barriers, Co-Creators Maintained a Sense of Hope for the Future Both for Themselves and Future Students

Despite the racialized barriers they faced, the co-creators in my study tapped into the aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) they brought to HC and were hopeful for the future. According to Gabriel,

I've learned throughout the years that there are a lot of barriers, but it becomes hope, and I even talked about how I feel like there's something wrong with me, but at the end of the day I am hopeful because I've made it this far and I'm gonna make it farther. So even though I may have all these barriers, it kind of makes you think that, okay, even though society or even though I may be thinking that there's something wrong with me, there's something in me that has been able to survive and persevere. That has been able to, even though I live in a world that doesn't want to see me succeed or doesn't want to see me thrive, that there's something within me that has pushed me and that is gonna continue to push me to where I need to go.

Even when suffering from imposter syndrome, including moments when they thought they were the problem, not the institution, co-creators remained hopeful. Many also hoped that the diversity, equity, and inclusion work they did at HC, like advocating for the Latinx/a/o community on committees or leading programs that highlighted the Latinx/a/o experience, would create a better campus climate for future Latinx/a/o students. They were

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hopeful about changes on campus and hopeful for their futures, even after facing adversity as Latinx/a/o students. For instance, Jairo said,

> I definitely do feel a sense of hope in the sense that, like myself, along with other peers, kind of did fight against the racial barriers we were enduring. We did advocate for more diversity. We did advocate for a more diverse curriculum and stuff like that. So, I feel like in a way I was hopeful because I knew we were kind of being the fighters for change for maybe the future generations that follow us that go to HC. They'll see a change. So, I am hopeful that, although we faced those racial barriers, maybe we fought hard enough to kind of break them down slowly, for the next people that come.

Co-Creators' Definition of Thriving Was Not Connected to Academic Achievement

Latinx/a/o co-creators often defined thriving outside the traditional white heteronormative definitions, such as maintaining a high GPA and excelling academically, especially at selective HWIs. For example, some co-creators connected thriving to self-care, boundary setting, and putting themselves first. According to Viviana, "I do think that a part of thriving is taking care of yourself and your wellness in all aspects and not trying to feel like all you need to do in college or for yourself is in the classroom." For others, thriving was associated with developing relationships and building community. For instance, Maria shared that her thriving was never correlated with her GPA but with finding community:

> For me, thriving was never, like it can never be measured by a number. You know what I mean? Like a GPA or grade, or the number of acceptances, or like the number of scholarships or awards that I won in my undergrad. Those are all good things I was

proud of. But I don't feel like I ever really like was thriving with that; I think to me,

thriving was more really finding community.

A Sense of Home Was Connected to Thriving

For most of the co-creators, a sense of home was connected to thriving, whether it

was because home instilled values they found themselves connecting to thriving at HC or

because they connected thriving to spaces and people that made them feel at home. In

general, part of the challenge of thriving at HC had to do with co-creators being far from

home and their families. For example, for Viviana, her home represented her family, and the

physical distance from her family made it difficult for her to thrive. Additionally, being

unable to build a sense of family with peers and other agents at HC made it hard for her to

thrive. Viviana shared that although she kept receiving messages from the institution about

HC feeling like home, she realized that it would never feel like home because her family was

not there. According to Viviana,

> So, it's like when you miss home, you miss all those people [parents, siblings,
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> cousins], and it's like you can come to college. I think you come to college, and
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> people are like "Oh, you make friends—that feels like home." And I was getting all
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> those messages of like, "This place really can feel like home or Harbor College can
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> really feel like home." But home to me never happens without my family.

For other co-creators, tapping into some of the values learned at home was associated with

thriving at HC. For example, Jairo felt that "the traditions [he] was taught at home and the

values that [his] parents instilled in [him]" helped him thrive at HC. Specifically, he was

talking about how his parents taught him to focus on helping others in his community. This

was something that, growing up, he saw his parents do within their community at home, and

at HC Jairo felt like he was thriving when he gave back to the Latinx/a/o community there through his work with the Beacon Center and his leadership role on the LASO executive board.

Ricardo was another co-creator who connected spaces where he felt at home to thriving. For example, during our walking interview, Ricardo shared that he often felt at home at a location off-campus: the barbershop. While we did not visit this location during the walking interview, Ricardo shared that the barbershop he frequented since his first year at HC was called "Los Hermanos" (the brothers). It was a place that reminded him of home. Ricardo shared,

> It's a Dominican place … and literally since freshman year, I've been going there.…
> Yeah, it's a special place because it's another reminder of back home because here
> you can have a Latino identity, but it's still like an American place. Like you go to
> that barbershop that's a Dominican place, you feel like you're in Republica
> Dominicana.

The barber shop was a reminder of home that Ricardo did not experience at HC. While Ricardo was from Puerto Rico, the barbershop represented a space that reminded him of the Dominican Republic, which has ethnic resemblances with Puerto Rico. That resemblance to home was why Ricardo associated that space to thriving more than any other space, even more than the Latinx/a/o identity-affirming spaces at HC.

Community and a Sense of Belonging Were Connected to Co-Creators' Ability to Thrive

The one common factor contributing to Latinx/a/o co-creators' thriving was their ability to find/build community and create a sense of belonging at HC. The communities

included identity-based organizations, communities they formed with roommates, and those created in some identity-based centers or offices on campus. Through these communities, co-creators felt connected and empowered, found support, and experienced moments of joy and belonging. Some experienced that sense of community and belonging associated with thriving through their involvement in identity-based student organizations. When I asked Jairo to define thriving, he shared that one element of thriving occurred when he was "making friends [and] making connections." Jairo was able to experience this element through his involvement in the Latin American Student Organization (LASO). During his walking interview, Jairo said,

> So, this is where LASO would meet. And for me, this is a really nice community. I joined my sophomore year, I believe, and it was a group that encompassed all of Latin America. So, there were Mexicans, there were Colombians, there were Puerto Ricans, Dominicans in that club. And so, through that, the events we put on were very much like, we all have our own perspectives, we all have our own upbringing. And it was very much like a friend group where we played music, we had little parties afterwards. We hung out outside of school. And the work that we did was really about how we can make other Latin American students feel included at HC specifically.

While Jairo found community in LASO, an established student organization, others created their own communities to experience a sense of belonging and thriving. For example, Maria found a community with friends who shared similar identities and experiences. After forming a connection with one such person, she met others with whom she eventually lived. Maria explained,

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So, I dormed with her. And then a few of her friends who are all, the majority are like Latina, the majority are low-income and first-gen. So, we dormed together our junior year, and that's the first time I felt like I truly had a community on campus because we all shared the same identities and we all just shared the same experience. And I remember it was a space that we could, you know, at the end of the day, like we could talk and vent about some type of microaggression we encountered or about something that someone said in one of my classes that was aggravating … so we got really close my junior year, and that's the first time I felt like I actually found my close-knit, like friends at HC…. [W]ith these girls, I felt like I had a home, which was a community collective. We all cared about each other. We cared that we were each thriving. We would check in with each other. And it was the little things that we do with each other, like we would celebrate birthdays. I remember during my junior year during the pandemic, we would literally host little mini parties, just for us because it was COVID, but just us roommates. Every week we had a theme just because we got through that week because it was COVID. And plus, just being at HC in general wasn't an easy type of thing.

Co-Creators Found a Greater Sense of Self-Confidence When Thriving

Some co-creators connected particular events and experiences to developing a greater sense of self and confidence. They experienced this greater sense of self when they felt they were thriving. These events and experiences included overcoming racialized barriers and moments when they felt empowered. For Ana, overcoming barriers helped her feel stronger and more appreciative of who she was:

[Overcoming barriers] always gives me a boost of confidence. I definitely want to

say it gives me a sense of, I think, similar to the question [about what ways you've

developed a greater sense of pride in your Latinx/a/o identity after overcoming

racialized barriers] before, it just gives me a sense of pride within myself. And

appreciating myself as a person. Like I said, there are times that I do feel small. But I

think that at times I'm able to overcome stuff like that. I feel powerful, and I feel very

much stronger than I did before.

In Ana's case, overcoming challenges gave her confidence, self-pride, and strength that she

related to thriving and helped her feel like she could overcome future barriers. For other co-

creators, a greater sense of self resulted from getting involved on campus. In Veronica's case,

she was a member of the Mexican Student Organization executive board, a freedom scholar,

and a peer advocate, and was involved with the admissions office—all of which allowed her

(and other co-creators) to take up space at an institution where she had previously felt like

she did not belong. As Veronica noted,

I definitely liked involving myself and stuff like this. Like it definitely makes me feel

a lot more secure. Like, for sure. It makes me feel like I have a place here. I'm

allowed to take up space here on this campus and do what I want to do and just

actually being able to do it. My confidence compared to, like, my freshman year, is a

lot higher because of the things I've been able to do.

By "taking up space" at HC, Veronica developed greater confidence, an element that she

connected to thriving. With time and by getting involved in roles that she found fulfilling and

could give back to her community, Veronica built a greater sense of confidence that she

connected to thriving. This helped her feel more secure and like she belonged at HC.

Co-Creators Developed New Knowledge and Skills Connected to Their Ability to Thrive

After overcoming racialized barriers, some co-creators developed new knowledge and skills that they either used in their leadership, mentoring, and community involvement or felt would be helpful to them in the future. They associated these new skills with thriving because they saw benefits in developing these skills—for example, building on the navigational capital (Yosso, 2005) they had before HC. Specifically, co-creators learned how to code-switch and maneuver in white spaces when dealing with racialized barriers, a skill they would need in future professional settings that are also predominantly white. According to Maria,

> I now know how to navigate white spaces, which is the reality of attending a HWI, you almost learn a second language, you know what I mean? You code-switch, you know what I mean? Now I know how to really navigate these white spaces and how to present myself and talk and things like that. I feel really comfortable going into a professional space and succeeding there. But like I said, it's kind of a sad reality because I have to adapt myself to fit in here to be successful here. And the same thing with the workforce and the, you know, going into my respective career type of thing. Yeah. And so, in a way HC prepared me for like I guess the real life, the real world, in a way that I know I like had mixed feelings about that.

Other co-creators developed their ability to communicate their emotions and felt that they had matured further. For instance, Viviana shared, "So I think that I am thriving in the sense of how I talk about my emotions and, like, to communicate them. I think I have become a lot more mature." Similarly, Veronica noted that participating in the peer advocates

program taught her how to "expres[s] her emotions" and further develop her speaking and presentation skills. She explained that she

> felt a lot more confident being able to talk and do presentations and stuff like that. That's why I'm doing it again next year, just because I struggle with expressing my emotions and thoughts. So, doing that really instills a lot of confidence in me. And I also see that even in class, I wouldn't really like to participate. But just because I'm able to talk in front of strangers, I feel like I can do that in my class too. So that was definitely good. And also, the peer advocates, like that talking and giving a presentation, helped me develop those skills even further.

Moments of Latinx/a/o Cultural Pride for Co-Creators Were Connected to Thriving

Some co-creators experienced moments of cultural pride in identity-affirming spaces, including student organizations. These were moments when co-creators felt connected and comfortable and when they could be their authentic selves due to the community and identity-based affirmation. But beyond their comfort, these were moments when co-creators felt pride in sharing their Latinx/a/o identity, not only with other students who shared their identity but also with others in the larger HC community. In these moments, they felt more pride in their ethnicities and Latinx/a/o identity because they were able to celebrate and connect back to their cultural roots through music, food, dancing, speaking Spanish, and being in community with other Latinx/a/o students while sharing their culture with the greater community. Gabriel's work with the Dominican Student Organization (DSO) often brought him pride in his ethnic identity because he could showcase part of his cultural roots with the campus. He said,

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I think my pride comes in most when I'm able to host the production with the

Dominican Student Organization. I feel like that's where my Latin identity shines

through and it's because we put on these large productions that incorporate not only

the BIPOC community but people also outside of the BIPOC community, to the

greater white community. And this is where we put our culture on display. It's like

we're speaking in Spanish, you're listening to Spanish music, you're eating our food,

you're in community with a lot of the Latinos on campus. So, having these big

productions, and seeing how much people are attracted to it, is where I feel the most

pride.

Similarly, Veronica shared her experience with the Mexican Student Association (MSA). As

a member of MSA, she could share her Latinx/a/o identity and culture and the pride she felt

about her ethnic identity with other students. These moments presented opportunities for co-

creators like Veronica to remind the campus that they existed at HC. Veronica shared,

I feel like also being involved in the Mexican Student Association here at HC, where

I've been able to share my culture and identity more closely with other students, has

definitely made me more prideful and like proud of my Latinidad. Because it's so few

of us, but also like we're few and mighty, like we're all so proud of like how far we've

come and how we're here and stuff … like I feel so seen right now and so supported,

and I feel like that has made everyone more prideful.

Family Was a Source of Support, but Co-Creators Felt That They Needed to Shield

Their Family From the Racialized Barriers They Were Experiencing on Campus

According to validation theory, Latinx/a/o students often rely on validation and

support from their family members (Rendón, 1994). This was true for some of the co-

creators. All the co-creators had some connection to family members who reaffirmed them and served as sources of validation. For some, it was their parents; for others, it was siblings or a tia (aunt). For example, Veronica shared,

> I've always had a very strong relationship with my parents. So, just already having that relationship with them made me feel comfortable sharing these experiences with them.… He [dad] was like, "You know, it's fine, you're there like you made it," and stuff like that. He was just trying to support me as best as he could because he knew what it felt like to be discriminated against or marginalized.… [T]hey always supported me to reach out to the offices because they knew that would also help in some way. But they were definitely a very, very important support system through my time here.

As a result of her parents' support, even though they lived far away, Veronica felt like she "could do anything." Her parents validated her existence at HC and reminded her she belonged there.

> However, validation theory does not address the pressure that some of these co-creators felt to shield their families from the negative and racialized barriers they experienced at HC. Some did not want to add to their family's burdens when they were already dealing with their own struggles at home. For instance, Gabriel said,

> I don't really talk to them about the struggles that I'm dealing with mentally or academically and that's because I don't want to overwhelm or overburden them. I've kind of put on this thing that I need to figure it out for myself, which can be bad. I'm also in a way looking out for them 'cause I don't want them to be at home worrying about me when they do have all of these other problems that they're going through.

Some co-creators believed that their parents, through no fault of their own, might not understand the challenges they faced at HC because the co-creators were the first in their families to go to college; not only did their parents not have an understanding of college, but they also did not understand what it means to be at an HWI. In addition to feeling like they could not worry their parents, some co-creators thought they had to maintain the positive facade of their experience at HC. As children of immigrants, the fact that they were attending college meant they were achieving the American dream their parents wanted for them. This illusion needed to be maintained so as not to disappoint their parents. About this tension, Jairo shared,

> My parents are very supportive of me. But it's like one of those things where you really wanna see your parents happy as a first-gen in a Latino family. I feel like for me, whenever they ask me, "How's college?" I always say, "Great." No matter what, I would never tell them about the racial incidents and if I [did, I] wouldn't really paint it, how it truly was. I would just try to be like, "Oh, this happened" [and] just brush it off because for me, like a deeper conversation that connects with my peers and like the people at HC. So, for them, I really don't want to disappoint them like, "Oh, well, he's not getting the college experience," as the first-born in the family to leave.

Co-Creators Received Validation From Various Internal Agents, Including Staff, Faculty, Administrators, and Peers

Validation theory also emphasizes the importance of internal agents within higher education institutions (Rendón, 1994). Students, faculty, staff, and administrators can positively and affirmingly impact Latinx/a/o student experience. Co-creators shared validating experiences with peers, faculty, staff, and administrators at HC. For example,

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Gabriel felt validated by a few professors at HC who affirmed his writing ability and his ability to excel academically. About a sociology professor, Gabriel shared,

I excelled in my papers, specifically in this class. So, her giving me that good feedback. Because that's where I wrote the most. Her giving me that good feedback. Like, "You're a great writer." Like, "Why isn't this published?" She really affirmed that even though I was failing in pre-med, I was excelling in sociology, I was excelling in the coursework where I had to read, reflect, and write, and not necessarily where I had to do math and like hard stuff. So she was, this class was instrumental in showing me where I can excel at. They helped me boost that confidence.

Gabriel also shared that

there was another professor that I didn't mention, but specifically during my first year. I feel like since my first year I was going through so much. I needed that extra assistance but really going to my professors specifically. There was one for my first-year writing. Yeah. And I just sat in her room, and again she affirmed that even though I was going through all this stuff, like my work was still really good, that as a student I was still able to, that I was still doing better and even excelling than my other peers. Yeah. So just again, I feel like a common theme that I've been talking about is just that affirmation.

For some co-creators, faculty, staff, and administrators validated them as student leaders and reminded them that they were assets to the institution. For example, Viviana shared,

[I]t's been kind of like, always check with people who I feel comfortable going to, and especially with Dean Francis being someone who I feel like has always affirmed me as a leader and a mentor just throughout the years and the different ways I've been involved in ELP [Emerging Leaders Program] and otherwise, and feeling like I can reach out to her and feeling like as I kind of like go on to the next chapter of my life and consider graduate school. And even when I was considering transferring and I went and talked to her about it, she was very affirming in terms of like, you know, what's best for you. And like, "I can't speak on your experience here, but I can speak on the fact that I know that you're an asset to the school." So just hearing those kinds of things is something that's really hugely affirming.

These internal agents affirmed and validated the co-creators' experiences. They served as mentors and affirming support systems and sometimes connected the co-creators to resources needed to navigate HC. As the quotations from Gabriel and Viviana show, these internal agents supported their thriving.

Identity-Affirming Spaces Provided Essential Resources, Spaces for Community, and Validation

Identity-affirming spaces often provide students with personnel and programmatic resources that they associate with thriving. In these spaces, co-creators found agents who listened to their experiences and built community through relationships with other peers who shared their identities. Additionally, they experienced a sense of belonging as their cultural backgrounds were accepted and celebrated. For instance, during our walking interview, Gabriel shared,

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So, I'm going to talk a little bit about this space before we enter it because if you want to take a look into it, we can because it will be open. But this is the Center for Diversity, Equity and Social Justice (DESJ) that we talked about. And this is really. Well, I got assigned an advisor and maybe we'll get to see my advisor, if they're in there. But some of the memories that I have in this place is going to my advisor. If something was going on academically or just to meet with my advisor if I needed summer funding or anything like that. But it's also a space where I got to see a lot of peers that were a part of the BIPOC community, where you're going to see there's a lot of places where we can chill and relax. For events like Hispanic Heritage Month, Black History Month, they will also be able to bring that food on campus for us.

For Ricardo, the Latin American Student Organization was one of the identity-affirming spaces he connected to thriving. During our walking interview, Ricardo took me to a classroom where LASO held weekly executive board meetings. Ricardo experienced love, affirmation, belonging, and connection during their meetings in that space. For this reason, he took me to that classroom, explaining that his experiences there were all connected to this ability to thrive at HC. Even though it was a regular classroom, for him, it was a space of thriving because the meetings held in that classroom were Latinx/a/o identity-affirming. Ricardo also met other Latinxs/as/os through LASO who became like family. Like Jairo, Ricardo noted that LASO was where he met Latinx/a/o students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds who became like family. Ricardo shared,

So, when I came here to LASO, I started meeting a lot of Latino Americans, a lot of Latino Americans that were just as proud, even though they've never stepped foot on where they lived [mother country/country of national origin]. Yeah. From the

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Dominican Republic, from Venezuela, from Colombia, from Cuba, um, Mexico. And to this day, I just love that fact. You felt like you have a different family, a different vibe, but at the same time, like, you feel all this love and all this peace being with them that it's almost like another reminder of your Latino culture but away from home.

