AMAE Special Issue

Latinx and the Community College: Promoting Pathways to Postsecondary Degrees

Guest Editors
Edna Martinez, Nancy Acevedo-Gil, and Enrique G. Murillo, Jr.
California State University, San Bernardino

Editors
Patricia Sánchez
The University of Texas at San Antonio

Antonio J. Camacho
AMAE, Inc.

Associate Editors
Julie L. Figueroa
Sacramento State

Lucila D. Ek
The University of Texas at San Antonio

Latina Student Mothers' *Trenzas de Identidades* in the Community College

Hortencia Jiménez

Hartnell College

Nereida Oliva

Hartnell College

Abstract

Latinx are one of the fastest growing demographic groups in the country and their growth is visible in higher education. Using focus groups with student mothers, we examine the narratives of four Latina student mothers pursuing higher education at the community college. Using Chicana Feminist Theory as our theoretical framework, we apply *trenzas de identidades* (Godínez, 2006; Montoya, 1994) as a metaphorical and analytical tool to understand the experiences of Latina community college student mothers. The student mothers' *trenzas de identidades* demonstrate the ways their mother, student, and professional identities intersect and influence how they experience and navigate the educational pipeline. We call upon higher education faculty and administrators to reject deficit ideologies of Latina student mothers, and we offer recommendations for creating a receptive environment for them.

*Keywords***:** Chicana/Latina, student, mother, parent, motherhood, community college, education, pipeline, metaphor, *trenzas de identidades,* braids

Introduction

I just want to come to my class. I don't have time for anything even if I wanted to I really don't have time.—Anayeli

Student mothers, like Anayeli, juggle parenting, family obligations, jobs, and school commitments, leaving little time or energy to participate in anything else. In college campuses, the parenting status of student parents is not recognized as an important part of their identities and experiences (National Center for Student Parent Programs, 2017). As a result, student parents, particularly Latina[1] student mothers, have received scant attention in the academic literature on the community college student experience (Oliva & Jiménez, 2017). Here, we analyze what these educational experiences look like for Chicana/Latina student mothers and what this means for the Chicanx/Latinx educational pipeline. Montoya (1994) and Godínez (2006) offer the framework of *trenzas de identidades* (multiple strands of identity) to better understand their experiences as a student, mother, and professional. To be specific, the student mothers' *trenzas de identidades* "illustrates the emotional and spatial rhythms, difficulties, and opportunities of shifting work, domestic, and familial spaces" (Matta, 2013, p.137) within and along the educational pipeline. All student mothers face challenges similar to those of other non-traditional college students; however, their challenges magnify with motherhood because they deal with society's cultural ideals, expectations, and definitions of a mother's role in higher education. As will be seen in the findings, Latina student mothers have additional territories to navigate.

Despite the increasing number of student parents at the community college, U.S. social policies provide little support to student mothers (Green, 2013). Additionally, campus climates tend to be negative toward student mothers; notably the belief that students who have kids do not belong on campus and cannot devote enough time to their student responsibilities (Duquaine-Watson, 2017). Hence, it is important to narrow our focus on Latina student mothers, a hidden population within the non-traditional student population.

This article is organized into five parts; first, we provide background on Latinas mothers in higher education and the growing number of student parents in community colleges. Second,

---

[1]We use Chicana to refer to women of Mexican descent and Latina to refer to women of Latin American ancestry.

we introduce *trenzas de identidades* as a metaphorical and analytical tool for understanding the experiences of Latina student mothers at the community college. We then discuss the research site and methods. Subsequently, we introduce analysis of each strand: motherhood, student, and professional. We conclude with recommendations.

Latina Student Mothers in Higher Education

The number of Latinas in higher education has increased substantially over the past decades (Sapp, Marquez Kiyama, & Dache-Gerbino, 2016). However, their rate of degree attainment compared to non-Latina peers is relatively low (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Chicana/Latina students in higher education face unique challenges and barriers in postsecondary education, including access to college admissions information (Kimura-Walsh, Yamamura, Griffin, & Allen, 2008), financial aid (Perna, 2006), citizenship status (Gonzalez, 2016), and campus climate (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998; Solórzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002; Villalpando, 2003).

Explanations for college access and educational opportunities for Latinas have relied historically on gendered explanations emphasizing *marianismo*—Latinas' self-sacrificing role, underscoring women's roles inside the home (Sy & Brittian, 2008). This deficit explanation sees Latinas as incapable of succeeding as students while taking care of family. However, what is seen as a weakness is actually a strength. As Delgado Bernal (2006) found when examining the role of family in the educational experiences of Chicana college students, Chicana students draw on their "bilingualism, biculturalism, commitment to communities, and spirituality" to overcome challenges and barriers to academic achievement (p.118). They also rely on counselors, teachers, and friends to address barriers while in college (Sapp et al., 2016).