In Identity-Affirming Spaces, Agents, and Resources Were Associated With Thriving and With Barriers

A harsh reality often addressed with hesitation by some of the co-creators was that some of the same spaces and agents they associated with thriving also presented racialized barriers. Co-creators experienced this tension in their leadership roles with identity-based organizations, within the centers that served students from marginalized identities, or with other leadership roles on campus. I observed that this was difficult for the co-creators to speak about. For example, Jairo hesitated to share and asked me to confirm that names would not be shared because the space and agent were important to him. He wanted to share a moment that disheartened him and threatened his thriving:

One experience that really sticks out to me from the Beacon Center is that the directors are People of Color, [overseeing] programs meant to serve People of Color. Well, everyone, poor people, low-income People of Color. And the fact that there was one experience where we had a social event down on main campus. We ordered food from a Mexican place … and the director was talking on the phone and she was very much like, "Oh, I don't understand them. Here Jairo, you speak Mexican, right?" And she handed me the phone. And that for me hurt … the fact that like you are the director and you met like I've seen her; she meets students who need help. She has

one-on-ones. She goes to different events. She goes to different faculty like she's the director. The fact that I had that experience where like, I'm you're like, I'm one of your workers. How do you not know that? It's like friendly fire. We're on the same team and you're hurting me here.

Jairo experienced a form of horizontal oppression, that is, oppression from others who shared similar or other marginalized racial/ethnic identities. Jairo's experience demonstrates that validating agents and identity-affirming campus spaces can also be toxic.

Another co-creator intentionally stayed away from identity-based student organization involvement. While many other co-creators felt they could be their authentic selves, found comfort and joy, formed relationships, and associated those organizations with thriving, Viviana did not. According to her,

Even though knowing those culture clubs existed and knowing that they're a niche for Latin American students, and they're a niche for Dominican students specifically at HC ... but I didn't feel like I was Hispanic enough to go to those clubs. Like if I go to a club meeting, and they're speaking Spanish, like, am I gonna be able to really feel like I can be at that club and be my authentic self?

To conclude, while these spaces and agents were associated with thriving, they were also associated with barriers and struggles for the co-creators.

Thriving Is Not a Permanent State of Being, and It Took Time for Co-Creators to Thrive

It took most co-creators time to experience or reach a thriving state. All the co-creators struggled in their first year of college, and some struggled even longer. During those times, there was no sense of thriving; in fact, they felt demoralized. As suggested in the

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previous horizonal statements, co-creators did not start feeling a sense of thriving until they began to form a community, connected to resources, got involved in and gave back to their community, and connected with agents who provided them with the academic, social, emotional, or psychological support they needed. While co-creators in their last year at HC felt like they had reached a state of thriving, many were still working toward it or acknowledged that thriving was not permanent. Even though some co-creators were further along, having been at HC for a few years, they shared that thriving was not a permanent state. By this time, they were more familiar with the resources, had established relationships with validating agents, and were connected to empowering identity-based communities. Yet, they still struggled with reaching and/or maintaining a constant thriving state. For instance, Jairo shared, "Personally, I feel like for me it's been like certain moments and spaces because I feel like that's the way it's structured, it's kind of hard for me to thrive all the time and the different aspects that I would be at." For some co-creators, thriving was like a "rollercoaster," with constant ups and downs, or like a work in progress. For instance, Ricardo explained,

> I feel like thriving is sort of a rollercoaster of emotions, so definitely not permanent. It's a work in progress whether it's personal, thriving. I feel like every aspect we've touched upon, thriving can change each day, like, you know, one day can be here and one day it can be there. But I feel as long as you remind yourself that it'll all be better and what you stand for and what your principles are. Even when thriving is at a low level, when the gas is low, at some point it will be back again so that can help, but definitely not permanent at all.

The co-creators highlighted that, even though they were further along in their academic journey, some aspects of HC continually threatened their thriving.

Latinx/a/o Co-Creators Felt Tokenized and Recognized That Selective HWIs Benefit

From Their Labor Through Their Leadership, Mentoring, and Supporting Other

Latinx/a/o Students and Addressing Issues of Social Justice and Inequities on Campus

While some co-creators thrived due to the connections and communities they built through leadership and mentoring roles, some felt tokenized and taken advantage of by the institution for their labor. From their perspective, HC gained much from their labor in their leadership/mentoring roles and the community- and service-oriented values instilled in them as Latinx/a/o people. For example, Veronica shared this sentiment about her experience as a student leader on admissions panels. She joined the panels because she saw their lack of representation and wanted to serve as a voice for her community when other Latinx/a/o families and their children attended these events. Over time, however, Veronica felt tokenized as she was often left to answer questions about diversity. According to Veronica,

> I feel also like it reminded me of this incident where I'm like, I was telling you about the panels. Usually I'll be the one to answer questions about diversity and stuff. And it got to a point where I was just like, "That's not okay," you know? I was also noticing I was the only [Person of Color] like they would have on the panels and they'd be like, "Oh, we need at least one Student of Color." To tokenize me. And I brought it up to them because I was like, "That's not okay." But I wouldn't have the balls to say that if I was a freshman. I did this last semester, and even then, I was like, "Oh my God." I was like, "Is that like, okay, am I allowed to say that?"

The admissions office knew that having a Person of Color on the panel was important. However, Veronica would often serve in that role because there was still a need for more Latinx/a/o representation in their admissions panel group. Though she was not sure if she

should, as an upper-class student, Veronica felt empowered to call out the tokenization that she experienced on the panel.

From Horizonal Statements to Larger Meaning Units

The 18 non-overlapping horizonal statements capture various aspects of the co-creators' thriving experiences at a selective HWI. As I examined these statements, I found connections that allowed me to narrow the statements to four meaning units. Table 7 provides an overview of how I paired the individual horizonal statements to formulate each larger meaning unit.

Table 7

Horizonal Statements to Larger Meaning Units

Horizonal Statement	Meaning Unit
Co-creators experienced racialized barriers, including microaggressions, lack of representation, being othered/feeling like they did not belong, and isolation.	
Co-creators persevered beyond racialized barriers.	
Co-creators experienced stress related to academic pressure, leadership roles, and at times their Latinx/a/o culture that made it difficult to care for their mental health.	Facing institutional and identity-based barriers that impact thriving and still remaining hopeful.
HC offered various resources, but accessing those resources was left to the student; HC did not consider the complex dynamic that students can have asking for help or resource-seeking.	
Co-creators resisted whiteness and cultural norms to overcome barriers.	

Horizonal Statement	Meaning Unit
Even though they experienced racialized barriers, co-creators maintained a sense of hope for the future both for themselves and future students.	
Co-creators' definition of thriving was not connected to academic achievement. A sense of home was connected to thriving. Community and a sense of belonging were connected to co-creators' ability to thrive. Co-creators found a greater sense of self/confidence when thriving. Co-creators developed new knowledge and skills connected to their ability to thrive. Moments of Latinx/a/o cultural pride for co-creators were connected to thriving.	Community-centered definition of thriving and the development of a greater sense of home, pride, self, and skills.
Family was a source of support, but co-creators felt they needed to shield their family from the racialized barriers they were experiencing on campus. Co-creators received validation from various internal agents, including staff, faculty, administrators, and peers. Identity-affirming spaces provided essential resources, spaces for community, and validation. In identity-affirming spaces, agents and resources were associated with thriving and with barriers.	External and internal agents, and identity-affirming spaces validated Latinx/a/o co-creator experiences and impact their ability to thrive.
Thriving is not a permanent state of being, and it took time for co-creators to thrive. Latinx/a/o co-creators felt tokenized and recognized that selective HWIs benefit from their labor through their leadership, mentoring and supporting other Latinx/a/o students, and addressing issues of social justice and inequities on campus.	Thriving is conditional on temporal, spatial, and labor dimensions.

Facing Institutional and Identity-Based Barriers That Impact Thriving and Still Remaining Hopeful

Co-creators experienced various forms of racialized barriers, including microaggressions, lack of representation, isolation, and feelings of not belonging at their selective HWI. These racialized barriers halted their ability to thrive, especially during their early years at HC. Some co-creators also struggled with barriers created due to their Latinx/a/o values and beliefs. Even when facing mental health issues or academic struggles, they had difficulty asking for help and sharing their struggles with their families due to familial and cultural expectations around academics and stigmas associated with mental health within Latinx/a/o communities.

Community-Centered Definition of Thriving and the Development of a Greater Sense of Home, Pride, Self, and Skills

For all the co-creators, thriving was separate from their academic ability. While they felt their institutions defined success in an academic sense, the co-creators often experienced thriving in other ways. For some co-creators, thriving was tied to self-care, finding peace, and joy. For others, thriving was found in spaces resembling home or where they found community and established relationships with others who shared their experiences. Some connected thriving to the leadership and mentoring roles they held on campus. In these roles, they felt a sense of thriving because they could live out some of their Latinx/a/o-based values around community, familismo, and service to others that they connected to their Latinx/a/o identity and culture. They also pushed for change at their institution, hoping that future Latinx/a/o students would not have to face the same barriers and struggles.

Additionally, all co-creators connected thriving to learning new knowledge, skills,

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and abilities that were applicable and relevant to their lives. Whether through overcoming racialized barriers or as part of the communities and leadership/mentorship roles they held, each co-creator connected thriving to their development of new skills. Lastly, others experienced thriving in spaces that celebrated their Latinx/a/o identity—spaces where they could showcase their identity and experience immense pride in their backgrounds and aspects of their culture.

External and Internal Agents and Identity-Affirming Spaces Validated Latinx/a/o Co-Creator Experiences and Impact Their Ability to Thrive

All co-creators connected thriving to external or internal agents that validated their lived experiences and affirmed that they belonged at HC. These agents played a role in connecting students to resources, providing moral support, validating student experiences through their shared identity, or empowering co-creators despite the racialized barriers they faced. Similarly, identity-affirming spaces played a role in the co-creators' ability to build community, create a sense of belonging, and/or validate their culture by celebrating and appreciating their Latinx/a/o identity. While validating agents and identity-affirming spaces were often connected to thriving, some of the same agents and spaces also negatively impacted the co-creators' thriving.

Thriving Is Conditional on Temporal, Spatial, and Labor Dimensions

Thriving was not a permanent state for the Latinx/a/o co-creators. Thriving can have temporal and spatial dimensions, and as a result, the co-creators in this study experienced what I have termed "episodic thriving." It took time for them to experience thriving, and it did not happen constantly or in all spaces. There were specific agents, spaces, and moments in relation to which the Latinx/a/o co-creators felt like they were thriving. Whether due to

institutional reasons or individual bias, co-creators sometimes experienced racialized barriers and impediments to thriving in identity-affirming spaces and from agents, including their peers, faculty, and staff. Additionally, the same agents and spaces supporting their ability to thrive could negatively impact their sense of thriving.

The at-odds tension that leadership and mentoring roles played in the co-creators' ability to thrive cannot be ignored. While co-creators found a sense of thriving through their leadership and mentoring roles, some expressed a sense of exploitation by the institution. These co-creators felt they sometimes gave the institution more than they got back. While the leadership and mentoring roles they held were connected to other elements of thriving, like experiencing joy, forming relationships, and supporting other Latinx/a/o students, these roles often required significant time and labor from the co-creators. For some co-creators like Gabriel, this ultimately impacted their academics and time for other priorities like self-care.

Summary

This chapter outlined the phenomenological reduction that I followed to analyze the interviews with co-creators. I revisited my relationship with the phenomenon of Latinx/a/o student thriving at selective HWIs and any potential impact that could have had on my analysis process. I then highlighted significant horizonal statements that I found in my data during my initial rounds of coding. This was followed by a description of the process of reducing the statements to four larger meaning units. The meaning units are essential as they provide the foundation for a composite textual description, structural description, and the essence of Latinx/a/o thriving at selective HWIs, which I present in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

ESSENCE OF THRIVING FOR LATINX/A/O CO-CREATORS AT HISTORICALLY

WHITE INSTITUTIONS

Arriving at the essence of a phenomenon requires the researcher to return to the comprehensive description of the experience. According to Moustakas (1994), "The aim is to determine what an experience means to the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it" (p. 13). Suitably, this study sought to examine the life experiences of Latinx/a/o students at a selective historically white institution to understand the essence of thriving for Latinx/a/o students. After identifying the non-overlapping horizonal statements and meaning units described in Chapter 4, I searched for similarities and overlaps in the co-creators' experiences. Through this process, I constructed four overarching themes that spoke to what the Latinx/a/o co-creators experienced at HC and how those experiences shaped thriving for them.

Having developed the four overarching themes, I then generated a composite textual description and structural description of Latinx/a/o co-creators' experience of thriving. These two descriptions differ because the composite contextual description highlights commonalities in the co-creators' experiences, while the structural description explores different perspectives in their experiences as they relate to the phenomenon of Latinx/a/o student thriving at HC. The structural description also reflects the setting and context in

which co-creator experiences took place and how these variations might have impacted their thriving experiences. With the composite and structural descriptions articulated, I conclude my phenomenological analysis by describing the essence of Latinx/a/o student thriving at selective HWIs.

Overarching Themes

This section presents the four overarching themes I constructed from the horizonal statement and meaning unit analysis. The themes speak to what was pivotal to the co-creators' thriving at HC. Through this analysis, I noted similarities in the co-creators' experiences and differences in their individual experiences that subsequently informed a structural description. The four overarching themes are: (a) re-defining thriving in ways that are identity-driven; (b) thriving is associated with a feeling of home; (c) identity-affirming spaces and validating agents can foster *and* hinder Latinx/a/o students' thriving; and (d) thriving is episodic and has spatial, temporal, and labor dimensions.

Redefining Thriving in Ways That Are Identity-Driven

Historically, the traditional approach to measuring college student success has been through academic measures such as grade point average (Cuevas et al., 2017; Kinzie, 2014). According to this definition, student success occurs when students excel academically, as reflected in high GPAs, merit-based achievements, and the completion of the degree the students are working toward (Cuevas et al., 2017; Kinzie, 2014). Thriving expands the traditional approach of measuring college student success. According to scholars who have studied general student success and thriving in higher education, the latter involves "academic, psychological and interpersonal wellbeing and engagement" (Cuevas et al., 2017, p. 79). As I outline in this theme, the co-creators' definitions of thriving were not tied to

academic excellence; instead, they underscored personal and community elements, with the latter associated with their various identities, ethnic and cultural pride, and Latinx/a/o values.

Personal Elements

As noted, none of the co-creators connected thriving to their academic achievement, even those with higher GPAs. According to Gabriel, "I don't base my thriving on aspects that society usually does, so like whether that's get[ing] a [high] GPA. I don't feel like that's thriving necessarily." Similarly, Viviana shared,

> My idea of success doesn't match the university's success. And so, I think that's why for me personally, I've separated the definition of thriving and success because I can still be successful or unsuccessful by merits or standards outside of myself, something that fits the institution more so. But then I can still, on the other end, focus on thriving in different pursuits. And I think that that's how I've been able to find that definition of thriving. And I think more so just looking back on my experience and feeling ways that I've given myself peace at being at an institution like this and having to create spaces.

For Viviana, thriving and success were distinct, with the former based on a personal sense of being at "peace" at HC and the latter based on institutionally defined standards of merit. Viviana found peace and academic achievement by not overcommitting herself in the classroom and through extracurriculars. Additionally, Viviana created a space of thriving for herself at the HC gym. She took me there during our walking interview, explaining that she worked as a student employee and utilized the gym to care for herself and focus on her wellness. Viviana shared, "And I think that [the gym] has been one of the places where I felt kind of just like that culmination of like wellness in terms of taking care of myself.… And I

think that like that's also an aspect of thriving is like taking care of yourself."

Some co-creators felt that developing new skills and experiencing self-growth were aspects of thriving. For instance, as a panelist for the admissions office at HC, Veronica developed her communication skills, which she associated with thriving. Veronica said, "It's also just been a really good place for me to grow in my speaking, like in my talking skills, because parents will just ask questions, and you'll have to answer them right at that moment." Similarly, Viviana shared that she experienced personal growth in better expressing her feelings during her time at HC, which she connected to thriving. She explained, "So I think that I like thrived in the sense of how I talk about my emotions and like to communicate them. I think I have become a lot more mature." Similarly, Viviana connected her skills growth to her ability to thrive. Viviana's growth occurred through the lessons she learned when overcoming negative challenges. Specifically, she named the "people skills" that she learned and how those skills would help her develop relationships and navigate different experiences with internal agents, including peers, faculty, and staff. She connected this growth in "people skills" to her ability to thrive at HC.

Community Elements

Several co-creators tied thriving to being in community and supporting others, which some associated with Latinx/a/o values. For example, Gabriel said that "most of my thriving comes from the experiences with people, meeting new people and kind of having that joy as I go day to day. That's my thriving." While Gabriel worked as an RA for financial reasons, he enjoyed the position and found joy in supporting his residents and building community. As Gabriel shared, "When I'm thriving and happiest is when I'm around people. How do I say? When I'm around people or helping people. And I feel like in all of these spaces, I was able

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to meet wonderful people, but was also able to help people. So even as an RA I was able to help people."

Likewise, Jairo connected thriving to helping and supporting other students, which to him was "what being Latino really means." In his case, thriving came through his work at the Beacon Center, which supports students with financial needs. He explained,

I think the work I was doing there tied to my Hispanic identity because it grounded me to like who I am and a lot of that grounding and that shaping of who I am now and who I was then was very much like what my parents raised me to be like…. That work that I was doing at the Beacon Center aligned with the values of the Hispanic identity that I carry. Because when I was helping students, it reminded me of what being Latino really means. And like how I'm carrying that out at a HWI. Because like I said, like I was helping them and I felt good inside. I wasn't helping them because it was my job like it was more so I was helping them because it felt good inside and it was so nice to know that other Latinos or other students of color were succeeding and were able to have a good semester because of me. So, it was very much tied to who my parents raised me to be. How they as Latinos themselves, how they instilled those values in me and how I carried that into the work I was doing there.

For Jairo, supporting students, especially Latinx/a/o and other Students of Color, was a value he aligned with his Latinx/a/o identity. He saw this value modeled by his parents, who were always inviting of others and willing to lend a helping hand. Jairo felt his parents instilled this value in him, and now as a college student, he was living out this value by supporting Latinx/a/o students who needed the resources offered by the Beacon Center.

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Cultural and Ethnic Pride Elements

Co-creators like Ricardo and Maria described thriving as overcoming racialized barriers, cultivating a greater sense of pride in their ethnic identity, and feeling empowered. As noted in Chapter 4, Ricardo was microaggressed by a white student in the residence halls. This student assumed that Ricardo was Mexican, referring to him with a colloquial term often used in Mexican culture. While microaggressions like the one Ricardo experienced can leave students feeling deflated, Ricardo overcame this racialized barrier. In the aftermath, he felt even more proud to be Puerto Rican and was empowered. Ricardo shared,

> But once you overcome those barriers and notice that, you can talk about that. You can show off where you're from. That's when it kicks in, like I'm from Puerto Rico, like, there we go, give it. You become even more prouder. Your proudness, your pride I guess sort of boosted when you overcome that. Innately, I don't know why, but you sort of feel like more empowered.

Empowered by overcoming racialized barriers and from having a greater sense of pride in his ethnic identity, Ricardo experienced thriving.

Likewise, Maria felt a greater sense of pride and confidence in her abilities and grew more resilient after overcoming racialized barriers. Ultimately, she started seeing her identities as strengths, not barriers. According to Maria,

> I definitely do feel a lot more like resilient at the end of the day, especially having gone through all my 4 years. And I definitely see my identities as like, as a strength and I don't see them as a barrier. I don't see them as a weakness. You know what I mean? I think my identities are what makes me unique. What makes me valuable in any field, really. Now that I look at it. And so, I feel stronger now, like having gone

through that experience and things like that, 'cause I definitely do see them as like a

strength, never a weakness, not anymore, at least.

The co-creators practiced self-agency by eschewing institutional and societal definitions and

cultivating identity-driven definitions of thriving. Resisting a definition of thriving often

associated with academic achievement, excellence, and success, co-creators re-defined

thriving on their terms. Similar to prior literature indicating that thriving moves beyond

traditional definitions of student success, such as GPA and graduation rates (Kinzie, 2012;

Schreiner, 2014), co-creators in this study defined thriving in ways that were true and

validating to them. Their terms consisted of personal, community, and cultural elements,

many of which they linked to their identities and saw as connected to their Latinx/a/o values.

They supported others and lived the values instilled in them by their parents and family

members to serve the community. Even as they faced racialized barriers at HC, co-creators

saw themselves growing, maturing, finding peace and joy, becoming more confident, proud

of who they were and of their ethnic cultures, and empowered.

Thriving Is Associated With a Feeling of Home

Some co-creators linked a feeling of home to thriving. In some cases, a sense of home

was lacking at HC, which negatively impacted their ability to thrive; in other cases, they

found pieces of home at HC, which they associated with thriving. For almost half of the co-

creators, their involvement with Latinx/a/o-identity organizations provided that sense of

home. For example, DSO became Ana's home away from home, helping her feel "more in

touch with my roots with my Latinidad. That feeling more in touch with myself." Ana

associated this connection to her Latinx/a/o roots and sense of home with her ability to thrive

at HC.

Similarly, Gabriel noted that the organizations and groups at HC that he was part of provided a sense of home. To thrive, he kept himself connected to those organizations:

I have to go to all these different meetings and be with all these different types of people and share different parts of myself and all these different clubs and organizations to feel like I have a home on campus when it doesn't feel like a home.

Although HC did not feel like home, Gabriel found a home and experienced thriving in those smaller identity-affirming spaces.

Lastly, Jairo shared how he decided to get involved with one of the Latinx/a/o identity-based student organizations because his first interaction with the organization connected him to home. He pointed out how students at HC were encouraged to get involved, and one way they exposed students to different opportunities was during an involvement fair at the beginning of the year. At the fair, Jairo saw people at the LASO table dancing, cheering, and showing their ethnic and cultural roots. That table, he thought, "feels like home," and he got involved with the organization.

Identity-Affirming Spaces and Validating Agents Can Foster and Hinder Co-Creators' Thriving

As detailed in Chapter 4, validating agents and identity-affirming spaces were significant to co-creators' experience at HC. Validating agents varied from external agents, such as family, to internal agents, such as peers, faculty, staff, and administrators at HC. Identity-affirming spaces included formal, institutionalized spaces like the DESJ office, the Beacon Center, and Harbor1st Center. Identity-affirming spaces also included areas that students created for themselves, such as the familial space that Maria created with her roommates and that Gabriel created with BIPOC friends in their residence halls, or the spaces

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that co-creators cultivated in student-run, identity-based organizations like LASO and DSO. In discussing this theme, I first present how these agents and spaces were essential to co-creators' thriving at HC; I then show how those same spaces and agents were sometimes barriers to their thriving.

Fostering Thriving

For many co-creators, formal identity-affirming spaces and the staff who worked there were sources of thriving. For instance, a few of the co-creators spoke about the DESJ, which supports BIPOC students and promotes equity at HC, as a space of thriving. DESJ had five staff members, most of whom identified as Black, according to some co-creators. The center also oversees the peer advocates group, which helps promote a welcoming and inclusive environment at the center, hosts programs and events, and connects students to appropriate resources.

Gabriel, a co-creator who was drawn to DESJ, pointed out the center during his walking interview. As a student, Gabriel was assigned an advisor at DESJ and was able to seek various types of support, including academic and financial support. Additionally, the center was a space where he could connect to other BIPOC students and "chill and relax." Gabriel shared that the center hosted various events throughout the year, including National Latinx/a/o Heritage Month and Black History Month events. For Gabriel, DESJ was a place where his multiple identities were celebrated and where he could get "cultural food." During his first few years at HC, Gabriel did not like the food at HC, but he ate well on the nights the center hosted events with food. During his walking interview, Gabriel shared that he experienced thriving in the DESJ center because it created

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that sense of comfort and just acknowledging our identities on campus through those

events and those resources that they had. Because they acknowledge that we might

have struggles because of our identities. And they really hone their programs and

hone their resources to us. Where other places on campus might not do so well, at

that.

DESJ comprised multiple elements that Gabriel related to thriving. At the center, he was

connected to his advisor, who served as an internal agent who helped address some of his

academic and financial needs. The center was also a space where he felt comfortable and

connected to BIPOC peers and where his identities were acknowledged and celebrated.

Some co-creators received support they needed to navigate barriers at HC from the

staff at HC identity-based support centers. I saw this first-hand during Gabriel's walking

interview. He took me to the Beacon Center, which was a space he connected to thriving.

That day, the center was hosting an event with food. We walked into a space where I

immediately saw that Gabriel felt comfortable. He started dancing to the music playing and

introducing me to the staff at the center. Walking in there was always a "good vibe," he

explained, and there was "always hospitality." He was most excited about the "good cultural

food" they were serving because it was summertime (when he did not have access to his

regular meal plan) and was struggling to pay for his meals, even though he had a job as an

orientation leader. Although this position came with limited meals and a small stipend, the

compensation was not nearly enough, and students had to figure out most of their meals

independently. Gabriel was excited about the free meal but even more because the meal was

"cultural." At that moment, I observed how the center space, the staff, and the hosted event

presented elements of thriving for Gabriel, as evidenced by how his demeanor changed upon entering the Beacon Center. He appeared more relaxed, happy, and confident.

Some co-creators identified BIPOC peers and the spaces they established with peers as sources of thriving. For example, Ana shared how different peers supported her by validating and empowering her.

My roommate as well has always been supportive of me, and like who I am always wanting to be in touch with my culture as well as me as well as hers. You know, 'cause she's not Dominican, her family is from Chad. So, she's African but she's very supportive of me and like wants to see me do good.…So, I think that brings me joy because she always wants to see me do good, she's always like whenever I say good news, she's always so happy about it, and stuff like celebrating with me and stuff.… My other friend, he's Dominican, he's a nurse and he's studying in the nursing school. Same thing, always wanting to see me do great and that makes me feel better myself, 'cause at least I know that I have a support system that is watching over me.

For Ana, as well as other co-creators, cross-ethnic relationships with BIPOC students were important. Peers were critical sources of support, encouragement, and affirmation whom the co-creators connected to their ability to thrive.

Barriers to Thriving in Institutional Spaces

Conversely, co-creators noted negative experiences with some agents and identity-affirming spaces. While Jairo, like Gabriel, connected the DESJ center to his ability to thrive at HC, he also felt that the center presented barriers for him. Jairo hesitated to share the following experience, but it highlighted some of the struggles he and other Latinx/a/o peers faced when engaging with the DESJ center. Jairo shared,

The DESJ center, I mentioned it as like being such a great office. All this has

definitely empowered me. But to also see the other side of the coin, it's just not really

spoken about. It's that center administrators don't look like us. I think all of them.

Well, one of them is from Honduras, but all of them are Black, and that's been a very

big issue for Latinx students. After like talking to them, you know, being their peers,

like I know, we all talk about. This is an intercultural center, but for a lot of us we

don't go there because the administrators don't look like us.

As an intercultural center, Jairo believed that HC should have done more to hire staff who

were representative of all the Students of Color the center serves. While Jairo associated the

center with his ability to thrive at HC, he also struggled with the limited Latinx/a/o

representation on the center staff. Throughout his interviews, he appeared to be making sense

of the context in which the center exists. His frustration was not because most of the center

staff was Black; instead, he could not understand why, in addition to the current staff, there

could not be more DESJ staff and more who identified as Latinx/a/o. The lack of Latinx/a/o

staff made it difficult for some Latinx/a/o students to connect with the center because they

did not see their ethnic identities represented and celebrated there.

Jairo shared a specific experience at the DESJ center when he was co-chair for the

Hispanic Heritage Month ceremony. While Jairo wanted to make the ceremony more

inclusive and ensure the event represented the diversity of Latinx/a/o ethnicities, he ran into

some challenges when planning the event. Jairo shared that he "wanted to make the

ceremony very inclusive to all Latinx students. No matter if there's no Bolivians that you see,

I wanted to have music, have food, have dances, have everything celebrating all of Latin

America." However, the DESJ staff on the committee raised some concerns. They wanted to

include food and music that were traditionally not part of Latin American culture. Jairo had to push back to ensure that the music, food, and dances included in the monthly celebration reflected the diverse ethnicities within Latin American culture. While Jairo had an appreciation for the DESJ center and saw it as an identity-affirming space, he also acknowledged that there were some struggles with the center. Even though the members were surrounded and supported by BIPOC agents, there still existed a disconnect because there was little Latinx/a/o representation within the center.

Though Jairo acknowledged that the center was important and associated it with his thriving, he was frustrated that the institution was not meeting the needs of the Latinx/a/o student population due to the lack of representation and cultural awareness of Latinx/a/o identity within the center; he was also frustrated by some instances of favoritism by some of the staff members at the center. Jairo did not provide specific examples of how he saw favoritism play out but shared that other Latinx/a/o students stopped going to the DESJ center because they did not feel connected to the space and that a sense of favoritism within the center created a negative environment for students. According to Jairo, "There was a lot of favoritism, and while there was a place for people to feel comfortable, it was also a place where people did not want to be eventually."

Gabriel was another co-creator who highlighted barriers to thriving within institutional spaces. Gabriel pointed out his struggle finding a singular space that embraced and valued all his intersecting identities. While there were individual spaces that supported various identities, such as the Beacon Center, which provided financial resources for low-income students, the Harbor1st Center, which focused on supporting first-generation students, and the DESJ center, which supported Students of Color, Gabriel struggled to find a

space where all his identities were validated. Gabriel shared that he had to be part of various spaces to find support for all his intersecting identities. As a result, he struggled to find a sense of home within any one space on campus. According to Gabriel,

> Can you tell how I'm made to split up my identities because I don't really have a space that I can go to that encompasses all of me? So, I kind of have to highlight parts of myself in different organizations and in different groups. For example, in the Dominican Student Organization, really my Latin identity is highlighted but sometimes my queer identity isn't upholded in those communities. But then I have my queer identity, and I'll participate in Pride Alliance…. So, you see how because I have all these intersecting identities, I have to spend more time finding places where I'm comfortable in and I can't really just go to one place.… I have to go to all these different meetings and be with all these different types of people and share different parts of myself in all these different [spaces] to feel like I have a home on campus when it doesn't feel like a home.

Barriers to thriving can be experienced within institutional spaces that are meant to provide support for students from marginalized backgrounds. Students do not walk into institutional spaces with one single identity, and, as a result, those same spaces do not always uphold and validate other intersecting identities that Latinx/a/o students have.

Barriers to Thriving in Student Organizations

Co-creators connected student-led identity-based organizations, specifically those that centered Latinx/a/o identity, with their thriving. Still, student organizations presented barriers and concerns for some co-creators. Maria and Viviana felt that other Latinx/a/o students perceived them as not Latina enough. For example, Maria commented about LASO:

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I never felt a home with that organization either. I think it's like being on [an HWI],

and being in those spaces where there are other Latino students, and things like that,

like you either feel like too Latino or [not] Latino enough, if that makes sense. Yeah,

I mean like, I think I think it's because other Latino students they cling onto that as

well like similar to, I think they cling on to that because it's like there's nothing else,

like they just have to cling onto it because they have no other choice, or else they

would feel like lost. But like I think I also felt like I don't know I feel like in a weird

way I have to like prove my like, you know, my Latino identity in those spaces which

is like a weird thing to think about. Because before HC, I was never like, "I'm not

Latina enough," I think things like that like you know what I mean, or it's like

measuring how Latina you are like whether you speak Spanish, and like weird things

like that, I think, come up at HWIs.

For Maria, LASO posed problematic tensions for Latinx/a/o students like her. Perhaps, as

Maria mentioned, these tensions were an aspect of being a Latinx/a/o student at an HWI

because, prior to attending HC, she did not feel like she needed to prove that she was

Latinx/a/o enough, especially in Latinx/a/o-centered spaces.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, Viviana was white-passing and did not speak Spanish.

Because of these factors, she worried about how she was perceived by members of student-

led Latinx/a/o organizations. Like Maria, Viviana felt that she needed to prove her Latinx/a/o

identity to belong and that these organizations could be barriers to thriving. As a result,

Viviana avoided involvement. In addition, she said that these organizations could negatively

impact Latinx/a/o students serving on the executive boards because of the time and labor

required from student leaders. Viviana explained,

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Then I made deliberate decisions to kind of not be like super involved or like, like I, I don't doubt that if I would have put my ambitions to it, although I know who it is, I know the people who run like the Latin American Student Organizations and I know people who've run like [the] Dominican Student Organization, like I'm friends with those people and they're all great people. And I don't doubt that I could have done that, but I don't think that that positioning was something that I was necessarily looking forward like looking for in college. But I think that sometimes you feel like you get so bogged down with trying to prove yourself here that you forget to take care of yourself. And I think that like that's also an aspect of thriving, is like taking care of yourself.

From Viviana's perspective, getting "bogged down" with trying to make their Latinx/a/o identity seen at HC took away from other ways that allowed student leaders in the organization to thrive, including their ability to focus on their own self-care. As stated earlier in this chapter, Viviana set boundaries for herself. She prioritized her well-being, which included intentional decisions around her involvement with organizations and groups on campus. She differed from other co-creators who also recognized the amount of labor they were asked to put into the organizations because she consciously decided not to be involved with the identity-based student organizations.

Jairo also shared concerns about student organizations, highlighting favoritism, lack of representation, and divisions between students. During his walking interview, Jairo shared that he sometimes did not see LASO working collaboratively. Specifically, Jairo noted that tensions between some of the executive board members made it difficult to work together and be on the same page. He also noticed favoritism within the organization through student

recruitment for positions on the LASO executive board. During his first year on the board,

Jairo saw that preference was given to the cousin of the organization's president at that time.

Jairo felt that while the cousin had interviewed well, another candidate who seemed timid

had a stronger interview and was more passionate about getting involved with the

organization. This candidate also represented a different ethnicity from the president and

other leaders and would have contributed to the ethnic diversity of the organization's

leadership. Jairo struggled with the preference given to the family member of the

organization's president. Even more so, he struggled with knowing that no consideration had

been given to expanding the number of roles that year, which would have allowed the other

student to also join. Of the lack of Latinx/a/o ethnic representation in the group, Jairo said,

> Another problematic thing was that it was a club that is meant to really represent all
>
> of Latin America. And it did not do that. It was very much people who were not on
>
> the same team. There was very much tension, personal tension between like different
>
> members. And because of that, we weren't on the same agenda.

Jairo felt that the group needed to be more representative of all of Latin America, and there

was personal tension between some members. This lack of representation and these personal

conflicts added to the sense of favoritism. This and the struggle to work collaboratively

troubled Jairo, in turn threatening what he believed the student organization should offer

Latinx/a/o students at HC. Not all Latinx/a/o students can serve on the executive board, and

while they can join as general members, Jairo wondered how many would want to after being

rejected by the organization that was supposed to include and represent them as Latinx/a/o

students at HC. These areas of concern caused tension within a space where Jairo was trying

to build community, cultivate a sense of belonging, and experience thriving. Ideally, identity-

based student organizations are spaces where Latinx/a/o students can create community and be comfortable. While the identity-affirming spaces contributed elements of thriving (e.g., relationship building, joy, and supporting agents and resources) for some co-creators, for others, those spaces—whether led by institutional members or students—presented barriers.

Thriving Is Episodic and Has Spatial, Temporal, and Labor Dimensions

The fourth and final overarching theme that emerged from the data centered on co-creators experiencing "episodic" thriving. Episodic thriving refers to thriving that is not a permanent state once achieved; instead, thriving comes and goes, and has spatial, temporal, and labor dimensions.

Spatial Dimension

As discussed in the third theme, some spaces on campus were associated with thriving, such as a residence hall room with Latinx/a/o roommates or a specific office or center. However, most of the HC campus was not a space of thriving for co-creators. For example, as noted in Chapter 4, Jairo experienced thriving and racialized barriers while working at the Beacon Center. Jairo associated the Beacon Center with thriving because he could support other Latinx/a/o students in his leadership role, yet he was microaggressed by an internal agent while working there.

For Gabriel, thriving did not happen in all spaces. He felt that, because his way of thinking was different and because he was not shy about pointing out what was wrong with HC, this impacted his ability to experience thriving everywhere on campus. According to Gabriel,

> Sometimes I feel like because of the way that I think and the way that I see things that are wrong in this institution, sometimes I'm just like, "Oh, I'm going to choose me."

And I feel like sometimes that's where I feel like my thriving is fragmented because there's some spaces where I feel like my opinions and my actions are worthy and, in some spaces, where I'm like, "Okay, I don't really agree with what's going on here." So, I choose to be the change. And sometimes that change doesn't really fit the way that this institution wants it to be.

Gabriel noted that thriving can be episodic, not a constant state. Gabriel enacted a sense of agency when he chose to "be the change" in certain spaces where he disagreed with what was happening. While he did not speak to any specific incident, policy, or area he had worked to change, Gabriel made it clear that he was not afraid to speak up to address institutional issues impacting him and other Latinx/a/o students. This agency seemed to empower him and counteract the impact that racialized barriers tended to have on him. To thrive, Gabriel seemed to push back on the barriers that would typically stifle his ability to thrive. In spaces where his opinions and thoughts might be suppressed, he fought to make space for them because he knew this was necessary for institutional change to happen.

In Maria's case, she "never felt like HC was a home," and thriving occurred in "little pockets," generally in spaces she created for herself or with certain internal agents at the institution. While Maria found these spaces and agents who could help her thrive at HC, she had to put in much intentional effort to find them, meaning she had less time for other things. As noted earlier, Maria created a familial space in the residence hall with her BIPOC peers. In addition, Maria felt like she "belonged" at the Harbor1st Center and "went there all the time." Maria also noted that some faculty "really took [her] under their wing." These were "professors who had a similar background," with whom she had "something in common,"

and for whom she "would really intentionally search." By comparison, Maria felt that white students at HC probably had a different experience with thriving:

I mean, I wish it wasn't the case like I feel like I wish I had, like you know, that experience that most white students do. And they feel like freedoms, like how does it feel like being a white student. Being a white person in general, you feel entitled to those spaces, like any space, really. But I never felt entitled to any of those spaces at HC. Except in my dorm when I was surrounded by my roommates and things like that. That was where I found joy because that's where I could be in my community in my own dorm room. If that makes sense, and it was the only place like I felt entitled to at that moment.

Temporal Dimension

Co-creators also commented on how thriving was a sporadic experience, happening in certain moments. During the focus group, Ana shared that she did not feel like she was thriving at that moment. While she did not explain why she was not thriving, she shared,

I'm at that moment right now where I feel like I'm not thriving. I'm in this place where I'm stuck and I'm like, "Okay, let's do like something more." So, it's just like, there's just like a lot of moments where it's just like, oh, like it's a little achievement, like something that boosts my confidence, boosts my motivation to continue. But then there's a lot of times where that's not the case at all.

Maria believed that thriving could be experienced permanently in an idealized world, but until then, "it's temporary and it comes in spurts." In addition to it occurring in only a few spaces on campus, thriving happened only at certain times for Maria. In making sense of why

this was the case, she reflected on how thriving, for her, was informed by her parents and their belief about what thriving might be:

> Like, if I ever asked my parents what thriving meant, because they come from humble backgrounds and also [because] they have a very community like orientation, for them as long as like we're eating and we're together as a family, like we're good type of thing. And maybe it's like very individualistic of me, very western of me. But I think part of that is also feeling fulfilled like fulfillment, and I don't think I'm at that place yet.

According to Maria, her parents would see her thriving because her basic needs were met, and she had her familial capital, unlike when her parents first came to the United States. Maria had benefited from the economic opportunity her parents were seeking, she was in college, and she had the support of her family. But even though Maria understood her parents' definition of thriving and why they saw her as thriving, she also struggled to feel fulfilled, and at that moment when she spoke the preceding words, she was not thriving.