Chicana/Latinas face stereotypes that reduce their multi-dimensional and complex identities to oversimplified binaries as "college-bound/drop-out, good/bad; sexually promiscuous/academically talented" (Sapp et al., 2016, p. 42). Student mothers must negotiate the presumed conflicts between the binaries of mother/student, good mother/good student, as well as the socially constructed narrative of the "good" versus "bad" mother (Duquaine-Watson, 2017; Lynch, 2008). Literature on student mothers focus primarily on the graduate level (Castañeda & Isgro, 2013; González, 2007; Lynch, 2008; Springer, Parker, & Leviten-Reid 2009), with little attention to community college student mothers, rendering them "unexplored

and, as such, an unacknowledged population" (Oliva & Jimenez, 2017, p. 239). Jillian Duquaine-Watson's (2007) study on single student mothers at a community college revealed the "chilly climate" they must navigate while pursuing their education (p. 229). That climate stigmatizes them because of "their marital status and their status as parents" (Duquaine-Watson, 2017, p. 145). Deficit ideologies range from blaming student mothers for poor judgment for pursuing an education while deciding to have children, to cultural stereotypes and beliefs that single student mothers are bad mothers (Cunningham, 2013; Duquaine-Watson, 2017). These deficit ideologies view student mothers with mutually exclusive identities, incapable of parenting well while pursuing an education.

These ideologies are further complicated by the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and immigration status. Women of color historically have been sexually stereotyped. For Latina women that means sexually provocative and hypersexual. Since the early days of Hollywood, Latinas have been presented as hypersexual, sexually promiscuous, prostitutes, and spitfires (Ramírez-Berg, 2002). Current political discourse frames Latina immigrant mothers as hyper-reproductive, hyper-fertile, and producing *anchor babies*.[2] They are vilified as "bad mothers" and "bad immigrants" (Escobar, 2016; Meacham, 2016, para 12). Chicana feminist scholars have challenged these deficit ideologies and binaries (Anzaldúa, 1987; Castillo, 1994; Escobar, 2016; Segura, 1994; Smith-Silva, 2011, Téllez, 2013) by humanizing, honoring, respecting, and recognizing Chicana/Latina mothers as distinct, multidimensional, and complex. Their writings underscore intersections between Chicana/Latina cultural identity and motherhood and social forces such as migration, violence, poverty, sexism, education, homelessness, mass incarceration and deportation, to name a few.

The enrollment of student mothers of color has significantly increased in the past several decades (Christopher, 2005; Duquaine-Watson, 2007; Katz, 2013; Snyder & Dillow, 2010). Student parents make up 26% of U.S. undergraduate students (4.8 million) of dependent children in 2011 (Christopher, 2005; Duquaine-Watson, 2007; Katz, 2013; Snyder & Dillow, 2010); the majority, about 71%, are women. About 2 million students, or 43% of the total student parent population, are single mothers (Gault, Reichlin, Reynolds, & Froehner, 2014a). About 45% of student parents are enrolled in public two-year institutions, while 16% attend

---

[2] Anchor babies is a racist, racialized, and gendered term that centers around Latina immigrant women's reproductive bodies. It implies that undocumented Latino parents, particularly, mothers immigrate to the U.S with the goal of establishing citizenship for their children.

public four-year schools (Gault, Reichlin, Reynolds, & Froehner, 2014b). The majority of student parents who are matriculated at community colleges are mothers of color: black mothers compromise 53.7%, Latina mothers 40%, and American Indian mothers 40.1%. They are also low-income, work full-time, need childcare, and graduate with high debt (Reichlin, 2015). A 2013 report published by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) found that the lack of on-campus child care prevents many community college student mothers from reaching their educational goals. Only 26% of two-year student parents attain a degree or certificate in six years (Reichlin, 2015). Student parents at the community college have been most dramatically affected by the decline of childcare from 53 percent in 2003-2004, to 46 percent in 2013, with less than half of all two-year campuses offering campus child care services (Gault, Reichlin, Reynolds, & Froehner, 2014b). Finding affordable and reliable child care is important for student parents and with the rising costs and limited childcare options, it's difficult for them to complete their college education.

Theorizing *Trenzas*/Braids in Chicana/Latina Educational Scholarship

Our individual and collective experiences as former first generation graduate student mothers of color offer a unique understanding—a cultural intuition—that is sensitive to the experiences of community college student mothers (Delgado Bernal, 2002). As Chicana/Latina mother scholars, we use frameworks and tools that honor and validate the complex lived experiences of student mothers. We draw on Chicana feminist theory utilizing *trenzas de identidades*/braids as a metaphorical and analytical tool in understanding Latina student mothers (Delgado Bernal, 2008; Espino, Muñoz, & Marquez Kiyama, 2010; Godinez, 2006; González, 1998; Montoya, 1994; Montoya, Cruz, & Grant, 2009; Quiñones, 2016).

Margaret Montoya (1994), a feminist legal scholar, first utilized *trenzas* as a conceptual metaphor in her bilingual (auto)biography about a mother-daughter braiding story. For Montoya (2009), *trenzas* is about intertwining stories, topics, and experiences that are fluid and require constant "unbraiding and recombing and rebraiding. In the process you comb things out" (Montoya et al., 2009, p.188). González (1998) furthers *trenzas* as an analytical tool in her qualitative study exploring the development of womanhood and the multiple identities of *Mexicanas* in California (p. 5). Delgado Bernal (2008) utilizes the framework of *trenzas* to theorize her personal, professional, and communal identities as a Latina in the academy,

challenging academia's continuous attempt to separate these identities. She argues that "we are often stronger and more complete" (p. 135) when we weave together these identities, but they can also "overlap, merge, collide, and sustain each other" (p. 147).

Espino et al. (2010) also theorize how multiple strands of their identities have shaped their doctoral education. They use *testimonio* to analyze how their *trenzas de identidades multiples* of motherhood, social class, and public intellectual have shaped their transitions from graduate school to faculty positions at different institutions. Quiñones (2016) uses a methodological application of *trenzas* around the notion of being a well-educated person to understand the experiences of six Latina teachers in New York and found that her Puerto Rican teachers took a bilingual-bicultural stance employing a broader view of what it means to be a well-educated person.

Trenzas de identidades allows us to explore the experiences of Latina student mothers at the community college as they weave the three main strands of their braided identity: mother, student, and professional (Dolores Bernal, 2008; Godínez, 2006). These three strands intersect and influence how they navigate the educational pipeline to find their way to success. What makes *trenzas* particularly relevant to Chicana/Latinas is the way relationships among them are shaped by the actual physical process of braiding each other's hair. Professor of Law, Zuni Cruz comments that, from an indigenous perspective, braids allow her to connect to her ancestors, both male and female relatives who wore braids. For her, braids are "a link to [her] grandfather" **(**Montoya et al., 2009, p.179). We recognize that our goal of centering *trenzas de identidad* explicitly as a Chicana framework is not new; however, it is one that is rarely used to understand the experiences of Latina community college student mothers.

We utilize one *trenza* with three strands: student, mother, and professional identities. The order of the strands does not matter; however, what we have found in our research is that the strand of motherhood is more salient. It is nearly impossible nor do we want to separate each strand of their *trenza* because the strands are interconnected. As Caballero, Pérez-Torres, Martínez-Vu, Téllez, and Vega (2017) noted "our identities are not only intersectional but also interwoven because we cannot easily compartmentalize the work we do within our communities, families, and academic spaces" (p. 64). For organizational purposes here, however, we place the strand of motherhood first, followed by student and then professional strands. In

examining each, we do not separate these identities, but rather seek to tease out how each strand separately and together shapes the educational pipeline for these mothers.

Description of Research

As faculty we have regularly signed and checked student progress reports for CalWORKS. We have also interacted with student parents who talk to us about their struggles and challenges. As a result, we are convinced we must make student parents visible to community college decision makers. Once approval for this research was obtained from the Director of Institutional Research in the Office of Institutional Planning, Research and Effectiveness, at Pacific Coast Community College , we conducted focus groups in the spring and summer of 2016 to gain a better understanding of the student parent population.[3] Specifically, we collected information on student parent experiences, their challenges, types of support system, thoughts about parenting, education, long term career aspirations, as well as mental health and self-care. We recruited participants through flyers, word of mouth, and with the help of the Pacific Coast Community College CalWORKs counselor. Thirteen student mothers—representing a diverse group based on marital status, social class, age, career aspirations, and ethnic and racial background—participated in four focus groups. Our respondents found the focus group discussions useful because they were able to share their stories in a supportive environment, and many wanted to continue the process. For example, one participant said "as busy as we are, this was a mini support group. Is there a support group for mothers?" Participation in the focus groups made them feel their experiences are valuable.

We utilized a semi-structured open-ended interview guide, which allowed participants to speak freely about experiences that were meaningful and private to them (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Our research question was: How do Latina student mothers interweave multiple identities as they navigate the educational pipeline? Interview questions emphasized how students understood education and motherhood (e.g., Have your educational and career goals been shaped by motherhood), their goals and aspirations (e.g., What are your educational and career goals?) if they knew campus resources for student parents (e.g., Are you aware of programs in campus that help student parents? Low income students?). Developing trust with

---

[3] Pacific Coast Community College is a public two-year community college designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) with an enrollment of at least 25% Latinx students (*Excelencia* in Education, 2017).

the participants was important, particularly with the student parents who did not know the researchers. To do so, we shared our experiences as former student parents navigating the educational pipeline while parenting, we also allowed the participants the opportunity to ask us questions and reach out to us beyond the focus group if they needed any social support.

Focus interviews were recorded and transcribed by both researchers. Focus groups allow the opportunity to collectively engage other student mothers in ways that otherwise would not happen (Wilkinson, 1998). We followed the tradition of qualitative research of coding, which involves "bringing together and analyzing all the data on major themes, ideas, concepts, interpretations, and propositions" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 151). The codes that were more recurring across interviews became the core codes. After identifying core codes we underwent a careful line-by-line reading with the aim of identifying additional instances and variations of the core codes. The core codes that we focus on in this manuscript are mother, student, and professional identities in the community college pipeline and serve as the basis of our analysis.

Out of the 13 students who participated in the focus group, we chose to focus on four self-identified Latina student mothers: Anayeli, Adriana, Krystal, and Rosa to demonstrate how their various and complex identities affected how they navigated higher education and their professional goals. We focus on these four participants because it became evident in the focus group transcripts the common intersectional and interwomen identities of mother, student, and professional. The narratives also show how the student mothers worked out some of the tensions in their *trenza* such as choosing a career that provides them the flexibility to "be there" for their children. What we present here comes from a place of care and respect for respondents who entrusted us with their lived experiences. Pseudonyms are used for the participants who requested their anonymity.

Findings: Intertwining Chicana/Latina Student Mothers' *Trenzas de Identidades*

The following narratives outline the student mothers' *trenzas de identidades*. The student mothers' trenzas de identidades capture how their motherhood, student, and professional identities influence how they navigate and experience the community college. We understand each identity to be a part of or a strand of the students mothers' trenzas de identidades. Each

strand builds on one another and carries very intimate, painful, and life-changing experiences and stories.

Motherhood Strand

In this section we introduce the motherhood strand of the student mothers' *trenza de identidades*. The motherhood strand revealed: 1) how the respondents defined and understood motherhood, 2) the intersectionality of motherhood based on race and class, and 3) how motherhood affected and influenced the student mothers' educational journey and professional goals.