Labor Dimension

Finally, even as some co-creators felt their leadership and mentoring roles were fulfilling, enabled skill building, helped them create community, allowed them to give back to their Latinx/a/o community, and fostered their thriving at HC, they sometimes felt exploited for their labor. Specifically, these co-creators talked about the unspoken ways that selective HWIs like HC benefit from their time, energy, and physical and emotional labor to make the campus more welcoming, inclusive, and supportive for Latinx/a/o students. Thus, at times they felt tokenized and they sacrificed their own thriving to do this work. This was Gabriel's experience:

But I also feel tired. I feel like I'm juggling a lot of things, and even when I work on

campus I feel like they're not paying me enough as a resident assistant, I feel like I do

not have enough resources that they're giving to me, and they're not really making my

life easier so that I'm able to help the institution. But they're using all of what I do,

and all of what I did, I'm kind of not paying you back for it. So, then again, I feel

tired and even extorted in that sense.

In addition, Gabriel felt that the institution was taking advantage of his Latinx/a/o values. For

Gabriel, growing up Latinx/a/o meant sharing what one has with their community. He

associated his Latinx/a/o identity with a community-centric or collective approach to

engaging with others and saw this as a value he developed growing up. As a student leader

on campus, this value guided his work. He strived to build community for his residents and

served as a support system for them, always making himself available. He explained,

I could just show you as an example, like as a RA, I already have that. I grew up very

hospitable. Like if anybody needed something or neighbor needed something is

always like, "I rather both of us have then for me to have and you not to have." So,

it's always like I'm always giving to others. And even as a RA, it's like I'm doing all

of this work, especially on the BIPOC floor where it's mostly minority students. And

I give a lot when it comes to it, what I've learned, my wisdom, some tricks that they

can learn, like whether it's holding programs that have food for them, anything that I

can to give to them.

The tension came in his awareness that, while the institution benefited from his support to

other BIPOC students, he continued to struggle because the institution was not doing enough

to support him. From his perspective, HC "doesn't recognize how much of an extra mile I

have to go" or that he was "still struggling to pay [his] bills, and it's like, 'Y'all are making all this money I'm doing for you what needs to be done on this campus.'"

Co-creators also felt exploited by the pressure put on them to succeed academically. Some programs at HC are designed to support the academic success of BIPOC and other minoritized students. According to some co-creators, however, these same programs put pressure on their ability to thrive. For example, Maria shared her struggle with the Freedom Scholars program at HC, which focuses on supporting underrepresented students as they pursue graduate studies. These programs benefit the institution by increasing the number of BIPOC students who go on to graduate studies—which helps build the reputation of the institution. While Maria "totally get[s]" that the mission is to diversify the graduate student population and, eventually, the professoriate, Maria said,

> But I feel like it also ties into like a burden is in being like in feeling like you have to represent your community and feeling like you have to achieve more and more and more in order to be successful for your community. Like they, for example, they like really, really strongly encourage everyone to go to a doctoral program right from undergrad because they want to see more successful Latinos and like getting their PhD and whatnot. But I think part of the barrier is like a, it left me feeling like I had no room to explore and left me feeling like I had no room just to like, I think we all feel like this because of our identities that we have to overachieve, like overcompensate for something. And I feel that kind of added to it. But I, I think the barrier was like, I never feel like I can relax and never felt like I can take a gap year off and really just, like, take a moment, to like appreciate that I got through my

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undergrad without having to like directly go into a master's program, if that makes

sense.

While Maria benefitted from the support of the program, it cannot be ignored that the

program also added pressure that likely impacted her thriving at HC. The nature of the

program made it difficult for Maria to take time to relax or consider other options other than

graduate school. Her success in the program depended on her performance and her ability to

meet the program's expectations—that is, her labor. While Maria did not explicitly state that

her labor in the program lessened her ability to thrive, the pressure and stress she felt and her

inability to relax suggested that there was no room for her to do anything that did not meet

the program's standards. Additionally, the program pressured her to achieve more and be

successful as a Latinx/a/o community representative. One must wonder how this program

created space for her to thrive based on her definition of thriving. For Maria, thriving was not

connected to her academic achievements; instead, thriving happened when she was in

community, experienced a sense of home, and felt like she belonged.

Thus, as some co-creators created community and a sense of belonging for other

BIPOC students, they also carried the weight of creating social change within the institution

to help improve the experiences of other Latinx/a/o students and to perform academically so

that there were "more successful Latinos" in graduate school and beyond. These co-creators

felt that no consideration was given to what this labor required of them. The labor they gave

to their leadership and mentoring roles impacted their ability to excel academically and care

for their mental, emotional, psychological, and financial well-being, ultimately impacting

their ability to thrive. For Gabriel, Maria, and Veronica, who, as previously shared in Chapter

4, felt tokenized by her leadership role on the admissions panels, thriving had a labor

dimension. As with the temporal and spatial dimensions, the labor dimension signals that thriving can be episodic.

Composite Textual Description

After generating the four overarching themes that culminated from my phenomenological analysis, I developed a composite textual description outlining commonalities related to thriving for the Latinx/a/o student co-creators at HC. I identified four commonalities. First, while the Latinx/a/o co-creators all experienced racialized barriers, they also remained hopeful despite the trauma caused by the racialized barriers they experienced. Second, all the co-creators tapped into their community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to help them overcome racialized barriers and thrive. Third, all the co-creators connected student involvement with thriving. Lastly, finding community where they could build relationships, experience joy and cultural pride, and feel seen and supported were important to co-creators' ability to thrive at HC. All four commonalities affirm previous research around the racialized barriers that Latinx/a/o students experience in higher education and the importance of finding community and opportunities to build familial types of relationships (Burciaga & Erbstein, 2012; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Lopez, 2006; Yosso, 2005).

Co-Creators Held Onto Their Aspirational Capital Despite Racialized Barriers

Every co-creator in this study spoke about racialized barriers they faced, which, as outlined in Chapter 4, included microaggressions, lack of representation, isolation, and feeling like they did not belong. They subsequently had to deal with the impact of these barriers on their well-being, seeking help and navigating relationships with their families, peers, and internal agents within the institution. Despite the trauma that resulted from these

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experiences, all co-creators maintained a hold on their aspirational capital and remained hopeful for their future and for other Latinx/a/o students at HC. Aspirational capital highlights the social capital Latinx/a/o students bring through their ability to remain hopeful and dream for the future (Guzman et al., 2018; Yosso, 2005). Overcoming racialized barriers empowered the co-creators: Knowing they would continue facing these barriers, they also knew they would overcome them, based on their previous experiences. Veronica expressed this sentiment when she shared,

> I feel like being able to battle those barriers right now. It gives me hope for, like the
> future, that I'll still be able to battle them and overcome them, and not be pushed
> down by them, because I made it this far like I can obviously like do anything like by
> standing up for myself, and like knowing my rights and stuff like that.

Maria shared a similar sentiment. She felt she could deal with what the future had in store, including navigating racialized barriers that might arise in the workforce. Maria shared,

> I do feel hopeful about the future, like I feel like, if I can handle higher ed like as a
> student, then I can survive the workforce or whatever that entails, and it always did
> prepare me for that. Like I said before, so I do feel hopeful.

While the racialized barriers the co-creators experienced at HC were disheartening, they maintained hope. The co-creators saw themselves as more prepared to deal with racialized barriers in the future, whether at HC or in their professional careers.

Co-Creators Tapped Into Their Community Cultural Wealth to Thrive

All the co-creators tapped into their community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) to overcome racialized barriers and thrive, whether they knew they were doing so. In addition to their aspirational capital discussed earlier, the co-creators drew from their familial, social,

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navigational, and resistant capital to thrive. For example, all the co-creators tapped into familial capital throughout their time at HC. For Gabriel, his aunt and grandmother were a source of familial capital, and he connected both family members to thriving because they provided financial support and, more importantly, because they were accepting of his queer identity and/or supported his emotional well-being. According to Gabriel,

> Another support system that I've had is my grandmother and aunt from my dad's side.… [M]y aunt has been the one that I've talked to about stuff that has to do with my queer identity because she is lesbian. So, when it comes to my queer side, it was like she got that, but when it comes to my emotional side, my grandma has been the person that I go to. I consider her my best friend, and they have also helped me monetarily, which is important. I can go to them, and they always ask me, "Do you have enough food? Are you eating? Do you need any money?"

For Viviana and Ricardo, their moms kept them connected to home and the values they grew up with. This was also the case for Maria and Veronica, both of whom saw their parents as inspirations and sincerely appreciated the sacrifices their parents made so they could attend college. In addition, as noted earlier, for Jairo, the values his parents instilled in him guided his service as a student leader on campus and his commitment to the Latinx/a/o community and helping others. These values stemmed from his familial capital.

For some co-creators (e.g., Ana), the extended familial relationships they built with peers, roommates, and staff helped them overcome racialized barriers and thrive at HC. These relationships were important in helping the co-creators foster a sense of belonging, community, and home, and experience joy at HC. Though perhaps they did not all tap into the same forms of capital throughout their experience at HC, all the co-creators utilized a

range of their community cultural wealth to overcome racialized barriers and help them thrive.

Co-Creators Connected Student Involvement With Thriving

All the co-creators connected student involvement with thriving. For some, this involvement consisted of their role as resident assistants or mentors. For others, it was serving as student leaders within the admissions office or first-year programs or serving on the executive boards of identity-based student organizations. These leadership roles involved various elements connected to thriving, including serving others, experiencing joy, gaining a greater sense of self, building new skills and knowledge, and experiencing cultural pride. For Jairo, his involvement on campus through his work with the Beacon Center and LASO allowed him to support other Latinx/a/o students facing struggles similar to those he faced. By answering their questions, mentoring them, or providing them with needed resources, Jairo wanted to "help them navigate" the barriers they faced at HC. According to Jairo, "It was thriving for me in the sense that I was thriving because they were thriving. [What] satisfied me was helping them."

For all co-creators, leadership and mentoring roles provided elements connected to their ability to thrive. They found joy in mentoring other students or felt that helping others was connected to their identity. For example, as a teaching assistant in the Emerging Leaders Program, Viviana felt like a resource for others. She found a sense of purpose and felt affirmed as a student and leader by the students she supported. Viviana shared that "mentoring is something that I enjoy. [It] felt like a part of my identity that was already there, that I just had to tap into … and when I was surrounded by students I was mentoring, [it] affirmed me as a student and as a mentor and a leader."

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Thriving Was Connected to Finding Community Through Feeling Accepted, Being

Their Authentic Self, and Building Camaraderie Over Shared Experiences

Every co-creator thrived because of the community they found or built for

themselves. These communities significantly impacted their feeling of acceptance, whether

they felt they could be their authentic selves, and the types of relationships they made in

those community spaces. In spaces where they felt accepted and where they could be their

authentic selves, co-creators experienced thriving. Additionally, in spaces where they built

relationships, found support, shared experiences related to their Latinx/a/o identity, and

served as champions and advocates for one another, the co-creators thrived. Community

happened in the residence halls, classrooms, recreational spaces, institutional offices,

program spaces, and through identity-based student organizations. For Gabriel, being part of

an African diaspora dance group allowed him to thrive because he felt he could be his

authentic self with the group. Not only did that group affirm his AfroLatinx/a/o identity, but

he also felt he did not need to check his queer identity at the door when he was with the

group. Prior studies on the experience of thriving of LGBTQ+ college students have found

that LGBTQ+ students thrived when they experienced support for multiple identities they

held (Hill et al., 2020). This was also true for Gabriel and was evident when we visited the

dance studio where practices were usually held. As he shared,

> I'm here for the dance studio. I'm a member of the African Diaspora dance team on
>
> campus, and I'm one of two males on the team, but the rest of them are primarily
>
> Black women. And I don't know when it comes to my queer identity and when it
>
> comes to my, um, African diaspora or Caribbean identity, this is where I felt like
>
> those two groups really kind of merged together where I didn't have to, like we

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mentioned, check one of my identities at the door, they accepted me as gay, as I am.

They accepted me as Latino, as I am.

For Ricardo, the community he developed through LASO was a space where he felt

safe, where he felt relief from the stressors of attending a selective HWI, and where he felt he

could be his authentic self and could gain a greater sense of confidence, which was often

depleted by his daily interactions at HC. When visiting one of the classroom spaces where

the groups held their executive board meetings, Ricardo shared,

> If there is a mask, if people are wearing masks around campus like, like that poker
>
> face mask here, those masks go off. So, that's like a very relieving feeling for I know
>
> a lot of people and also, as you were saying, like trying to be somebody you're not.
>
> Sometimes you don't notice it, but it can be very exhausting, and it's very daunting
>
> and stressful…. So, it's also I think, these meetings are like an energy booster. You're
>
> like booster since it's a Sunday like a booster [for the] week…. You leave
>
> reenergized.

Furthermore, as mentioned previously, for Maria, the space she formed with her

Latinx/a/o roommates during COVID-19 became a space where she could vent about

racialized barriers she experienced and be understood. She also felt she thrived in that space

because they cared for and supported one another. Similarly, as mentioned earlier in this

chapter, for Ana, the relationship she built with her roommate from Chad was one that she

associated with thriving. They served as each other's champions, celebrating and pushing one

another to succeed. These elements of caring, supporting, and advocating for each other were

elements Maria and Ana associated with thriving. While some of the community spaces

might have differed, ultimately, the co-creators attributed feelings of acceptance, being their authentic selves, a sense of home, and building genuine relationships to thriving.

Structural Description

In addition to a composite textual description, I developed a structural description of thriving for Latinx/a/o students at selective HWIs. This structural description highlights some of the different perspectives among the co-creators and offers a reflection on the setting and context in which co-creators experienced thriving.

Leadership, Mentoring, and Involvement With Identity-Based Student Organizations and Spaces Varied

While all co-creators noted identity-affirming spaces on campus that they connected to thriving, those spaces varied for each student. Common spaces for some included the DESJ center, the Harbor1st Center, and the Beacon Center. These spaces supported their various identities, including their Latinx/a/o, first-generation, and socioeconomic identities. Some students experienced thriving with LASO and other identity-based groups, but others like Viviana did not. Instead, as mentioned, Viviana felt like she experienced thriving at the college gym because it helped center her, and she aligned self-care with thriving. Ricardo found peace in the library and saw it as a space of thriving.

Additionally, while students were highly involved on campus in various leadership and mentoring roles, some differences existed in those roles. Some co-creators served in leadership roles, such as working as a resident assistant or sitting on the executive board of an identity-based student organization. Others served in mentoring roles with identity-based centers, while others worked with non-identity-based offices like admissions or through HC's

first-year experience program. That said, no matter the role, they all connected their involvement in leadership and mentoring roles to their thriving.

Differences in Latinx/a/o Co-Creators' Experiences Based on Racial Identity and Socioeconomic and First-Generation Status

I found differences in co-creators' experiences based on racial identity and socioeconomic background. For example, two co-creators, Viviana and Ricardo, self-identified as white-passing Latinxs/as/os. Both also differed from the other co-creators regarding their socioeconomic background. Both identified as middle class, while the other five co-creators came from working-class backgrounds. Because of these distinctions, Viviana's and Ricardo's experiences differed in some ways from the experiences of the other co-creators. While both dealt with racialized barriers, they recognized that their experience was somewhat different from other Latinx/a/o students because, physically, they were white-passing. For example, Viviana recognized that she held a certain privilege that perhaps other Latinx/a/o students did not. She said, "But then also like recognizing that as a point of privilege because I'm white racially so I was able to kind of like, I'm able to check my ethnicity at the door, even though I don't think I'm like, I don't think I'd look necessarily like what people would think is like standardized Caucasian." Viviana recognized two points related to her racial identity. First, being white-passing enabled her to check her ethnicity at the door, which then freed her from having to explain her culture to other people. Second, depending on the space she was in, Viviana did not experience racial privilege; even as white-passing, she did not fit the mold that defines "Caucasian" or white standards at HC. While Viviana and Ricardo recognized that they were white-passing, this did not negate the challenges they experienced.

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In addition, Viviana and Ricardo deviated from the other co-creators regarding how, where, and with whom they experienced thriving. For example, they were the only co-creators to experience thriving in spaces that were not necessarily identity-affirming: the gym in Viviana's case, and the library in Ricardo's. Additionally, both co-creators were the only ones who did not identify BIPOC internal agents as support agents who helped them thrive at HC; the internal agents they named were white. It is important to note that even though these agents were not BIPOC, they provided the support and affirmation that Viviana and Ricardo sought from a validating agent. The agents were available to them and demonstrated they wanted the best for them. They reminded Ricardo and Viviana that they were assets to HC.

Additionally, while all the co-creators shared aspects of their familial capital and identified different family members who served as validating agents, Viviana and Ricardo spoke most distinctly about their mothers. While other co-creators also saw their mothers as validating agents; Viviana's and Ricardo's relationships with their mothers seemed different. They were more open about sharing their whole experiences at HC; they did not worry about shielding their mothers from the barriers and negative experiences. That is, Ricardo and Viviana shared more with their mothers about the challenges they were experiencing. By contrast, in some cases, other co-creators did not because they wanted to protect their family from what they were experiencing at HC. Ricardo said that he spoke to his mother daily. In many ways, she was living his experience at HC with him. Ricardo shared,

> Literally, I would talk to my girlfriend and my mom like every day… [and that] support system is what helped.… My mom constantly jokes about when I get to medical school, she's going to wear the white coat with me because she's suffered everything with me along the way.

Viviana had a similar relationship with her mom, who was a listening ear for her, especially when she felt lonely at HC. Viviana shared,

> There were moments where I would call my mom and bless her heart because she had to deal with all of my stuff. I know that it broke her heart, but there were so many times where I'd call my mom and I'd be crying and I'd be like, "Mom, I'm so lonely."

This differed from the other co-creators who associated their families with thriving but either sheltered their families from their experiences at HC or were motivated by their parents' life stories to thrive at HC and did not speak as much about their families. Perhaps this was also because Viviana and Ricardo did not identity as first-generation, which implies that one or both of their parents had previous college experience. For Ricardo and Viviana, not being first-generation college students might have eliminated the need to shelter their family members from the barriers they were facing because perhaps their family members were already aware that they would face racialized barriers in college.

Essence of Latinx/a/o Thriving at Selective HWIs

Understanding the essence of a phenomenon involves understanding its rawest form. In this study, the phenomenon was thriving for Latinx/a/o co-creators at selective HWIs. At its core, thriving was subjective to each individual, but for Latinx/a/o students at selective HWIs, it is often associated with various elements that are not academically bound. Some co-creators experienced thriving in spaces and with individuals with whom they felt they could be their authentic selves and where they felt comfortable, supported, and affirmed. Thriving was also associated with feelings, moments, and spaces, as well as agents who embraced the Latinx/a/o co-creators for who they were as individuals. They were seen, accepted, and

affirmed as their authentic selves and for the identities with which they walked in the door. For some co-creators, thriving was correlated with feeling empowered or developing skills, while for others, it centered on values they connected to their Latinx/a/o identity, including community, family, and serving others. Others associated validating relationships with faculty, staff, and peers with their ability to thrive.

Although they might not have known it as "community cultural wealth," thriving happened when the co-creators tapped into the community and social capital they brought to their selective HWI. This happened as they received support from family, friends, and validating agents at their institution. The co-creators also experienced thriving when they used their navigational capital to overcome racialized barriers and navigate their experiences on campus. They utilized their skills around community building, advocacy, mentoring, and code-switching as well as their aspirational capital, including hope for the future, to navigate HC.