For Anayeli, a mother of four, becoming pregnant at 17 with her first child was a life-changing experience even though she had already graduated from high school. She came from what she referred to as a "traditional" family, and the expectations of that traditional Latinx family created a taxing situation at home. As she explained,

> We came from Mexico, they are really you know traditional. So, my dad
> especially, he was like, "You are pregnant. Hay pero who is the guy? Why didn't
> he come ask me for permission?" No, I was more like open. No, asking my dad
> for permission? I'm not his...I'm not really his, you know.

The quote above illustrates the ways patriarchal ideologies influenced how Anayeli's parents received her pregnancy announcement. Anayeli's brown pregnant body was perceived and treated like property, in particular by her father. Asking for "permission" is a common practice in Mexican and Mexican American families that implies possession or control over the female body by the father or male figures in the family (Gonzales, Sable, Campbell, & Dannerbeck, 2010). Patriarchy is not exclusive to the Latinx community; women of different class and racial background and sexual orientations experience patriarchy in different ways (Walby, 1990). Patriarchy within the Latino community does not occur in isolation; it occurs alongside and at the intersection of race, class, and other forms of oppression. Ana Castillo (1994) critiques the subordination of women's sexuality within patriarchy. She writes, "*la hembra* first submits to parents, next to extended family; if she belongs to the church, she then defers to that institution" (p. 183).

Becoming pregnant at a young age also contributed to Anayeli's experience of

motherhood. McDermott and Graham (2005) assert that "early motherhood has become synonymous with a number of social 'problems,'" particularly for women who become mothers before age 20 (p. 59). Anayeli's young pregnant body was further scrutinized after her then partner decided to end their romantic relationship. Anayeli recalled her father's reaction, "*Te dije*, I told you that was going to happen. He wasn't serious with you, if he was serious he would have come and ask for permission." In the quote, Anayeli demonstrates her father's perceived authority over her body. For Anayeli's father, asking for "permission" was a verbal agreement between him and Anayeli's former partner. Anayeli's father's desire to have been asked for permission may have come from a place of care for his daughter; however, the expression of care in this manner reflected a patriarchal transaction of authority over Anayeli's body. Adriana, a 20-year old mother of an infant, also experienced being stigmatized for becoming a teenage mom. Adriana was 19 when she got pregnant and even though her boyfriend supported her, family members insisted she would never amount to anything. At one point, Adriana thought of having an abortion, but her partner and parents dissuaded her. She remarked that her "baby is the best thing" as her eyes filled with tears and began to cry. She said her father's side of the family believes that "if you are pregnant, it's over." As the first in her immediate family to become pregnant, Adriana said "I felt discriminated." She became the subject of gossip and criticism of the family. As she said "it's so bad to get pregnant and it's like a sin. Because I was not with the guy. Now, I'm married." The criticisms continued even after Adriana got married because her husband is a few years older than her and has a child from a previous relationship.

The beliefs held about Anayeli and Adriana's young pregnant brown bodies reflect the way virginity or marriage elevate a woman's status (Anzaldúa, 1987; Castillo, 1994), but it falls if she is sexually active outside of marriage. A pregnancy is undeniable public proof of extramarital sexual activity. Furthermore, under traditional and religious views, both Anayeli and Adriana's pregnancies, unlike other pregnancies in the community, could not be celebrated (Téllez, 2013). Thus it is "simultaneously juxtaposed with equal denigration of the Mother status" (Castillo, 1994, p. 183).

In the same vein, Rosa, single mother of one, also explained how becoming a mother affected her life. As she stated, "after I got pregnant, everything fell apart, I lost my job. There was a lot of turmoil." Losing her primary source of income while being pregnant brought on unforeseen stressors, such as losing her home. Additionally, her partner at that time had drug

problems, and Rosa eventually left him. The "turmoil" Rosa began to experience immediately began to shape and challenge her beliefs about mothering. She said, "how you said, everything on TV, oh you have your family, is nice, you have your house, on the outside everything looks good but in the inside everything is falling apart." Popular culture images portraying "the perfect family and home" only made her feel worse about her situation. Additionally, at this time in her life, Rosa was desperately committed to finding employment to provide for her soon- to- be born child. College attendance seemed impossible under the circumstances: "I got laid off, so I was like, 'Maybe I should go back to school,'" she said, "but school was still not a priority…like I needed to be more a mom than the student."

Like Anayeli, Rosa understandably prioritized employment and being a "mom" over attending college. In addition, Rosa felt that attending school in addition to working would prevent her from "being there" for her daughter. She was aware of how she felt when her own mother returned to school and often didn't have time to spend with her as she would have liked. Thus, Rosa did not initially perceive college as an option. Yet, with time, Rosa realized "that being a student is actually gonna…help me be a better mom."

Latina student mothers experience motherhood within interlocking systems of oppression such as race, class, and gender (Hill Collins, 2000). Such interlocking structures intersect and manifest themselves in the student mothers' lives and affect how they navigate higher education and other institutions. The motherhood narratives help locate the student mothers within the current sociopolitical context, and as a result, within the educational pipeline. The motherhood strand serves as the entry point for exploring further Chicana/Latina *trenza de identidades*. The following two strands—student and professional—both build on and weave themselves into the motherhood strand.

Student Strand

In this section we introduce the student *trenza* strand to show (1) that the educational experiences of student mothers in the community college are nonlinear, (2) how teenage mothers deal with the stigma of stereotypes, an underappreciated and unacknowledged journey; and (3) how student mothers deal with the consequences of higher education fraud.

Trenzas de identidades depicts the Latina student mothers' nonlinear educational pathways as a multidirectional fluid process that includes stopping out of the educational system

for extended periods of time and returning later in life. For Anayeli, Krystal, and Rosa, a better future for their children was central to the choice to further their education, but it took time for them to realize this, due to financial instability. Motherhood delayed Anayeli and Rosa's enrollment in postsecondary education because they needed to figure out their lives as new mothers. As young and single mothers they dealt with the everyday circumstances of life—worrying about money, food, and shelter for their kids, and dealing with the pressures from over their single mother status. Motherhood is an underappreciated and unacknowledged journey because motherhood is assumed to come naturally.

As discussed earlier, Anayeli faced a series of challenges that delayed her matriculation at Pacific Coast Community College. In the Fall of 2009, she enrolled at Pacific Coast Community College and stayed for two semesters. She stopped because her partner at the time did not support her. She tried to maintain a relationship with her daughter's biological dad, but his lack of support caused her to fail and/or drop her courses. By the time she returned to school, she had four children, her 8-year-old daughter from her first relationship, an 11-year-old step daughter from her current husband, and their 4-year old twins. Her transition "back to school" involved fear and self-doubt. Anayeli's racial identity as a Chicana/Latina further complicated her educational experience because of her racialized brown body (Cruz, 2001). Being a young Chicana/Latina mother of four children automatically placed her in the stereotype of young Chicana/Latina moms stopping out of school—which she did, temporarily. Anayeli described it this way:

> Like everyone expected me to not do anything because I was a teenage mother. I
> was like not going to do anything with my life. At the beginning I actually did
> believe it. I actually did believe that I couldn't really do it.

Anayeli experienced stereotype threat, feeling that perhaps she would confirm the stereotype of the Latina teenage mother (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The intersection of motherhood, race, and age significantly affected her confidence in her status as a student mother.

In contrast to Anayeli, Rosa was a second generation college student who grew up exposed to the college setting via her immigrant mother; however, this exposure still did not help her understand the intricacies of the educational system. Rosa lacked a strong knowledge base; in particular, she did not understand federal financial aid. This ultimately led her to

become a victim of fraud by the for-profit institution, Heald College. She tried enrolling first at Pacific Coast Community College in 2010 when she was pregnant, but she did not get the help she needed. All Rosa wanted to know when she tried to enroll in Pacific Coast Community College was "what is FAFSA"? She sought help from the financial aid office, but in effect they blocked her from receiving that information from a disinterested source. Rosa described her experience:

> What is FAFSA, what is this? They said, "come tomorrow at 8 o'clock in the morning. They're going to be open from 8." So I went and the line was out the door and I'm pregnant. I'm like, what do I do? I have to pee every 5 minutes. You get out of line, they don't want to hold your spot so you get back in line. Finally, I got in the room. It's hot. I'm bothered. I haven't ate, I'm cranky, and I just walk up. We had to sign in so I back up to the desk where the lady had the sheet and I'm like, "I've been here since 8 o'clock in the morning and I just want to know what's FAFSA, can I do it on my own?" She's like, "well, you're just gonna have to wait, they're gonna help you."

The embodiment of Rosa's pregnant body further complicates her experience trying to get information about financial aid while constantly needing to use the restroom, and no other student would save her spot in the line. Rosa was near her "breaking point" and "stormed out of there" a few hours later, without any help or direction. Instead, Rosa was enticed to enroll at Heald College in Oakland, California, after "seeing all these commercials, get in, get out, get ahead, you know." In her mind, Rosa had it all figured out. By the time her daughter turned two she would have a career. She stated: "(my daughter) won't even know that I was broke you know, she won't even know I went to school."

Rosa was not considering enrolling at Heald. She went to Heald only to get information about financial aid. But in less than two hours Rosa left Heald college with her financial aid application completed and a schedule of her classes. Rosa earned an A.A. in Applied Science from Heald college after three years. However, when she left Heald her debt was over $30,000 and she had no job. Her first student loan statement was more than her car payment, $300. Rosa struggled financially despite her degree—or perhaps, because of it. She moved four times in one year and eventually moved in to live with her parents. But, she held on to a dream

because, as she said, "I always knew school is going to get me through this, like, if I just hold on to school, and I was holding on to the wrong school but I held on, you know."

Little did Rosa know that she was one of thousands of student victims deceived by misinformation and misrepresentation by Heald College. In 2015, Corinthian Colleges, Heald's parent company, closed all of its 28 ground campuses misrepresenting job placement data. Using those inflated placement rates, they encouraged students to take out expensive private loans (Whittaker, 2015). Hundreds of students were deceived by Heald college, but Rosa received no compensation for the fraud. On the contrary, the insurable debt she acquired left her with no job security or financial freedom. Since she earned an A.A. degree she was disqualified from receiving California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKS), a type of temporary cash aid when she enrolled at Pacific Coast Community College. This made it even more difficult for her to continue her education while parenting. Nonetheless, Rosa developed strategies to make things work. Among other sacrifices, Rosa compromised her privacy and parental autonomy by moving in with her parents to save money, enabling her to graduate with an Associate in Arts Degree for Transfer (AA-T).