While co-creators experienced thriving mostly in community spaces and spaces where they felt their Latinx/a/o identity and other marginalized identities were embraced and celebrated, thriving was not a permanent state of being for the Latinx/a/o co-creators once achieved. Co-creators experienced thriving in some spaces, with certain agents, at particular times. Thriving was therefore episodic; it had spatial, temporal, and labor dimensions that could present positive, validating experiences as well as negative experiences that impeded their sense of thriving. With thriving associated with feelings of confidence, safety, pride, or home—feelings which are rarely constant and are complex—thriving can be expected to be episodic and vary for Latinx/a/o students at selective HWIs.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study aimed to explore how Latinx/a/o students thrive at selective HWIs despite the racialized barriers they face on campus. HWIs continue to center whiteness through institutional practices, pedagogy, policies, and interpersonal interactions, negatively impacting Latinx/a/o college students. As a result, Latinx/a/o students experience hostile environments where they are confronted with microaggressions, lack of Latinx/a/o representation, isolation, and added stressors that hinder their ability to achieve (Hall, 2017; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Jones et al., 2002; McCoy, 2014; Robertson et al., 2016). Whiteness at HWIs also leads to problematic practices, including deficit-based pedagogies and curricula that fail to center Latinx/a/o voices, culture, and experiences (Delgado Bernal, 2002; A. González, 2016; K. González, 2002; Robertson et al., 2016). In continuing to center white knowledge, experiences, and epistemologies, HWIs fail to acknowledge Latinx/a/o experiences through an asset-based lens, and practitioners at HWIs diminish the capital that Latinx/a/o students bring to their college communities. As such, HWIs are structured and operate in ways that hinder Latinx/a/o student thriving. Studying how Latinx/a/o students at selective HWIs can thrive despite whiteness is essential. As the Latinx/a/o college-going population continues to grow and as they attend selective HWIs in increasing numbers, decisionmakers and practitioners at these institutions need to understand Latinx/a/o student

thriving so they can make changes that result in more equitable experiences for Latinx/a/o students.

O'Leary and Ickovics (1995) defined thriving as when an individual experiences physical or psychological downfalls in response to adversity but rebounds and surpasses their previous level of functioning. According to O'Leary (1998), thriving occurs when one goes through the process of confronting and dealing with barriers and, as a result, a transformation happens. Indeed, thriving is a process of transformation (O'Leary, 1998). Previous literature on thriving in higher education has focused on college students generally. Only recently have researchers sought to understand what thriving is and how its experience varies by race/ethnicity, including for Latinx/a/o students (Morgan Consoli et al., 2014; Morgan Consoli et al., 2015; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017). My study contributes to this growing literature and to the limited literature focusing on Latinx/a/o student thriving at selective HWIs.

In my study, I utilized a qualitative phenomenological methodology to understand how seven Latinx/a/o students at Harbor College, a selective HWI in the northeastern United States, overcame barriers—racialized and otherwise—and thrived, as well as *who* and *what* contributed to their ability to thrive. Three key takeaways regarding the essence of thriving for the Latinx/a/o co-creators emerged from the study: (a) co-creators identified a variety of elements directly connected to thriving; (b) co-creators tapped into community cultural wealth, validating agents, and institutional and self-created spaces to overcome racialized barriers; and (c) thriving was subjective and episodic for the Latinx/a/o co-creators. In this chapter, I first bring the three takeaways together to illustrate the transformative process of thriving for Latinx/a/o students at selective HWIs. I then discuss each takeaway in more detail, connecting each to existing literature and my conceptual framework, which utilized

LatCrit, Rendón's (1994) validation theory, and Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth (CCW). LatCrit illuminates the racialized barriers Latinx/a/o students experience in higher education institutions, while validation theory and CCW guided my exploration of how Latinx/a/o students experience thriving and what contributes to their ability to thrive. Putting the key takeaways into conversation highlights the lessons learned about Latinx/a/o thriving at a selective HWI. I close the chapter with implications for practitioners and offer suggestions for future research.

Transformative Process of Thriving

Prior literature has indicated that thriving occurs when one goes through the process of addressing and dealing with barriers, leading to a transformation (O'Leary, 1998). For the co-creators in my study, the *when*, *where*, and *how* of their transformations varied. While co-creators shared some similarities, the subjectivity and episodic nature of thriving meant that the transformation process for achieving thriving differed. Even when the co-creators shared common elements that led to thriving, where and how the transformation occurred differed. Co-creators identified different conditions for thriving, including tapping into their community cultural wealth, institutional and self-created spaces, and validating agents. However, ultimately, thriving cannot be generalized for Latinx/a/o students, even for students who share multiple identities, attend the same institution, and have access to the same practitioners and resources.

Figure 1 highlights the transformative process of thriving for Latinx/a/o students at selective HWIs. Latinx/a/o students experience racialized barriers at selective HWIs (red arrows) because these institutions continue to center whiteness in their policies, practices, and campus culture. To overcome these barriers, Latinx/a/o students tap into various

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conditions—that is, particular capital or resources—to move toward thriving. These conditions included the Latinx/a/o co-creators utilizing their community cultural wealth and having positive experiences with validating agents and within institutional spaces (purple boxes). While validating agents and identity-affirming institutional spaces can serve as conditions for thriving, they can also present barriers for students. However, when validating agents, institutional spaces, and community cultural wealth serve as conditions for thriving, they allow students to enter a state of being where they feel elements (sage boxes) that they connect to their thriving. Elements of thriving refer to intellectual, emotional, social, and psychological factors that the Latinx/a/o co-creators connected to thriving. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 and as captured in Figure 1, co-creators reported different elements of thriving, including cultural pride, joy, sense of home, self-confidence, self-care, comfort, sense of belonging, development of new skills, cultural values, including service to others, ability to be their authentic selves, and validation. These elements are connected to thriving. Since thriving is not a permanent state and because where and with whom the co-creators experienced the elements connected to thriving varied, thriving is episodic (represented by black dotted arrows). Yet, when co-creators no longer experienced elements connected to thriving, they maintained the skills and knowledge (purple arrows) they developed through the transformation process. These skills and knowledge become a form of capital for the Latinx/a/o students that they can tap into to continue overcoming racialized barriers.

Figure 1

Transformative Process of Latinx/a/o Student Thriving at Selective HWIs

Thriving is a transformative process unique to each Latinx/a/o student. Nevertheless, understanding the conditions and elements that can lead to thriving and the episodic nature of thriving is necessary to provide Latinx/a/o students with higher education experiences that acknowledge, value, and celebrate their presence and contributions to the institutions they attend. Exploring this transformative process enables an understanding of the essence of thriving for Latinx/a/o students at selective HWIs.

Co-Creators Connected Thriving With Positive Intellectual, Emotional, Social, and Psychological Elements

Prior literature has shown that thriving involves students' ability to fully engage intellectually, socially, and emotionally (Paredes-Collins, 2012; Schreiner, 2014). In my study, the Latinx/a/o co-creators connected thriving with intellectual, emotional, social, and psychological elements. The social elements were associated with the relationships the co-creators maintained with family or built with internal agents, including peers, faculty, staff, and administrators. Through these relationships, co-creators experienced feelings related to thriving.

Intellectual Elements

As supported by prior studies on thriving, the co-creators did not connect academic grades to thriving (Pérez & Sáenz, 2017; Schreiner, 2014)—a factor that would presumably be of importance to students at a selective institution whose acceptance depends on their K–12 academic achievement. Instead of focusing on academic success, the intellectual elements co-creators connected to thriving centered on the growth of new knowledge and skills. Some of the co-creators experienced thriving as they developed new knowledge and skills that they thought would benefit them; some resulted from overcoming racialized barriers; and others were developed through leadership roles on campus. Prior literature has suggested that students who are thriving adapt and grow psychologically after overcoming adversity (O'Leary, 1998). Additionally, the literature has found that students who thrived through stressful events developed new skills or knowledge that they applied to future programs (Carver, 1998). This study found that co-creators experienced growth in maturity, knowledge, and skills, including developing presentation and communication skills,

vocational and people skills, and code-switching skills, which allowed them to navigate white spaces. Though Maria came to HC with code-switching skills, at HC she further developed her ability to code-switch and she realized that code-switching would help her navigate the many white professional spaces she would encounter in the future. As an admissions panelist, Veronica experienced growth in her presentation and communication skills. Similarly, Viviana felt that she not only developed her people skills but also matured. These three co-creators tied the element of growth and development of skills to their thriving at HC.

Emotional, Social, and Psychological Elements

Some co-creators felt a sense of home and belonging, which often happened in spaces where they were comfortable and affirmed and where they were celebrated by their peers or practitioners. For Maria, her sense of belonging happened when she found her community at HC, and as a result, she performed better academically. Before this achievement, however, she dealt with depression and isolation that negatively impacted her ability to thrive. Prior literature has indicated that isolation is one of the barriers that Latinx/a/o students often face at HWIs (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hernandez, 2002; Jones et al., 2002; Lewis et al., 2000; Lopez, 2006; Pérez, 2014; Pérez & Sáenz, 2017; Robertson et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009). Maria felt a sense of comfort and home in community with her Latinx/a/o roommates— elements that helped her thrive.

While none of the co-creators connected their academic achievement to thriving, some reflected on validating experiences within the classroom or feeling empowered because they felt supported and affirmed by the faculty teaching the course. For example, Gabriel associated thriving with experiences in which faculty validated his writing abilities and

reminded him that he belonged there, and in which he saw his identities and experiences reflected in the course material. The validation of his identities and contributions was an empowering element that Gabriel connected to thriving. Though recognition and a sense of empowerment can be connected to emotional and psychological experiences, they often result from validating relationships with faculty members in the classroom. This element of validation through these positive interactions with internal agents was connected to thriving for the co-creators in this study.

One element that previous studies have connected to Latinx/a/o student thriving but that did not appear to be as relevant in my study is faith and spirituality (Morgan Consoli et al., 2014). Only one co-creator, Veronica, spoke in relative depth about faith and spirituality. However, although her faith and spirituality were important to her when she first arrived at HC, her exploration of faith and spirituality throughout her time at HC became a means of finding strategies to address mental health concerns. That is, she connected thriving not to the element of faith, but instead the element of caring for her mental well-being. Likewise, other co-creators connected mental health and self-care to thriving. These psychological and emotional elements helped students navigate the racialized barriers and stressors they experienced at HC. Both Veronica and Viviana connected elements related to their well-being—such as seeking support for dealing with depression or finding time and space to go to the gym to care for the whole person—to their thriving at HC. Others, like Gabriel, did not hesitate to take the time needed to care for their well-being, even if that meant missing meetings or class. For these co-creators, they connected thriving to caring for their entire well-being.

In addition to caring for their entire well-being, some co-creators connected the element of joy to thriving. Ricardo, for instance, experienced joy in the weekly Latin American Student Organization executive board meetings. Gabriel and Maria experienced joy in being together with peers or roommates who shared similar experiences, values, and ways of thinking, while Ana and Jairo felt joy and fulfillment in supporting others through their student involvement. My study confirmed for Latinx/a/o students what other studies have confirmed for students from other racial/ethnic groups. For example, Tichavakunda (2021) found that Black students at Historically White Institutions found joy through their involvement in ethnic student organizations and celebrations hosted by the Black Cultural Center and events hosted by Black affinity groups. My study findings suggest that this is also true for some Latinx/a/o students. The element of joy, along with the elements of comfort and pride and having their identities and experiences as Latinx/a/o students affirmed and celebrated, were connected to thriving.

Some co-creators, including Gabriel, Ricardo, Ana, and Jairo, felt cultural pride in their involvement with identity-based student organizations. Some felt this pride when sharing meeting spaces with other students with shared identities. In those spaces, mostly shared with other Latinx/a/o students, the co-creators felt greater pride in their Latinx/a/o identity. For others, like Gabriel, cultural pride was experienced when they hosted cultural events during which they could share their Latinx/a/o identities with the campus. In those moments and spaces, their Latinx/a/o identities were celebrated and affirmed through music, food, performances, and cultural displays.

As a key takeaway, Latinx/a/o students connect a variety of intellectual, emotional, and psychological elements, some of which occur as a result of social interactions with

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validating agents, to thriving. In this study, these elements included validation, empowerment, joy, cultural pride, a sense of comfort, and home, among other elements connected to thriving. It is important to note that none of these elements were related to academic success, which one might expect at a selective institution.

Thriving in the "Little Things"

It is important to note that, while these elements of thriving can happen due to larger events, such as new programs, cultural shifts on campus, or changes in practices, some of the elements can also happen in smaller occurrences. These everyday "little things" are just as— if not more—important to thriving for Latinx/a/o students. Specifically, many of the co-creators in my study experienced elements of thriving through daily interactions with validating agents like class deans, program directors, faculty, and peers. Others experienced elements of thriving through their access to spaces like identity-based student organization meetings or being in community with roommates and friends. These daily interactions and spaces cannot be undervalued; in fact, they should be given greater emphasis because of the important role they can play at HWIs committed to becoming more Latinx/a/o-centered. Too often, practitioners strive to develop large-scale programs, policies, and changes on campus while ignoring the little things. Doing so can result in the manifestation of barriers to these little things, which are just as important to Latinx/a/o student thriving as the larger programs and major events. Becoming a Latinx/a/o-centered institution requires attention to the everyday little things that have a significant impact on Latinx/a/o student thriving and perhaps figuring out ways to recreate those little things at a larger scale across the institution.

Conditions That Led to Elements Connected to Thriving

According to LatCrit, racism is endemic at institutions like HC, and these institutions function within a dominant culture that centers whiteness (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Whiteness infiltrates every facet of the institutional culture, including the demographic make-up of students and internal agents, campus policies, and the voices and knowledge centered in the classroom. As a result, Latinx/a/o students are bound to experience racialized barriers, including microaggressions and other forms of discrimination. Racialized barriers can then negatively impact Latinx/a/o student thriving (K. González, 2002; Robertson et al., 2016; Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Yosso et al., 2009). The co-creators in my study experienced racialized barriers similar to many outlined in previous literature, including the lack of Latinx/a/o representation on campus, microaggressions, isolation, and alienation (Delgado Bernal, 2002; K. González, 2002, 2016; Hall, 2017; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Jones et al., 2002; McCoy, 2014; Robertson et al., 2016). Maria shared how difficult it was to find professors and mentors who shared her Latinx/a/o identity on campus; in the end, she had to contact a graduate department professor to connect her with a faculty member who shared her ethnic identity. Gabriel felt a disconnect with some classes in which he did not see his experiences reflected in the coursework. Other co-creators, like Ana, Ricardo, and Jairo, talked about the microaggressions they experienced from their white peers, while others, such as Veronica and Viviana, shared how alone they felt at times at HC. Nevertheless, despite these barriers, the Latinx/a/o co-creators in my study overcame these racialized barriers.

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Community Cultural Wealth

As discussed in Chapter 2, CCW is an asset-based framework that identifies six types of social capital beyond traditional notions of capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). Although my study co-creators might not have known it as "community cultural wealth," in interviews, they talked about their families, the Latinx/a/o values they learned at home, maintaining hope despite the adversity they experienced, tapping into resources to help them navigate racialized barriers at HC, and resisting institutional and cultural norms that would impact their thriving. These contributed to their thriving and can be connected to Yosso's (2005) conceptualization of familial, social, aspirational, navigational, and resistance capital. Prior literature has outlined the ways Latinx/a/o students tap into their community cultural wealth to help them overcome racialized barriers (Yosso, 2005). The same was true for the co-creators in my study as they used their community cultural wealth to help them overcome racialized barriers at HC. The co-creators accessed various forms of community cultural wealth, including family and Latinx/a/o values learned at home and social networks. They also tapped into their navigational, resistance, and aspirational capital.

Familial and social capital were prominent in my study findings. Familial capital is the cultural knowledge gained from family and community, while social capital focuses on peer and social contacts that students utilize to navigate social institutions (Yosso, 2005). The literature has highlighted the critical role of family and community members in helping students thrive (Morgan Consoli et al., 2014; Rendón, 1994). In one way or another, all the co-creators maintained a connection to home and family during their time at HC, and this connection contributed to their thriving at the HWI. For some co-creators, staying connected

to their families was a source of support. For example, Ricardo and Viviana often discussed their relationships with their mothers. For both, their constant communication with their mothers helped them stay grounded and navigate the barriers they faced at HC. The support Ricardo and Viviana received from their mothers allowed them to experience elements connected to thriving, namely feeling validated and a sense of home.

Other co-creators connected to thriving through values around community and service to others learned at home and associated with their Latinx/a/o identity. Prior literature has found that Latinxs/as/os equated success with the ability to serve others, including family, peers, and their community (Morgan Consoli et al., 2014). For some, the values around community and service to others that they learned at home and associated with their Latinx/a/o identity guided their activities on campus. The co-creators' connection to values around community and service to others came from their familial capital. Jairo, for instance, centered the values he learned at home—values he associated with his Latinx/a/o identity. Jairo often talked about how he learned values at home, like serving others and the importance of community, from his parents, whom he saw as role models in their commitment to helping others, which he associated with being Latinx/a/o. That in turn guided how he engaged with and supported other Latinx/a/o students through his work with the Beacon Center, the DESJ center, and LASO. By serving the Latinx/a/o community at HC, Jairo experienced cultural pride by connecting the values he learned at home to support others at HC. He also found joy in being a resource to other students. He associated both these elements with his thriving.

Gabriel was another co-creator who tapped into his familial capital. During his interview, Gabriel discussed his collective responsibility and how that value of community

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guided some of his leadership roles and his interest in mentoring and supporting others. Veronica also spoke about serving as a voice for her community on the admissions panels she sat on as a student leader. Co-creators associated their ability to thrive with supporting other students and their community. Both Gabriel and Veronica found joy in helping others and experienced greater confidence by taking what they had learned from their experiences to help others succeed at HC. Whether directly or indirectly, family members served as validating agents for the co-creators. Even without necessarily knowing it, the co-creators used their familial capital to thrive at HC. By tapping into familial capital, the co-creators found the support they needed to navigate barriers and honor the values they learned at home by incorporating them into their experiences at HC. Tapping into their familial capital allowed students to experience various elements connected to thriving.

The co-creators also drew from their social capital to navigate HC. Social capital refers to Latinx/a/o students' "peers and other social contacts" that help them navigate social institutions (Yosso, 2005). Some of the co-creators in my study indicated that other peers served as mentors for them. Ana, for instance, talked about a former student, her close friend and mentor. During his time at HC and even after graduating, this peer mentor supported her, helping her navigate the barriers she faced at HC. Likewise, Gabriel's and Maria's experiences with other Latinx/a/o or BIPOC peers helped them navigate HC. In sharing with their peers, they realized they were not the only ones experiencing racialized barriers. Their peers validated their experiences and provided spaces for them to vent about the racialized barriers they faced at HC. For Ana, Gabriel, and Maria, they connected their thriving to elements of comfort and validation they gained from mentors or other BIPOC peers.

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Co-creators in my study also tapped into their aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) to help them thrive at HC. Yosso (2005) defined aspirational capital as the "hopes and dreams" that students maintain despite the educational inequities they face. Previous literature has highlighted (though not extensively) how aspirations of hope and goals influenced students' experiences (Morgan Consoli et al., 2014). My study found this to be true for each of the co-creators. Despite the racialized barriers they faced and the resulting trauma, the co-creators maintained hope for the future, themselves, and the institution. This aspirational capital served as an element that the co-creators related to their ability to thrive at HC.

While the co-creators developed their skills at HC connected to thriving, they also accessed their navigational capital to transcend some of the racialized barriers they experienced. Yosso (2005) referred to navigational capital as the skills and abilities students utilize to navigate "social institutions," including educational institutions like colleges and universities. While they initially struggled to use resources offered at the institution, once co-creators found the resources, they drew on them to make the most of their experience at HC. Similar to Ngyuen's (2021) findings, which suggested that low-income students thrive in environments where they can ask for help, the co-creators in my study thrived once they figured out and utilized the resources available to them. For some co-creators, this meant leaning on and asking for help from mentors and other institutional centers and practitioners for emotional, psychological, and even financial support. For example, Gabriel, Maria, and Jairo discussed seeking support from the various centers to purchase books or materials needed for classes, purchase event tickets, or take part in experiences like service trips. In Maria's case, some of her navigational capital came from the code-switching skills she developed to navigate the whiteness she encountered in most spaces at HC. Although Maria

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had learned this skill before coming to HC, she strengthened it after arriving because of the prevalence of whiteness on campus. Ricardo tapped into his ability to connect with people and his extroverted nature to help him navigate hostile spaces and build community. By accessing these forms of navigational capital, the co-creators experienced a greater sense of belonging by overcoming the barriers they faced due to financial needs and whiteness. Removing barriers threatening their sense of belonging at HC allowed Gabriel, Jairo, Maria, and Ricardo to thrive.