Through the lens *trenzas de identidades* offers, we can identify the various ways motherhood has influenced Anayeli and Rosa's educational experiences. Navigating the educational pipeline for Latina community college students, particularly student mothers, multidirectional rather than linear. Both Anayeli and Rosa began their postsecondary education at Pacific Coast Community College but left and returned once they were mothers. Although returning to college was not easy, they continued to push through the self-doubt and financial challenges. The narratives in this section further our understanding of the "leaks" in the Chicano educational pipeline, in particular for those who begin their postsecondary education at a community college. The student *trenza* also demonstrates how the mother identity influences their educational experience. Several scholars note that identity development has a significant influence on the overall college experience. However, mother identity for Latina community college students has not been included in the discourse (Caballero et al., 2017). This is problematic because unless the mother identity in addition and in relation to their other identities is explored, best practices will not fully reflect and include Latina community college student mothers.

The Professional Strand

The professional strand highlights how student mothers negotiate the conflicts between career choices and parenting responsibilities, selecting education that will lead to careers that align with their priorities and responsibilities as mothers. Some had to negotiate "big" dreams with more realistic professional careers. For example, the career paths Krystal, Anayeli, and Rosa chose will allow them to achieve their personal academic goals, provide for their family while still allowing them to raise their children in ways that meet their motherhood standards.

Krystal, a thirty-year old single mother of two children ages six and eight enrolled in the nursing program at Pacific Coast Community College in the fall of 2014. Originally, Krystal wanted to be a physical therapist, but after considering what that would require of her she realized it would not be possible to combine that with her responsibilities as a mother. Pacific Coast Community College did not offer physical therapy programs.

> I have to work [and] … the closest [program] is San Francisco and it's super competitive, it's like 35 spots, it's $50-$60,000 a year and it's continuous, and it's clinical hours are 40 hours a week, so I would go to work. I wouldn't be able to go to school and take care of children at the same time.

The cost, commute, expected clinical hours, work, and necessary child care meant she couldn't pursue her first career choice. She chose Pacific Coast Community College nursing program instead because it would allow her to weave her student and mother strand.

Anayeli also had to compromise her professional goals along the way. Initially, Anayeli dreamed of "owning a business" but she believed being a mother cost her that dream, "Before I wanted to be like something big, a business woman or something and now I just kinda like...I want to be a math teacher; math is my major and I want that."

> When I became a mother I was like, like you lose a dream, it's like your kids only, that was like for me, my kids and then my boyfriend was going to the [police] academy, so, it's kinda like his turn kinda thing, so, I was put in the back burner kinda thing until right now that I started. I actually you know, taking classes.

Mothering pushed Anayeli to negotiate her "dreams" with more "practical" goals and aspirations. When she returned to Pacific Coast Community College in the Fall of 2014 she discovered that she was "really good" at math and enjoyed taking math courses. She recognized the perks of teaching—getting the summers off and being able to spend more time with her children. Anayeli feels she had to compromise her professional aspirations, choosing to become a math teacher because the job aligns with the demands of motherhood.

In 2014, after focusing on her responsibilities as a mother, Rosa gave Pacific Coast Community College another try. She enrolled full time and has been matriculated every semester since. She will graduate with an Associate in Arts in Sociology for Transfer (A.A.T.) and will attend UC Berkeley in the fall 2017. Rosa's academic goal is to earn a Master's degree in Counseling so she can be a guidance counselor for high school and college students. That career choice also fits well with the demands of motherhood.

The professional strand builds on the aforementioned two strands, the mother and student *trenza*. The career paths Krystal, Anayeli, and Rosa have chosen will allow them to achieve their personal academic goals, provide for their family, and have the necessary flexibility to raise their children.

Conclusion

Latina community college students mothers are often invisible on college campuses and in the education literature. In order to improve their chances for success, we must understand the lived experiences of Latina community college student mothers, and perhaps student parents overall. We must acknowledge and validate their experiences and identities using frameworks providing a "holistic, culturally rich, and family inclusive model" (Sapp et al., 2016, p. 53) such as *trenzas de identidades,* so we can better serve them as administrators and faculty.

The student mothers' *trenzas* reveal the centrality of their motherhood and its influence on their educational and professional experiences and goals. Additionally, the student mothers' *trenzas de identidades* challenge the deficit ideologies (Valencia, 2012) about Latina mothers and Latinx community college students. They affirm motherhood as a positive force and source of strength and wisdom that contribute to their educational pursuits. As other scholars have noted and as these narratives exemplify, Latina community college student mothers are neither "lazy" nor "uneducated"(Cunningham, 2013), but rather "creators and holders of knowledge"

(Delgado Bernal, 2002). Student mothers face circumstances similar to those of all non-traditional students, but because they are parents, their challenges magnify exponentially, particularly on hostile, unwelcoming college campuses. Their experiences and identities play a critical role in who they are as mothers today, where they are located academically, and whom they hope to become professionally and personally. The stories shared in this article are a testament not only to their persistence, but also their resiliency and *ganas* to obtain a post-secondary education in order to be role models for their children.

We urge others to recognize that the educational pipeline for Latina student mothers, often begins at the community college. This is critical because the literature on the Latinx pipeline does not address the detours community college student mothers must make after they enter and return later. We know that out of 100 students, 17 go to the community college and only one transfers to a four- year university (Pérez Huber et al., 2015; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). We question who those 17 students are and to what extent they include student mothers. We also wonder who is the one student who transfers to a four year university.

The affirmation of Latina community college student mother *trenzas de identidades* warrants culturally responsive policies and practices in higher education. Administrators, practitioners, and educators need to create appropriate services and resources to support student parents. We provide a list of recommendations in creating college campuses that are welcoming to student parents:

- Extend childcare during evening classes
- Offer child-friendly spaces throughout campus that include changing tables in campus restrooms and lactation rooms for nursing mothers.
- Provide a library study room for student parents equipped with computers.
- Collaborate across campus programs and community organizations to support student parents and their children by providing student parents with mentoring, scholarships, and parent education workshops.

In addition, administrators can provide professional development opportunities for faculty and staff to attend conferences and workshops on student parents, such as the annual Student Parent Support Symposium organized by Endicott College. Community colleges can create a Student Parent Center offering services that target student parents. Community college administrators can collect data on their student parent population so they may better

understand this group and respond with programs and services to meet their needs. The National Center for Student Parent Programs (2017) launched the family friendly campus toolkit to enable colleges and universities to begin collecting relevant data. By creating a campus culture that is receptive and welcoming, we can increase student parent retention rates. We call upon administrators, faculty, and staff in other community colleges to join in these efforts.

References

Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza.* San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Press.

Caballero, C., Pérez-Torres, J. C., Martínez-Vu, Y., Téllez, M., & Vega, C. (2017). "Our labor is our prayer, our mothering is our offering:" A Chicana m(other) work framework for collective resistance. *Chicana/Latina Studies: The Journal of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social, 16,* 44-75.

Castillo, A. (1994). *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma.* Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.

Castañeda, M., & Isgro, K. (2013). *Mothers in academia.* New York, NY: Columbia University Press

Christopher, K. (2005). Welfare recipients attending college: The interplay of oppression and resistance. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare, 32,* 165-185.

Cruz, C. (2001). Toward an epistemology of a brown body. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 14,* 657-669.

Cunningham, S. R. (2013). How higher education became accessible to single mothers: An unfinished story. In M. Castañeda & K. Isgro (Eds.), *Mothers in academia* (pp.181-190). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Delgado Bernal, D. (2002). Critical race theory, Latino critical theory, and Critical raced-gendered epistemologies: Recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8,* 105–126.

Delgado Bernal, D. (2006). *Mujeres* in college: Negotiating identities and challenging educational norms. In D. Delgado-Bernal, C. A Elenes, F. E. Godinez, & S. Villenas (Eds.), *Chicana/Latina education in everyday life: Feminista perspectives on pedagogy and epistemology* (pp. 5-94). Albany, NY: New York Press.

Delgado Bernal, D. (2008). La trenza de identidades: Weaving together my personal, professional, and communal identities. In K. P. González & R. V. Padilla (Eds.), *Doing the public good: Latina/o scholars engage civic participation* (pp. 135-148). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Duquaine-Watson, J. M. (2007). "Pretty darned cold": Single mother students and the community college climate in post-welfare reform America. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 40,* 229-240.

Duquaine-Watson, J. M. (2017). *Mothering by Degrees: Single mothers and the pursuit of postsecondary education.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Escobar, M. D. (2016). *Captivity beyond prisons: Criminalization experiences of Latina (im)migrants.* Austin, TX: The University of Texas Press.

Espino, M. M., Munoz, S., & Kiyama, J. M. (2010). Transitioning from Doctoral study to the academy: Theorizing *trenzas* of identity for Latina sister scholars. *Qualitative Inquiry,*

16, 804-818.

Excelencia in Education. (2017). *Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) fact sheet: 2015-16*. Washington, DC: Excelencia in Education.

Gandara, P., & Contreras, F. (2009). *The Latino educational crisis: The consequences of failed social policies*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Green, A. (2013). Patchwork: Poor women's stories of resewing the shredded safety net. *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work, 28*, 51-64

Gault, B., Reichlin, L., Reynolds, E., & Froehner, M. (2014a). *4.8 million college students are raising children*. Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved from https://iwpr.org/publications/4-8-million-college-students-are-raising-children/

Gault, B., Reichlin, L., Reynolds, E., & Froehner, M. (2014b). *Campus child care declining even as growing numbers of parents attend college*. Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved from https://iwpr.org/publications/campus-child-care-declining-even-as-growing-numbers-of-parents-attend-college/

Godínez, F. E. (2006). Haciendo que hacer: Braiding cultural knowledge into educational practices and policies. In D. Delgado-Bernal, C. A. Elenes, F. E. Godínez, & S. Villenas (Eds.), *Chicana/Latina education in everyday life: Feminista perspectives on pedagogy and epistemology* (pp. 25-38). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Gonzales, E. U., Sable, M. R., Campbell, J. D., & Dannerbeck, A. (2010). The influence of patriarchal behavior on birth control access and use among recent Hispanic immigrants. *Journal of Immigrants and Minority Health*, *12*, 551-558.

González, F. (1998). The formations of Mexicananess: Trenza de identidades multiples growing up Mexicana: Braids of multiple identities. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 11*(1), 81-102.

González, J. C. (2007). Surviving the doctorate and thriving as faculty: Latina junior faculty reflecting on their doctoral studies experience. *Equity and Excellence in Education 40*, 291-300.

Gonzalez, R. (2016). *Lives in limbo: Undocumented and coming of age in America*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Hill Collins, P. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hurtado, S., Milem, J. F., Clayton-Pederson, A. R., & Allen, W. R. (1998). Enhancing campus climates for racial/ethnic diversity: Educational policy and practice. *The Review of Higher Education*, *21*, 279-302.

Jiménez, H. (2017). *Challenging Inequalities: Readings in Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration*. San Diego, CA: Cognella Publishing.