The co-creators also tapped into their resistance capital as they challenged dominant cultural norms at HC and within Latinx/a/o culture. Resistance capital refers to the knowledge and skills developed through oppositional actions that challenge inequity (Yosso, 2005). When Jairo pushed back against the DESJ center staff by advocating for inclusive representation of Latinx/a/o ethnicities in planning National Latinx/a/o Heritage Month activities, he drew from his resistance capital. When Viviana and Maria resisted dominant definitions of what being Latinx/a/o is (e.g., speaking Spanish, joining a Latinx/a/o identity-based organization at HC), they tapped into their resistance capital. Similarly, when Veronica challenged the beliefs and stigmas in the Latinx/a/o community around mental health by seeking support and treatment from the counseling center for her depression, she accessed her resistance capital. Through their resistance capital, Maria and Viviana focused on finding spaces where they felt comfortable and validated, while Veronica sought resources to care for her entire well-being. These elements of comfort, validation, and self-care were connected to thriving.

In sum, Latinx/a/o co-creators tapped into the various forms of capital they brought to the institution, which helped them thrive at HC. The fact that Latinx/a/o students arrive to

college already possessing forms of capital should be acknowledged and nurtured. Selective HWIs have much work to do before Latinx/a/o students feel like they belong there. In the meantime, these forms of capital have helped and will continue to help students navigate the oppressive nature of institutions like HC and help Latinx/a/o students thrive in similar environments. However, if selective HWIs were more focused on creating equitable experiences for Latinx/a/o students, they would make changes that would not require Latinx/a/o students to use their community cultural wealth to find their way to an equitable experience.

External and Internal Validating Agents

In addition to utilizing their CCW, the co-creators also benefitted from relationships with external validating agents, such as their families, internal validating agents, including faculty, staff, and peers, and affirming institutional and self-created spaces to help them thrive at HC. Rendón's (1994) validation theory helped me understand why internal validating agents, including administrators, staff, faculty, and peers, are essential to Latinx/a/o student thriving. As outlined in Chapter 2, Rendón's validation theory examines agents' impact when they validate students both academically and interpersonally. Accordingly, agents can help Latinx/a/o students feel valued, motivated, and appreciated by serving as support systems (Rendón, 1994). Academic validation comes to fruition through in-classroom activities when students receive support and affirmation through academic efforts, work, and achievement. On an interpersonal level, validation can happen inside and outside the classroom (Gildersleeve, 2011). According to Rendón (1994), interpersonal validation is experienced through activities recognizing and celebrating Latinx/a/o students' cultural and social traditions. Prior literature has also highlighted the impact of external and

internal validating agents on Latinx/a/o student success. Rendón's (1994) validation theory

maintains that validating agents play an active role in affirming Latinx/a/o student experience

inside and outside the classroom. For the co-creators in my study, validating agents whom

they associated with thriving included peers, staff, faculty, administrators, and external

agents, including family members.

My findings align with results of previous research on validating agents (Rendón,

1994). For the co-creators, various validating agents were essential to their thriving inside

and outside the classroom. For most, peers—whether roommates or friends they made

through their involvement with leadership positions on campus or in identity-based student

organizations—served as validating agents and were connected to thriving. For example,

both Ana and Maria associated their roommates with thriving. At the same time, Gabriel

shared that the relationships he built with peers in the residence halls were essential to

helping him thrive at HC. Ana, Maria, and Gabriel experienced validation, joy, comfort, and

belonging with their roommates and peers in these spaces. Maria shared specifically that she

experienced a sense of home with her Latinx/a/o roommates. The co-creators also connected

their thriving to other validating agents like faculty who affirmed them in the classroom or

administrators and staff members who connected them to resources and became mentors.

This was the case for Gabriel, whose experiences and academic ability were affirmed by

faculty in his sociology classes, and for Maria, who found a professor who shared her El

Salvadorean identity and who was a mentor. Viviana also found a source of support in a dean

on campus who did not share her Latinx/a/o identity but validated her existence at HC and

reminded Viviana that HC was a better place because she was a student there. For Gabriel,

Maria, and Viviana, various practitioners helped them experience validation, a sense of

belonging, and, for some, greater self-confidence. These elements were associated with thriving. Though some of these agents identified as Latinx/a/o, not all did; in some cases, co-creators formed cross-ethnic relationships with agents who shared other marginalized identities. In some cases, the agents identified as white. Since Latinx/a/o validating agents can be challenging to find at selective HWIs, it was vital that the co-creators could form validating relationships with non-Latinx/a/o agents as well.

Institutional and Self-Created Spaces

In addition, institutional and self-created spaces helped co-creators thrive. Prior literature has indicated that spaces like those created by student groups contribute to students' sense of belonging and thriving (Tichavakunda, 2021). This was true for the co-creators in my study who either associated institutional spaces, like identity-based centers or organizations, with thriving or created spaces for themselves with roommates and peers to help them thrive. In my study, self-created spaces closely resembled counterspaces highlighted in previous literature (Keels, 2019; Solórzano et al., 2000). Counterspaces are resistance spaces where students can experience radical growth and where identities often marginalized or made invisible in the larger campus culture are "explored, critiqued, and deepened, and sometimes claimed for the first time" (Keels, 2019, p. 6). Similarly, the self-created spaces in my study were those where the co-creators' marginalized identities were valued and celebrated. Self-created spaces were identity-affirming spaces where the co-creators' differences, values, and lived experiences were welcomed and were not rendered invisible as they might have been in most other places at HC.

For some co-creators, these spaces were within institutional centers like the DESJ, Beacon, and Harbor1st centers. For others, these spaces were tied to their work with identity-

based student organizations, including spaces where the groups held meetings, events, and programs. Additionally, some co-creators identified spaces they created for themselves to thrive. Maria talked about the affirming space she built with her Latinx/a/o roommates during the COVID-19 pandemic and how that was a space she associated with thriving. Gabriel shared how being in community with peers in his residence hall became like "group therapy" for them. In those spaces, they vented to each other, shared lived experiences, affirmed one another, and celebrated their identities. In these spaces, Maria and Gabriel experienced a sense of home, comfort, validation, joy, belonging, and cultural pride, each of which was associated with their ability to thrive at HC. The key takeaway is that self-created spaces and the individuals in those spaces are essential to Latinx/a/o student thriving. Validating spaces are limited within institutions like HC, but Latinx/a/o students find or create them for themselves. Within these spaces, Latinx/a/o students experience elements that they connect to their thriving.

To conclude, the Latinx/a/o co-creators at HC not only tapped into their community cultural wealth to thrive, but they also connected their ability to overcome racialized barriers and thrive to validating agents and to institutional and self-created spaces. Community cultural wealth, validating agents, and institutional and self-created spaces served as conditions that allowed Latinx/a/o students to experience elements they connected to thriving.

Thriving Was Subjective and Episodic for the Latinx/a/o Co-Creators

The final takeaway that goes beyond existing literature focuses on the subjective and episodic nature of thriving for Latinx/a/o students at a selective HWI. For the co-creators in my study, thriving was not a constant state of being; instead, its temporal, spatial, and labor

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dimensions impacted their thriving. None of the prior literature I reviewed referenced college student thriving as a temporary state or as conditional on time, space, and the responsibilities of students.

As discussed in the first two takeaways, the conditions that lead to, and elements associated with, thriving varied by co-creator. My study found that thriving was subjective to the individual and therefore looked different for all the co-creators. While they all shared their Latinx/a/o identity and attended the same institution, ultimately, thriving varied based on their unique social identities and experiences. The subjectivity of thriving for the Latinx/a/o co-creators was demonstrated throughout the study. As previously mentioned, for some co-creators, caring for their mental health and practicing self-care was connected to thriving; however, not all the co-creators expressed this. For some, thriving was connected to the comfort of being in community with roommates or other peers in the residence halls. Other co-creators connected the joy and cultural pride they experienced being part of identity-based organizations to thriving. However, this was not the case for Maria and Viviana, who did not associate identity-based student organizations with thriving. For Viviana, organizations like LASO represented a space where she felt disconnected and judged by her peers who questioned her Latinx/a/o identity because she did not speak Spanish. Similarly, Maria did not associate identity-based organizations with thriving because, in those spaces, she felt like she had to prove that she was Latinx/a/o enough and that her Latinx/a/o identity was measured by how much Spanish she spoke. In the self-created space she shared with her Latinx/a/o roommate, Maria experienced elements that other co-creators experienced within identity-based student organization. There, she felt joy and validation. Viviana's and Maria's experiences demonstrate that *how, where*, and *with*

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whom elements of thriving are experienced can vary. This reinforces the takeaway that thriving can be subjective and varies within the Latinx/a/o community at a selective HWI.

In addition to thriving being subjective, it was episodic for the Latinx/a/o co-creators, possessing temporal, spatial, and labor dimensions. For example, some co-creators associated spaces like the gym and library with thriving, while others related identity-based centers and meeting spaces for identity-based student organizations to thriving. Leadership and mentoring roles were connected to thriving for all the co-creators. In serving on panels for the admissions office, working as teaching assistants or resident assistants, or mentoring other students, the co-creators experienced joy, belonging, a connection to their Latinx/a/o values, and a greater sense of confidence and pride—elements they connected to thriving.

However, some co-creators also identified these spaces and roles as barriers. Some connected identity-affirming spaces and organizations with negative experiences because they did not always feel welcomed. Other co-creators experienced microaggressions or exclusion in some of these spaces, while others talked about being tokenized or feeling exploited by the institution in some leadership roles. In this way, thriving was conditional on how they experienced their leadership roles and identity-affirming spaces and organizations, whether their experience brought them to a positive or negative state of being.

Additionally, while both previous literature and my study suggest that validating agents, such as family, practitioners, and peers, are essential to Latinx/a/o students, my study also indicates that agents who validate and spaces that affirm can also have a negative impact on Latinx/a/o students, even creating additional racialized barriers, thus curbing their ability to thrive. For example, Jairo experienced a microaggression from a validating agent, whom he also connected to his thriving at HC. Further, Jairo struggled with the DESJ center staff

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during National Latinx/a/o Heritage Month because he felt they lacked understanding of the

cultural diversity of Latinx/a/o ethnicities. He then had to advocate for the representation of

other Latinx/a/o ethnicities being left out of the celebrations. This highlights that, whether

intentionally or unintentionally, the same agents who work to help Latinx/a/o students thrive

can also cause them harm and challenge their ability to thrive. Veronica had a similar

experience with family and friends who contributed to her thriving but who were also

barriers because of the stigma she believed they associated with seeking support for mental

health issues. This almost prevented her from seeking the support she needed when dealing

with depression, help that she ultimately connected to her ability to thrive at HC.

Conocimiento Capital

Previous literature on cultural capital has highlighted how Latinx/a/o students utilize

skills and abilities to navigate social institutions (Yosso, 2005). In the context of this study,

navigational capital refers to how Latinx/a/o students draw upon skills to maneuver through

racists institutions like HC. While my study affirmed that navigational capital is important to

traversing selective HWIs, it also highlighted skills and knowledge that co-creators

developed through the transformative process of thriving. In the Spanish language,

conocimiento[6] refers to knowledge, awareness, or consciousness. For this reason, I opted to

utilize the term "conocimiento capital" to refer to the new knowledge and skills that the co-

creators developed through the transformative process of thriving. Although my study

established that thriving is episodic for co-creators at selective HWIs, there is one permanent

dimension to the thriving: the knowledge and skills developed through the transformative

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[6] See Anzaldúa (2015), who theorized that conocimiento as a way of knowing and being.

process of thriving that will stay with them even when they are no longer experiencing thriving. As mentioned previously, this new knowledge and skills can then be utilized to overcome future barriers. Conocimiento capital is born from the process of thriving, and whether referring to the development of communication skills, the ability to code-switch, or learning to confront racialized barriers, these skills and knowledge serve as a new form of capital that can be accessed in the future.

Summary

Thriving does not look the same, nor is it permanent for Latinx/a/o students at selective HWIs. While they might share aspects of their Latinx/a/o identities, the intricacies of their social identities and experiences that result in thriving look different for each student. Though they might tap into community cultural wealth, the capital they bring with them and the capital they choose to draw from can vary. Additionally, while validating agents and institutional spaces and resources are associated with thriving, *who* and *what* spaces lead to elements connected to thriving vary for Latinx/a/o students. Lastly, thriving can depend on students' positive and negative interactions with peers, family, internal agents within the institution, and the various spaces at a selective HWI, whether self-created or created by the institution. Ultimately, my study found that thriving is subjective and episodic for Latinx/a/o students at selective HWIs. This is important to understand because it has implications for institutions and internal agents who must work to understand the episodic nature of thriving and begin making institutional changes so that students can experience elements connected to thriving at all times, in all spaces, and not feel taken advantage of by the institution when they decide to take on leadership and mentoring roles to support other students who share their identities.

Implications

This study has implications for higher education institutions as well as future research. In this section, I describe practice implications for administrators, faculty, and staff at selective HWIs as well as implications for future research on how Latinx/a/o students thrive in higher education.

Implications for Administrators, Faculty, and Staff

While this study has individual implications for administrators, faculty, and staff, there are implications that all three groups should consider. One implication relates to how they exploit their Latinx/a/o student population for the institution's educational and academic agenda. This study demonstrated that some co-creators felt tokenized and exploited by HC. They experienced this feeling of being taken advantage of mainly through their student leadership roles. Practitioners often see leadership positions as skill- and community-building opportunities for students. They focus on getting students involved on campus in leadership roles or invite them to sit on panels and attend dinners to serve as voices for their communities. While it is true that these opportunities help students build essential skills, the line between students' development and the burden these roles have on students often goes unacknowledged. Co-creators connected the roles they held to thriving because, through those roles, they could support other Latinx/a/o students and develop new skills, experience joy, and build confidence. However, the labor dimensions of those roles must be addressed. These positions added stress and required time and energy that co-creators could not dedicate to other areas, including academics and self-care. Institutions benefit by having Latinx/a/o representation on panels or by having students in these roles help build community or create

awareness of Latinx/a/o culture at their institutions. But such benefits come at the expense of their Latinx/a/o student leaders.

A second implication for administrators, faculty, and staff focuses on understanding the nuances of Latinx/a/o thriving and recognizing that Latinx/a/o student thriving is complex and different for every student. Some co-creators' experiences and actions did not fit the dominant definition of being Latinx/a/o—for example, participating in Latinx/a/o student organizations. The dominant narrative of being Latinx/a/o holds that Latinx/a/o students seek familismo, faith, and spirituality; speak Spanish; and seek community with other Latinx/a/o individuals in spaces that center their Latinx/a/o identity. However, practitioners cannot assume that all Latinx/a/o students adhere to the dominant narrative and must be prepared to see Latinx/a/o students for their uniqueness and complexity. That is, each student should be allowed to be who they are. For example, in my study, Viviana experienced thriving at the gym, not within identity-based organizations. This, however, does not make her any less Latinx/a/o.

Third, all practitioners should consider including Latinx/a/o students in ways that empower them, validate their experiences, and are personal to each student. These implications arise directly from feedback shared by the co-creators during the focus groups. As mentioned in Chapter 3, co-creators noted that this study's approach made them pause and think about their identities and experiences at HC and that the study felt personal. They appreciated the methods used, including the walking interviews during which I, as the researcher, "walked with them," living for a moment in their shoes. In inviting them as co-creators, I established that their reflections, experiences, and contributions defined this study. These were intentional choices because it was important that the students felt seen and

validated and that their experiences were valued. I needed to serve as a validating agent throughout this experience with the co-creators. Similarly, practitioners can play a critical role in promoting Latinx/a/o student thriving at selective HWIs by centering Latinx/a/o student values and elements of thriving in their classroom and campus spaces. In centering Latinx/a/o experiences, voices, and values in the spaces they oversee, practitioners send a message to Latinx/a/o students that they see them, value them, and celebrate their experiences. In doing so, practitioners become validating agents and create spaces where Latinx/a/o students feel welcomed, comfortable, valued, and safe to be their authentic selves—all elements that my study demonstrated were connected to Latinx/a/o student thriving.

This study's asset-based approach and use of Yosso's (2005) CCW framework also inform this third implication. During the focus groups, I introduced CCW to the co-creators. Although this framework has been around for nearly 20 years, only one of the six co-creators had engaged with it before the study. This new knowledge of the CCW framework was validating to the co-creators, helping them see that they were utilizing the community capital they brought from home, which is not universally recognized at HC as valuable. Practitioners need to do a better job of introducing Latinx/a/o students to asset-based frameworks and ideas like CCW so that they are better positioned to recognize the strengths, knowledge, skills, and capital they possess and can use to overcome barriers that threaten their thriving. Administrators, faculty, and staff can reframe how Latinx/a/o students see their experiences. Given that many Latinx/a/o students have been socialized to see their assets as deficits or as not valuable, it should be a prerogative of practitioners to shift the narrative. By doing so, practitioners can serve as validating agents for Latinx/a/o students.

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Practitioners can positively impact the experiences of Latinx/a/o students at selective HWIs. By serving as trusted agents who acknowledge and validate the lived experiences of Latinx/a/o students, practitioners can contribute to the elements that Latinx/a/o students associate with thriving. This can be accomplished by creating community inside and outside the classroom for Latinx/a/o students, including the voices and experiences in their curriculum, or offering support and resources that Latinx/a/o students need to navigate racialized barriers. Practitioners, no matter their racial and ethnic identity, must understand the nuances of Latinx/a/o student thriving, serve as validating agents, and work toward helping eliminate the institutional racialized barriers that Latinx/a/o students encounter at selective HWIs.

Additionally, practitioners must be conscious of the negative impact they can have on Latinx/a/o students, even those who work in spaces or roles that are intended to support students from marginalized identities. My study findings suggested that while practitioners in higher education can serve as validating agents, they can also threaten their thriving intentionally or not. Practitioners must be conscious of their individual bias while also understanding how the systems they work within could shape how they address Latinx/a/o students in ways that negatively impact student thriving. This applies not only to white practitioners but also to Practitioners of Color. In addition to being conscious of the negative impact that practitioners can have on Latinx/a/o students, there is also a need for practitioners within all areas of the institution to consider how they contribute to the elements of thriving. As noted earlier, practitioners often aim or are encouraged to create systemic change on campus in the form of large programs or initiatives or through policy change. While these changes and programs are important and can contribute to elements of thriving for Latinx/a/o

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students, practitioners should not ignore the role they play in the everyday little things that can impact elements of thriving. Through everyday interactions with Latinx/a/o students, practitioners can validate them and help them experience cultural pride, a sense of home or comfort in their offices, or joy. While seemingly small, these interactions or spaces in practitioners' offices and on campus are known to contribute to elements of thriving. If practitioners ignore them, they might unintentionally create barriers to the little things and, as a result, negatively impact Latinx/a/o student thriving.

How practitioners work and engage with Latinx/a/o students must be considered. Intentional methods that empower, validate, and create room for reflection can support Latinx/a/o student thriving or at least provide them the opportunity to reflect on what thriving means for them, if they see themselves as thriving, and, if not, what they need from the institution and practitioners to thrive. This also has implications for future research with students from minoritized identities.