Katz, S. (2013). "Give us a chance to get an education": Single mothers' survival narratives and strategies for pursuing higher education on welfare. *Journal of Poverty, 17*, 273-304.

Kimura-Walsh, E., Yamamura, E., Griffin, K. A., Allen, W. R. (2008). Achieving the college

dream: Examining disparities in access to college information among high achieving and non-high achieving Latina students. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *8*, 298-315.

Lynch, K. D. (2008). Gender roles and the American academe: A case study of graduate student mothers. *Gender and Education*, *20*, 585-605.

Matta, A. A. (2013). Revolving doors: Mother-woman rhythms in academic spaces. In M. Castañeda & K. Isigro (Eds.), *Mothers in academia* (pp. 137-148). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

McDermott, E., & Graham, H. (2005). Resilient young mothering: Social inequalities, late modernity and the "problem" of "teenage" motherhood. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *8*, 59–79.

Meacham, C. (2016). "Anchor babies" and birth tourists: Birthright citizenship and the racialized politics of belonging. *The Journal of Social and Cultural Analysis*. Retrieved from https://wp.nyu.edu/as-journalofsca/2016/05/02/anchor-babies-and-birth-tourists-birthright-citizenship-and-the-racialized-politics-of-belonging/

Montoya, M. E. (1994). Mascaras, trenzas, y grenas: Un/masking the self while un/braiding Latina stories and legal discourse. *Chicano-Latino Law Review, 15*, 1-37.

Montoya, M., Zuni Cruz, C., & Grant, G., (2009). Narrative braids: Performing racial literacy. *American Indian Law Review, 33*(1), 153-199.

Oliva, N., & Jiménez, H. (2017). *Nepantlera*s in a community college: Student mothers negotiating mothering, school, and work. In H. Jimenez (Ed.), *Challenging Inequalities: Readings in Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration* (pp. 237–249). Diego, CA: Cognella Publishing.

Pérez Huber, L. , Malagón, M. C., Ramirez, B. R, Gonzalez, C., Jimenez, A., & Vélez.V. N. (2015). *Still falling through the cracks: Revisiting the Latina/o education pipeline* (CSRC Research Report No. 19). Retrieved from http://www.chicano.ucla.edu/files/RR19.pdf

Perna, L. W. (2006). Studying college access and choice: A proposed conceptual model. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (Vol. 21) (pp. 99-157). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer

Quiñones, S. (2016). (Re)braiding to tell: Using trenzas as a metaphorical–analytical tool in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *29*, 338-358.

Ramírez-Berg, C. (2002). *Latino images in film: Stereotypes, subservsion, resistance*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Reichlin, L. (2015). *Supporting student parent success in community colleges*. Washington, DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research. Retrieved from https://iwpr.org/publications/supporting-student-parent-success-in-community-colleges/

Solórzano, D., Allen, W. R., & Carroll, G. (2002). Keeping race in place: racial microaggressions and campus racial climate at the University of California, Berkeley. *Chicana/o Latina/o Law Review*, *23*(1), 15-112.

Sapp, V.T., Marquez Kimaya., J., & Dache-Gerbino, A. (2016). Against all odds: Latina activatist agency to secure access to college. *NASPA: Journal About Women in Higher Education, 9,* 39-55.

Segura, D. A. (1994). Working at motherhood: Chicana and Mexican immigrant mothers and employment. In E. N. Glenn, G. Chang, & L. R. Forcey (Eds.), *Mothering: Ideology, experience, and agency* (pp. 211-233). New York, NY: Routledge.

Smith-Silva, D. (2011). *Latina/Chicana mothering.* Toronto, Canada: Demeter Press.

Springer, K. W., Parker, B. K., & Leviten-Reid, C. (2009). Making space for graduate student parents: Practice and politics. *Journal of Family Issues, 30,* 435–457.

Snyder, T. D., & Dillow, S. A. (2010). *Digest of education statistics, 2009.* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2010013

Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69,* 797-811.

Sy, S. R., & Brittian, A. (2008). The impact of family obligations on young women's decisions during the transition to college: A comparison of Latina, European American, and Asian American students. *Sex Roles, 58,* 729–73.

Taylor, S. J., & Bogdan, R. (1998). *Introduction to qualitative research methods* (3rd ed). San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Téllez, M. (2013). Lectures, evaluations, and diapers: Navigating the terrains of Chicana single motherhood in the academy. *Feminist Formations, 25*(3), 79-97.

The National Center for Student Parent Programs. (2017). Keys to degrees. Retrieved from http://www.endicott.edu/National-Center-for-Student-Parent-Programs.aspx

Valencia, R. R. (2012). *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Villalpando, O. (2003). Self-segregation or self-preservation? A critical race theory and Latina/o critical theory analysis of findings from a longitudinal study of Chicana/o college students. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 16*(5), 619–646.

Walby, S. (1990). *Theorizing patriarchy.* Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell.

Wilkinson, S. (1998). Focus groups in feminist research: Power, interaction, and the co-construction of meaning. *Women's Studies International Forum, 21*(1), 111-125.

Whittaker, B. (2015). Heald college in Salinas shut down abruptly. *KSBW.* Retrieved from http://www.ksbw.com/article/heald-college-in-salinas-shut-down-abruptly/32609240

Yosso, T. J., & Solórzano, D. G. (2006). Leaks in the Chicana and Chicano educational pipeline. Latino Policy & Issues Brief. Number 13. *UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.*