Practitioners at all institutional levels must consider how barriers like the ones Latinx/a/o students face with validating agents and within institutional spaces, including identity-based student organizations, are connected to how whiteness functions at a systemic level within these institutions. The systemic factors that might have contributed to barriers co-creators experienced with validating agents and within identity-affirming spaces (e.g., LASO and the centers at HC) cannot be ignored. Ultimately, these agents and spaces function within whiteness, which can position validating agents and identity-affirming spaces as agents and spaces that do not validate Latinx/a/o student thriving. Functioning within whiteness centers speaking Spanish as a norm within LASO, for example. Since speaking Spanish is looked down upon in the greater HC community, Latinx/a/o students look to

spaces like LASO to be able to speak their native language. A consequence, however, is that students like Viviana and Maria are excluded because they either do not speak Spanish or do not want to be part of organizations where their Latinx/a/o identity is measured by how much Spanish they speak.

To conclude, validating agents and identity-affirming spaces at HWIs function within whiteness, which, as a result, can threaten their positive impact on Latinx/a/o student thriving. All practitioners must understand how personal bias as well as systemic factors can contribute to the barriers Latinx/a/o students experience with validating agents and within identity-affirming spaces.

Implications for Administrators

Administrators play a critical role in instituting some of the necessary changes at selective HWIs to help support Latinx/a/o student thriving. To promote Latinx/a/o student thriving, administrators must focus on hiring more Latinx/a/o faculty, staff, and administrators. This need is not new, as prior literature has demonstrated (K. González, 2002; Yosso, 2005; Zalaquette & Lopez, 2006). Increasing the number of Latinx/a/o faculty, staff, and administrators allows students to build mentoring and familial relationships with individuals who share their Latinx/a/o identity and values. It also allows for greater representation of Latinx/a/o faculty, staff, and administrators in spaces where decisions are being made that impact Latinx/a/o students. In their hiring practices, administrators must be more conscious of the importance of Latinx/a/o representation and the knowledge and experience that Latinx/a/o practitioners offer.

My study reveals an added layer to this need. Administrators will continue failing Latinx/a/o students if they do not acknowledge that there are differences in the lived

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experiences of BIPOC individuals. Experiences can differ significantly, not only by race but also by ethnicity. Thus, while an institution might have a center, as HC did, that is staffed by BIPOC individuals, when the diversity and representation of one racial/ethnic community are lacking, the institution will continue failing students from those communities. Although it was clear that a center staffed primarily by Black practitioners helped support Latinx/a/o students at HC, the lack of Latinx/a/o representation at the center added to some of the barriers and frustrations the students experienced. Latinx/a/o students can find support and comfort through cross-ethnic relationships with BIPOC staff and faculty. However, the void cannot be filled if the connection of sharing a similar Latinx/a/o identity or sharing similar experiences as Latinx/a/o people is lacking.

Additionally, administrators should consider either hiring new staff to advise Latinx/a/o identity-based student organizations or compensating current staff and faculty, who are often Latinx/a/o, for the time and energy they dedicate to advising these student groups. These groups are traditionally advised by staff members or faculty who are not compensated and often juggle many other responsibilities in their positions on campus. Administrators should consider how hiring Latinx/a/o-identifying individuals to serve in these roles might help shift some of the responsibilities and labor away from student leaders in these groups, who often must take on this labor in to promote the mission of the organizations and create Latinx/a/o-centered community spaces on campus. More specifically, the hired advisors can assume some of the labor that students take on to advocate for the groups and push back on the institution when issues around discrimination and oppression occur or when Latinx/a/o students or the groups need resources from the institution to better serve the student population they represent. One example is advocating

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for more funding or office space for these student groups. While the students need to have a voice in this advocacy work, they should not have to push back on the institution alone, without the support of an advisor. In such a relationship, students still serve as the primary voice and make decisions about how the organizations function on campus; however, there is relief in the labor placed on students. Additionally, staff advisors can play a significant role in combating the systemic factors that seep into the student organizations as a consequence of them functioning within whiteness.

Administrators should also properly compensate students for their labor. Though some student roles, like resident assistant or orientation leader, receive some compensation, it is often inadequate. There is no compensation for leadership roles in identity-based student organizations. While students benefit by building leadership skills in these positions and experiencing other elements associated with thriving, taking on these roles also means they must shift their attention from other things that might be important to them such as academics, self-care, and family. The institutions also benefit from the programming the students organize, like the cultural shows that Gabriel and Ana discussed. Often, administrators will highlight these programs as diversity-related efforts and connect them back to the institution's mission and values. Compensating students would demonstrate that administrators respect and value students' time and labor. This would also allow students to maintain the leadership roles they associate with elements of thriving while addressing the labor dimensions that can negatively impact their thriving.

Another implication that administrators must address if they are committed to Latinx/a/o student thriving relates to centering Latinx/a/o values and experiences and creating more racial/ethnic identity-based centers. Institutions like HC continue to center

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whiteness, creating little or no space for Latinx/a/o values and experiences. Administrators must work from the top down toward becoming more Latinx/a/o identity-centered and begin dismantling white heteronormative ways of being that permeate institutional policies and practices. Only then will selective HWIs make room for centering Latinx/a/o knowledge, culture, and ways of being and creating more opportunities for thriving. Administrators can begin making that shift by providing personnel and resources to create more specific racial/ethnic identity-based centers on campus. While intercultural centers like the one at HC are meant to serve all BIPOC students on campus, this does not always happen in practice. Though unintentional, sometimes the centers prioritize the voices and experiences of one group and leave out others. Instituting more racial/ethnic identity-based centers, such as a Latinx/a/o center, creates additional spaces on campus where Latinx/a/o students can experience elements they associate with thriving and connect with validating agents who share similar ethnic backgrounds and experiences. Just as crucial as creating these centers, however, is appropriately staffing and adequately providing them with the funding needed to serve Latinx/a/o students on campus. It is not enough to create a one-person center and expect them to be able to serve all Latinx/a/o students on campus through programming, advocacy, and one-on-one work with students. It is also essential to staff these centers with practitioners representing the racial and ethnic diversity within the Latinx/a/o community to avoid conflating Latinxs/as/os with a hegemonic image of "working-class Brown people" with no ethnic, racial, or socioeconomic status distinctions.

Additionally, where these centers are located sends a message to the campus body. Because thriving has spatial dimensions for Latinx/a/o students, creating these spaces and locating them in what I call "prime institutional real estate," or spaces of high traffic or value

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to the campus, tells students and the campus community that this is a space that is important to the institution. The space also needs to reflect Latinx/a/o culture—everything from the Latinx/a/o identity of the staff hired, to the art and furnishings, to the food served and the music heard in that space. These are all important considerations when creating these spaces.

Implications for Faculty and Staff

One implication for faculty and staff focuses on creating spaces for students to reflect *if* and *how* they have thrived and how their thriving might be connected to their Latinx/a/o identity. Within the classroom and other campus spaces, faculty and staff can provide students with the space and time needed to reflect on how their identities are assets and are connected to their thriving at the institution. This can be done formally in the classroom through assignments that allow students to reflect on how their identities are connected to the course of study and the contributions the Latinx/a/o community has made in those areas of study. Staff can also incorporate this type of reflection into their departments more broadly. For example, career services can tie in reflective practices that help students connect their Latinx/a/o-related assets to potential jobs or careers. This can also happen through faculty–student advising meetings or more informally through the normal course of conversations. Doing so allows Latinx/a/o students to pause and acknowledge the assets and capital they carry with them and identify areas where they need support from faculty and staff to thrive. It is then essential that the faculty and staff ensure they provide the students with the support and validation they need to thrive.

Additionally, as this study demonstrates, an institution can have multiple centers, services, and resources supporting marginalized students. However, students need to be made aware of these resources to ensure their purpose is met. While co-creators in my study

eventually found and sought available resources, many shared that the resources were not immediately apparent upon their arrival at HC. As frontline practitioners, faculty and staff can play a critical role in connecting Latinx/a/o students to services and resources and help eliminate unnecessary challenges that arise from the lack of awareness of these services and resources. Faculty and staff need to be conscious of these barriers and be intentional about making information about the resources available for marginalized students as soon as possible. Two examples of how faculty can connect students to essential resources include incorporating information about those resources in their course syllabi or inviting the centers or offices that offer those resources to speak about them for a few minutes at the start of class. Faculty can also take their advisees to those centers and offices at the start of their experience at college and connect them to practitioners in those areas.

Implications for Future Research

Phenomenological studies focus on subjective experiences and value the connections between self and the world. Understanding lived experiences from a place-based perspective can play a significant role in understanding how study co-creators engage with the world and how that impacts the essence of the phenomenon being studied. While sit-down interviews allow researchers to hear how co-creators engage with space, walking interviews allow the researcher to live the engagement directly with the co-creators. In doing so, researchers can not only hear but also see and feel directly the impact that spaces and the individuals within those spaces have on co-creators. Lived experiences are often tied to the places where they occur, and while describing a place can create a picture of the setting, experiencing the place first-hand creates a clearer description that allows for a deeper understanding of how space can impact that lived experience. Simply put, walking interviews can enhance

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phenomenological inquiry by deepening the understanding of the lived experience of study

co-creators in specific spaces.

In my study, walking interviews illuminated place as an important dimension of the

phenomenological essence of thriving for Latinx/a/o students at a selective HWI. Since

elements associated with thriving are not experienced in all spaces at HC—due to the

prevalence of whiteness—walking interviews provided richer, more detailed data not only

about the general environment at HC, but also and more specifically the environment within

the spaces that the co-creators associated with thriving. Walking interviews also allowed me,

as the researcher, to engage directly with validating agents. I saw first-hand the interaction

the co-creators had with validating agents, as opposed to other practitioners who were not

seen as validating agents. For example, I saw the warmth and connectedness that Gabriel

shared with one of the validating agents whom he referred to as "auntie" when he introduced

me to her when we walked into one of the identity-based centers. I saw them embrace in a

way often seen when running into family or close friends. Meanwhile, I saw the opposite

when we ran into a member of the residence life staff. Even though Gabriel had been a

resident assistant for 2 years already, this staff member did not remember his name. The

interaction between the two was distant and transactional—nothing like the interaction he

had with his auntie. If I had only conducted sit-down interviews, I would not have gained this

deeper understanding of the relationships the co-creators shared with validating agents.

While Gabriel might have shared that his auntie was a validating agent, I would have never

seen and heard first-hand how he engaged with her. There was warmth and a sense of

comfort that I could see from Gabriel in his engagement with her that I did not see when he

engaged with the staff member from residence life. I could see, hear, and feel the elements he

associated with thriving when he engaged with his auntie in one of the centers he associated with thriving. This multisensory experience with spaces and the fact that I walked side by side with the co-creators set the walking interviews apart from the regular sit-down interviews.

Lastly, while I did not call my focus groups pláticas, they were modeled in the form of pláticas. Pláticas emerged as a model of research that moves away from traditional methods that often do not capture well the experiences of Latinx/a/o people (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). In Chicanx/Latinx research, pláticas developed from a focus on honoring the "researcher's and research participants' epistemological position" (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016, p. 107). Pláticas allow for the sharing of ideas and experiences and building relationships. This method also creates spaces for the facilitators of the pláticas to be open and vulnerable when engaging with study participants. For my study, I wanted the focus groups to be a space where the co-creators not only connected with one another and myself, but also felt validated and affirmed. I intentionally built a space for conversation around community cultural wealth because I wanted the co-creators to walk away from the focus groups and the entire study with an understanding of the capital they brought to HC and the assets they were to the HC community. The focus groups were intended to represent a community space and, when looking back now, perhaps for some a space where they experienced elements they associated with thriving, such as sense of belonging, comfort, and validation.

To conclude, the walking interviews and the focus groups were not intended to center traditional forms of data collection methods. Instead, both forms of data collection honored the lived experiences of the Latinx/a/o co-creators by allowing me, as the researcher, to walk

side by side with them, be open about my own personal experiences, and create spaces where their lived experiences were valued and validated. Future research should consider the methods utilized in this study to collect data when working with Latinx/a/o students. Traditional research methods can leave students feeling like "lab rats" or disconnected from the study, creating a harmful disruption for students as they reflect on their lived experiences and relive moments of racialized barriers. Interviews structured from an asset-based perspective and specific methods like the walking interview can make students feel more empowered and connected to the study. The walking interview method was significant in this study as it allowed me to experience HC with the co-creators, especially the spaces and individuals they connected to their thriving and racialized barriers. This allowed me to experience first-hand the spaces and people they were sharing with me. Future research should consider how walking interviews and intentionally asset-based and identity-affirming data collection methods resonate with and validate co-creators from minoritized backgrounds. As much as possible, researchers should lift the voices and experiences of the students and leave them in a better state of being as a result of participating in the study.

Given this study's finding that thriving is episodic and conditional on time, spatial, and labor dimensions for Latinx/a/o students at selective HWIs, further research is warranted to explore whether and how thriving is episodic for Latinx/a/o students at different types of higher education institutions. Recognizing that Latinx/a/o students are more likely to attend other types of institutions, including community colleges, board access institutions, or institutions with a smaller residential component than institutions like HC, conditions for thriving might look different for Latinx/a/o students at those types of institutions. Further research on the episodic nature of thriving at different institutions is critical, as it would help

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identify specific patterns or major differences among the time, spatial, and labor dimensions across institution types. Other future studies might incorporate data collection as students are experiencing moments of thriving versus reflecting on past experiences, as my study did. For example, researchers should consider including journaling as a data collection method to capture details regarding specific moments when Latinx/a/o students experience thriving. This would help develop a deeper understanding of the temporal nature of thriving as students are living the moment or capturing the experience when it is fresh on their minds.

Further research is also needed to explore how thriving differs for Latinx/a/o students by race and ethnicity, given the racial and ethnic diversity of Latinidad. This study touched on some differences in the data between the experiences of the two co-creators who identified as white-passing. Researchers should seek to understand how definitions of thriving and what leads to thriving might differ among Latinx/a/o students based on racial and ethnic identity. Additionally, future research should explore if there is a depth or intensity to thriving for Latinx/a/o students in higher education. While my study established that Latinx/a/o student thriving at selective HWIs is subjective, future research should explore the different levels at which thriving is experienced. Lastly, future research should examine how administrators, faculty, and staff define thriving for Latinx/a/o students and whether their definitions align with how students conceive of thriving and the elements they connect to thriving. This study focused on how Latinx/a/o co-creators defined thriving and the elements associated with thriving and did not include practitioner perspectives on Latinx/a/o thriving. Thus, it remains to be determined whether there was an overlap or disconnect between co-creator and practitioner views at HC. Future research can help clarify this question, which my study did not address.

CHAPTER 7

REFLEXIONES OF A LATINA PRACTITIONER WHO HAS THRIVED BUT STILL

HAS NOT FOUND A HOME IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Twenty-one years ago, I was in my second semester of college at a selective HWI. As a first-generation Latina, I had yet to learn what I was doing. I was struggling academically, and while I had started building relationships with friends who are like family today, our relationships were still new, leaving me feeling isolated and lonely. My roommate and I were from two different worlds. She loved her Kraft mac and cheese, and I loved my arroz con habichuelas and pollo. I blasted my favorite bachata band at the time—Aventura—from our room, and she listened to artists that I had never heard of. I remember sitting in classes and social spaces where I felt like I did not belong. I just could not fit in because I was in an environment where anything sacred to me was not part of the culture on campus. The food, the music, the way people engaged with one another, the materials we studied, what other students seemed to value—I did not feel connected to any of it. At that time, nothing felt like home to me. Today, I know that imposter syndrome was taking over, and at that time, I did not (or so I thought) have the knowledge, capital, or resources to deal.

The experiences of the co-creators in this study often reminded me of my experience as an undergraduate student at my alma mater. In some ways, I relived the isolation and feeling of not belonging when hearing about the experiences of the co-creators. I relived

moments of racialized barriers when I listened to their stories. I thought about the validating agents who helped me get through my college experience and the leadership roles I held, and I thought about the spaces where I felt at home or in community with other Latinx/a/o students. I reflected on my relationship with my family and the values I brought to college with me that helped me navigate through college. I thought about the resources available to me and those that did not exist back then. I also realized that, even now as a practitioner in higher education, I have lived through experiences that mirror those experienced by the co-creators; being on the other side of higher education as a Latina practitioner sometimes does not feel much different.

Twenty-one years later, as a Latina practitioner working in higher education, I still have not found a sense of home in higher education. Institutions continue to be just as isolating and to need more representation of Latinxs/as/os on both the student and practitioner side. There have been times when I could go days without engaging with someone who is Latinx/a/o or BIPOC. I still deal with microaggressions. The difference is that the impact these barriers have on me differs from when I was a student. I have learned to utilize my community cultural wealth to navigate the institutions where I have worked. I have been able to build a support system around me that I tap into when I am feeling isolated, othered, or frustrated by the systemic forms of oppression that continue to exist in higher education for both students and practitioners. Through serving as a validating agent for BIPOC students, I have learned to see myself as an asset to the institution, regardless of whether the institution sees me in that light. If I only knew as a student what I know now.

The reality is that Latinx/a/o students thrive because they have no choice but to be resilient and move through the transformative process of thriving in a way that sets them up

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to succeed. This is especially the case when they hold multiple marginalized identities. For some students, as was the case for me, by the time they get to college, they have overcome so many identity-based barriers that facing racialized barriers at college is not new. It is exhausting and frustrating but neither new nor unexpected. Latinx/a/o students often tap into the forms of capital they come to the institution with to overcome barriers and get through college. Imagine the success they would have if these barriers did not exist or if institutions implemented the structural changes needed to remove the barriers that threaten their ability to thrive. If Latinx/a/o students had to spend less time and energy searching for mentors who looked like them, creating spaces for themselves, looking for moments, spaces, and agents that connected them to home, and if they were always welcomed into an environment that reflected and valued their cultural backgrounds, then they would be able to focus on other aspects of being a college student.

Looking back, I tapped into different forms of community cultural wealth. Ironically, for me, Yosso's (2005) work on community cultural wealth was published at a time when I needed it the most. I was finishing my undergraduate experience as a senior, and while I was at a better place by then, Yosso's work would have helped me see my experiences through a new lens. Perhaps I would have noticed how some of my Latinx/a/o values of family and community-centeredness helped me build meaningful relationships with peers, as was the case for Jairo and Gabriel. Perhaps I would have recognized the navigational capital I tapped into as a first-generation Latina from a working-class background and how my work ethic and ability to find solutions and persevere by finding the needed resources were related to navigational capital.

Like the co-creators in my study, my thriving was not tied to academic success. However, changing my major from biology to Spanish allowed me to connect with faculty who shared my Latinx/a/o identity. I did well academically in my Spanish courses and a few education courses that examined inequalities in education because I felt connected to the material. I saw my experiences and my identities reflected in the course material, and I took classes with professors like Erika Fisher, with whom I shared many identities, including being Women of Color, growing up in Worcester, and having attended the same undergraduate alma mater. I took as many education courses as possible with her because her classes felt "real" to me.

As I reflect on my journey, I cannot help seeing the similarities in my experiences with those of the co-creators in my study. Their voices have given voice to my own experience and perhaps the experiences of other Latinx/a/o students at selective HWIs and elsewhere. Our stories parallel one another in many ways, yet the co-creators have shed more light on the phenomenon of thriving that, despite my own experience, I did not understand. In the Prologue, I shared that I did not thrive as an undergraduate student. Yet, looking back now and considering what I learned from the co-creators in my study, I did thrive in more ways than I realized back then. I thrived when I learned how to code-switch like Maria. I thrived when I served for 3 years on the executive board of the Latin American Student Organization, like Ana, Jairo, Veronica, Ricardo, and Gabriel, who served on one of the identity-based student organizations on the HC campus. I thrived when I built a sisterhood with a group of four Dominican and one Colombian woman in my class year, as Maria did with her roommates. I thrived when I found mentors and advocates like Dean Esther Levine, Tina Chen, Tamika Weaver-Hightower, and Anabel Paniagua, similar to Viviana, who

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connected her relationship with Dean Francis to thriving. I thrived in other leadership roles, like serving as a mentor for BIPOC students, serving as a resident assistant, and working with the admissions office, similar to each of the co-creators in my study. I thrived when we celebrated National Latinx/a/o Heritage Month and held our yearly Noche Latina cultural show, as Jairo and Gabriel did through their involvement with the DESJ center and the DSO.

Looking back, did the institution benefit from my time and labor? Absolutely. But giving up any pieces of those aspects that benefited the institution would have undermined my ability to thrive as an undergraduate. I needed the familia I built through my involvement with LASO. I cherished the relationships I made serving as a mentor and RA. They often brought me joy. I experienced cultural pride and greater self-confidence through planning and hosting our annual cultural show. As an executive board member of LASO, I found comfort in the small programming spaces we created for Latinx/a/o students on campus throughout the year. Without those leadership experiences, I would not have experienced the moments, spaces, or connections with validating agents that helped me persevere. I wouldn't have learned essential leadership skills that, to this day, impact my personal and professional life.

Ultimately, at this point, selective HWIs like HC do not offer Latinx/a/o students "a home away from home." Work must be done for HWIs like HC to create spaces where Latinx/a/o students can thrive without racialized barriers. A step in that direction is understanding how Latinx/a/o students define thriving as well as the conditions and elements that contribute to their thriving. However, understanding the nuances of Latinx/a/o student thriving is just the beginning of creating a community and environment where Latinx/a/o students can choose but are not required to tap into their community cultural wealth to build

more positive college experiences and graduate. I want to remain hopeful that practitioners at selective HWIs can continue moving these institutions forward and help create college campuses that are more Latinx/a/o-centered. It will take time, but I do believe that "si se puede." It is possible and needed if selective HWIs are committed to providing equitable experiences for Latinx/a/o students. In the meantime, practitioners like me will need to keep pushing these institutions to do better.

Imagine an institution where Latinx/a/o students see themselves represented in most of the student body, faculty, and staff. Imagine an institution where they come to campus and see their culture and experiences reflected in the courses offered, in the activities held by the institution (not just one student group), in the languages spoken on campus, and in the food from their cultures served in the dining hall. The often overlooked aspects of institutions, like pictures and furnishings, reflect their history and culture. But beyond this, imagine an institution where whiteness no longer sets the cultural norms of the institution, where a sense of home is experienced everywhere, not just in small student-created spaces or in small pockets of institutional programs, where the mission of the institution reflects values important to the Latinx/a/o community, and where practices center on these values as well (Orellana, 2023).

APPENDIX A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

Key information about the research study:
Below is a short summary of the study to help you decide whether you would like to participate in the study. More detailed information is listed further down on this form.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of successful Latinx/a/o students at selective Historically White Institutions and the factors that contribute to their thriving at these institutions. As a participant in the study, you will participate in a 60-90-minute sit-down interview, and a 60-90-minute walking interview, 60-minute focus group. You can expect to be in the research study for approximately 3-4 months.

Study purpose:
There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the opportunity gaps in access and equity for Latinx/a/o students in higher education and that elevates their voices and experiences. The purpose of this study is to explore your experiences as a Latinx/a/o college student and what contributes to your success at a historically white institution. Attention will be paid to your perceptions of individual, institutional, community and identity-based factors that contribute to your ability to thrive.

Number of participants:
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be one of 6-10 participants who will participate in this research.

Procedures for the study:
If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in the following:
- Attend an informal group meeting to build trust and rapport with the researcher, familiarize yourself with the process and receive this consent form. Location of the meeting will be determined based on convenience for study participants.
- Participate in a sit-down interview that will take 60-90 minutes. Location will be determined based on convenience for the participant and the researchers. The interview, with participant consent, will be recorded using an audio-recorder.
- Participate in an in person walking interview that will take approximately 60-90 minutes. Walking interviews will take place on campus and participant will determine the locations we visit throughout the interview. The interview, with participant consent, will be recorded using an audio-recorder.
- Participate in a focus group that will take approximately 60-90 minutes, during which the researcher will provide strategies and tools you can utilize to further support your success in college.
- After the data is collected and transcribed participants will be asked to review transcriptions to ensure the accuracy of the documented account.

Risks and inconveniences:
There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study. Risks include:
- The risk of a breach of your confidentiality.
- Inconvenience associated with the time it takes to participate in the study.
- Experiences of discomfort when discussing dimensions of your lived experience.

Campus Resources:
- Counseling Center, [location], [phone number]
- Office of Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice, [location], [phone number], [email address]
- Latin American Student Organization [link to organization website]

Safeguards:
- Any documents associated with the study will be kept in a locked security box at the office of the researcher. Only the researcher will have access to the security box key.
- Participants will be provided with a timeline that outlines the time commitment. associated with participation in the study. This timeline will be provided to the participants in advance and participants will be given one week to consider participation.
- Participants will have the option to end their participation in the study at any time during the research process.
- Participants may ask the investigator to turn off the audio recorded at any time during the interview.
- Referrals to appropriate resources will be offered if a strong emotional or mental reaction is evoked during the interview process.

Confidentiality:
Participant information will be kept confidential. The results of the study will be used in research, reports and/or publications, but participants' names and other personal information will not be utilized.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in the study is voluntary. At any time, you can choose to leave the study without resulting in any penalty. Your decision to participate or not participate in the study will not impact your current or future relations with your university.

Benefits of participating in the study:
The benefits of participating in this study include having your voice heard and story told. Further, your participation will add an in-depth understanding of your lived experience and highlight the factors that have encouraged your success and enabled your ability to thrive at your institution.

Payment of incentive:
Each participant in the study will receive a $100 gift card for taking part in the study. Gift cards will be distributed to the participant at the completion of the study. Participation in the study is voluntary and withdrawal from it is understandable.

Contact information:
If you have any questions about the study, you may contact the primary investigator, Melisa Alves at melisa.alves001@umb.edu or 508-579-9405 or the primary investigator's chair, Dr. Cheryl Ching at Cheryl.Ching@umb.edu. Participants will receive a copy of this form to keep for your personal records. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in the research or if you feel you have been placed at risk at any point you make, contact the IRB office at University of Massachusetts Boston at irb@umb.edu

Study participation:
Would you be interested in participating in the study?
❏ Yes, I am interested in participating in the study
❏ No, I am no longer interested in participating in the study

Participant consent:
By signing below, you are giving consent to participate in the study. Please check the option that applies to you before signing:

❏ I give permission for my individual interview to be audiotaped
❏ I do not give permission for my individual interview to be audiotaped

Name of the participant (print):

_____

Signature of the participant:

_____

Date: _____

SURVEY PROTOCOL

Survey Email:

Dear student,

My name is Melisa Alves, and I serve as the Director of Career Services at Worcester State University. I am also currently a doctoral student in the University of Massachusetts Boston, Higher Education Leadership program. You are invited to participate in a research study of Latinx/a/o students thriving at selective Historically White Institutions. You are selected as a possible participant because you identify as Latinx/a/o and are successfully matriculated at a local four-year university. You must be 18 or older to participate in the study.

To be considered for participation in the study, fill out this short questionnaire: LINK TO SURVEY

Thank you,

Melisa Alves

Demographic Information:

First Name:
Last Name:
Pronouns:
Age:
Email Address:
What year did you enroll at the institution?
What is your expected graduation year?
Country/place of origin/Ethnic identity:
Racial identity:
Where is your hometown?
What is your gender identity?
Sexual orientation:
What is your immigration status?
What is your family's socio-economic status?
Do you identify as a first-generation student? *(You are the first in your family to attend and be on track to graduate from college)*
What is your current GPA?
What is your current major? Has it changed? If so, what was it previously?
Do you have a job?
What extracurriculars are you involved with?

Questions:

On a scale of 1-3 how often have your experienced racialized barriers (barriers resulting from racial/ethnic discrimination-unjust or prejudicial treatment- example being treated different because of race, nationality etc.) at your institution?

1. I have never faced racialized barriers at my institutions
2. I have experienced racialized barriers in a few instances
3. I have experienced racialized barrier on a routinely basis

What have you learned, if anything, after experiencing racialized barriers at your institution? (open response question)

Students who select response 2 or 3 will proceed with the survey to the next question.

During my time in college, I have experienced the following (check off all that apply):
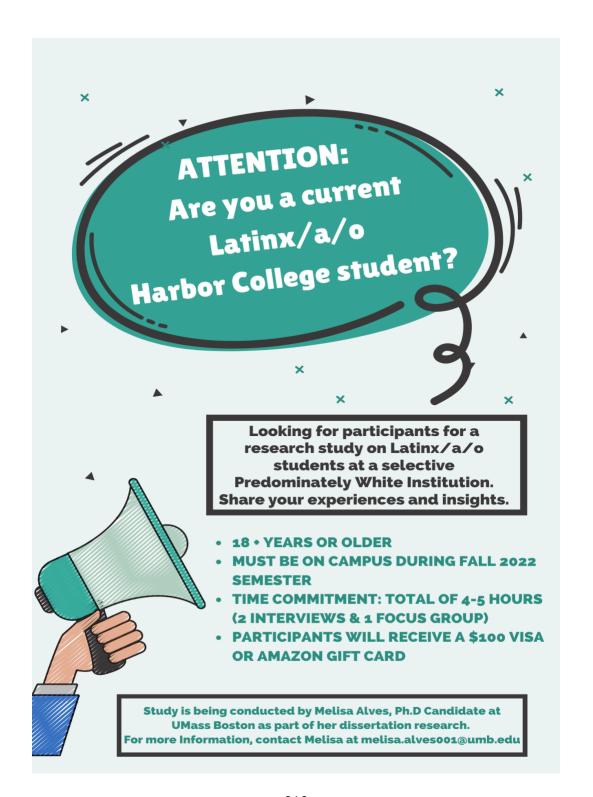
1. Developed new knowledge and/or skills after overcoming experiences of adversity
2. Felt I am receiving quality academic and learning experience
3. Experience a sense of cultural pride and greater appreciation of my Latinx/a/o identity
4. Developed healthier relationships with others
5. Felt supported and validated by my peers, faculty and/or staff
6. Felt a sense of community and belonging
7. Greater sense of confidence in my ability to confront future adversity
8. Motivation to achieved academic/personal goals and aspirations
9. Sense of hope for my future
10. Heighten sense of self
11. Started to figure out my sense of purpose
12. Experienced joy after overcoming identity-based adversity
13. Developed my ability to ask for help

I am getting the most from my college experiences as a Latinx/a/o person
1. True
2. False

RECRUITMENT FLYER

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction:
Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today and for your participation in my research study. My name is Melisa Alves and I serve as the Director of Career Services at Worcester State University. I am also currently a doctoral student at the University of Massachusetts Boston. I have asked to interview you as part of my study of Latinx/a/o students thriving at selective Historically White Institutions. This is a semi-structured interview, which means that I will be using a protocol with a set of questions, but the course of the interview will be dictated by what you are telling me.

Purpose of the study:
The purpose of this study is to add to current research that explores the experiences of Latinx/a/o students in higher education. Specifically, the study will explore the experiences of successful Latinx/a/o students at selective Historically White Institutions and their perceptions of the factors that have contributed to their ability to thrive at their institution. This study is important as it adds to the growing body of literature that examines Latinx/a/o student experiences from an asset-based lens.

Before we continue, I would like to ask for permission to audio record this interview.

Informed consent:
You have already completed a consent form to participate in this study. I wanted to emphasize a few points from the consent form before we begin. First, I will make every effort to ensure that your responses remain confidential. This means that no one besides me and a professional transcriber will hear the audio recording of our interview. Information gathered for this study will be stored in files on password protected computers. It also means that transcripts as well as any other study documents will not contain your real name. I will be providing you with a pseudonym, which can be of your choosing if you prefer. Second, your participation in the study is voluntary. We can stop the interview, audio recording or your participation in the study at any point without any consequences.

Timeframe and questions:
The interview should last approximately 60-90 minutes.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Prior experiences with barriers:
1. Can you tell me how racialized barriers have challenged your sense of Latinx/a/o identity?
   a. How did the barrier challenge your academic and learning experience?

      b. Can you tell me if the barrier you faced challenged other marginalized identities that you hold?

2. What emotions have you felt when dealing with racialized barriers?
3. What short- or long-term impact did this barrier have on you?
4. Tell me in what ways have you sought help when overcoming these barriers?
      a. Can you tell me what if any institutional support system did you utilize to overcome these barriers? (ex. Campus resources, faculty, staff, peers, mentors, identity-based student groups etc.?)
      b. Tell me what role if any did family play in helping you overcome racialized barrier?
      c. Can you tell me what personal characteristics have contributed to your ability to overcome racialized barriers?
      d. Tell me how your other identities (ie. gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, race) have helped you overcome these barriers?
      e. How if in any way did your spirituality or faith contribute to your ability to overcome these barriers?
      f. How if in any way did your sense of family/community contribute to your ability to overcome these barriers?

Thriving:
5. How do you define thriving?
6. Who has helped shape your definition of thriving?
7. Is there a difference between success and thriving for you? If yes, what are the differences?
8. Can you tell me how overcoming racialized barriers creates a greater sense of hope for you?
9. Can you tell me in what ways you feel a greater sense of community and/or belonging after overcoming racialized barriers?
10. Tell me in what ways if any you developed a greater sense of pride in your Latinx/a/o identity after overcoming these barriers?
11. Tell me in what ways did you gain a greater sense of self after overcoming the barrier?
12. Tell me in what ways did overcoming these barriers motivate you to achieve personal or aspiration goals?
13. In what ways do you feel like you are getting the most out of your college experience as a Latinx/a/o person?
14. In what ways have you experienced joy on campus?
15. For students who noted new knowledge and skills on the survey: On the survey, you noted that you have developed new knowledge and/or skills after overcoming experiences of adversity. What's an example of new knowledge or skills that you developed?

Those are all the questions that I have for you. Do you have any questions for me?

I will be reviewing this interview closely over the next few weeks. Would it be okay for me to reach out to you with additional or follow-up questions?

Thank you for your time and participation.

WALKING INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Timeframe and questions:
The walking interview should last approximately 60-90 minutes.

Directions:
Using a campus map, we will begin at an agreed upon location. From there we will be guided to other spaces on campus based on locations you feel are important to your college experience as a Latinx/a/o student. While I have some questions to guide the interview, the course of the interview will be dictated based on what you are telling me. As part of the interview process, I ask you to consider not only the spaces on campus we will visit but also the people that you might see along the way or who work/utilize those spaces. Consider how both spaces and individuals throughout the walking interview have impacted your ability to thrive while in college. Include individuals who have presented barriers but more importantly those who have impacted your ability to thrive and have served as support systems for you.

Do you have questions before we get started?

To get started can you give me a tour of the campus? As part of the tour share with me where you spend most of your time and with whom? Why are these places important to you?

Questions:
Below is a list of standard questions for the walking interview, however it is important to note that other questions might be developed specific to each student based on previous data collection rounds.

Places of thriving:
1. What are places on campus where you have experienced moments of thriving? (*reference list of experiences with thriving they previously mentioned in the survey-will inquire further regarding the items they did not check off*) offer examples of feelings, behaviors, and experiences that exemplify thriving and/or definition of thriving
    a. Developed new knowledge and/or skills after overcoming experiences of adversity
    b. Felt you are receiving a quality academic and learning experience
    c. Experience a sense of cultural pride and greater appreciation of your Latinx/a/o identity
    d. Developed healthier relationships with others
    e. Felt supported and validated by your peers, faculty and/or staff
    f. Felt a sense of community and belonging
    g. Greater sense of confidence in your ability to confront future adversity
    h. Motivation to achieve academic/personal goals and aspirations

        i.   Sense of hope for the future
        j.   Heighten sense of self
        k.   Felt joy
        l.   Places where you have asked for help or support

2. What thoughts, memories, or emotions surface for you as we stand in this location?
3. What strategies do you remember utilizing that helped you thrive at this location?
    a. Use of native language
    b. Reached out to individuals for support (ex. Faculty, staff, peers, family, etc.)
    c. Utilized campus support service (counseling, programming, etc.)
    d. Faith and spirituality
    e. Focused on goals and aspirations
4. Who were other individuals you remember being part of that moment for you? (offer example of community and institutional agents). What role did they play in supporting you?
    a. Peers
    b. Faculty
    c. Staff
    d. Administrators
    e. Other individuals who work at the institution
    f. Family
    g. Significant others
5. What did you learn from this experience about your ability to overcome challenges and thrive?
6. Why are these places of thriving for you?

Campus resources:
Below are a list of campus services/individuals available at your institution that can provide support:

- Counseling Center, [location], [phone number]
- Office of Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice, [location], [phone number], [email address]
- Latin American Student Organization [link to organization website]

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Introduction:
Thank you for taking the time to participate in this focus group. As a reminder my name is Melisa Alves and I serve as the Director of Career Services at Worcester State University. I am also currently a doctoral student at the University of Massachusetts Boston. I have asked you to participate in this focus group as part of my study of Latinx/a/o students thriving at selective Historically White Institutions.

Purpose of the study:
The purpose of this study is to add to current research that explores the experiences of Latinx/a/o students in higher education. Specifically, the study will explore the experiences of successful Latinx/a/o students at selective Historically White Institutions and their perceptions of the factors that have contributed to their ability to thrive at their institution. This study is important as it adds to the growing body of literature that examines Latinx/a/o student experiences from an asset-based lens.

Informed consent:
You have already completed a consent form to participate in this study. I wanted to emphasize a few points from the consent form before we begin. First, I will make every effort to ensure that your responses remain confidential. This means that no one besides me and a professional transcriber will hear the audio recording of our focus group. Information gathered for this study will be stored in files on password protected computers. It also means that transcripts as well as any other study documents will not contain your real name. I will be providing you with a pseudonym, which can be of your choosing if you prefer. Second, your participation in the study is voluntary. We can stop the audio recording or your participation in the study at any point without any consequences.

Before we continue, I would like to ask for permission to audio record this focus group.

Questions:

Questions focused on being a co-creator in the study:
- How has participating in this study shaped how you see yourself within the Harbor College community?
- How has participating in this study shaped your thoughts about the way you have thrived at Harbor College?
- Now that we are wrapping up our interviews, do you see yourselves as co-creators in this study?

Questions focused on thriving based on initial review of data:
- In reflecting on your experiences of thriving at Harbor College, would you say you are thriving holistically or just in certain moments/spaces?
- In what ways have spaces and resources (programs) represented both barriers and thriving for you as a Latinx/a/o student at BC?
- In reflecting on your experiences of thriving at Harbor College would you say that thriving is temporary or a permanent state of being? Why?
- If thriving existed on a spectrum, what does that look like for you as a Latinx/a/o student at Harbor College?

Reflections on article:
- Were you familiar with community cultural capital before reading this article? If you were, where did you first learn about it?
- What are your initial thoughts and feelings about the CCC framework?
- How does understanding this framework shift your perspective of what you bring to the Harbor College community?
- How does understanding this framework make you think differently about the way you might or might not be thriving at Harbor College.

Focus group ground rules:
- Participation in the focus group is voluntary
- It is okay to abstain from discussing specific topics if you are uncomfortable with the topic
- There are no wrong or right answers
- Please respect the opinion of everyone- even if you disagree with what they are saying
- Speak as openly as you feel comfortable
- One person speaks at a time
- To help protect others privacy please do not share details discussed today outside of this group
- Resources are available if needed including speaking with a counselor or support staff at your institution (share list of resources)

As this is a collective agreement, are there any rules you would like to amend/modify or add?

Resources:
Community Cultural Wealth: https://www.tarajyossophd.com/

Article to review before focus group

Campus resources:
Below are a list of campus services/individuals available at your institution that can provide support:

- Counseling Center, [location], [phone number]

- Office of Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice, [location], [phone number], [email address]
- Latin American Student Organization [link to organization website]

Thank you for your participation in the focus group. Today's discussion will help to further shape the study and understanding of the phenomena of Latinx/a/o students thriving at a selective HWI.

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