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Disrupting Hegemonic Whiteness: Testimonios as Critical Race Counter-Narratives along the Community College Pathway

Abstract: The purpose of this qualitative case study focused on the early lived experiences of working-class Mexican American students in a community college in Oregon, USA. This article considers hardships that influence student's decision to pursue a community college education. The research questions for the study are "How do your early lived experiences influence you to pursue a community college education"? "What do you foresee as you complete your community college studies"? Each student participant provided their testimonios, all data was recorded, then transcribed for themes. The findings that emerged from testimonios were in relation to family struggle, early schooling experiences, and optimism in their education. Such experiences further the need to examine alienation within institutions of higher education. The author calls for community colleges to critically examine hegemonic whiteness while considering what can be learned in engaging with Mexican American students in their struggles to further their educational aspirations.

Keywords: Mexican Americans, community college, hegemonic whiteness, alienation in education

Introduction

The early philosophies community colleges in the United States of America were founded upon serve as challenges to social justice and equity within the context of education. Specifically, in relation to the lived realities that marginalized communities bring with them into the adult learning environment (Hernandez & Hernandez, 2011). Brint and Karabel (2020) state that community colleges

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promote social equality, increase economic efficiency, and provide students with a common cultural heritage by sorting them into a specialized curriculum. This is managed while answering the call in responding to socio-economic pressures placed upon such institutions by employers and state planners who promote the dire need for technical training within industrial societies.

Community colleges emerged at the turn of the twentieth century in the United States as institutions that promote social mobility by serving the workforce while also championing higher education. This was realized by offering two-year technical jr. college degrees, as well as the option to transfer to universities with a transfer degree, or a specific number of credits to satisfy university requirements for admission (Kane & Rouse, 1999). The premise of such institutions would be to offer cost-effective tuition in the communities in which they serve. In addition, they purport to promote a philosophy that upholds that education must serve both industry and the good of society (Grubbs, 2020; Hardin, 1986; Jaynes, 2007; Kroll, 2012).

Mexican Americans² in Community College

Mexican Americans as a historically marginalized group will continue to confront normalized racism, prejudice, and discrimination within their K-12 schooling experience. Consequently, such ill-treatment will continue pushing students out, and community colleges will continue to serve as a pathway for higher education (Gaxiola Serrano, 2017). There have been long-lasting concerns and criticism aimed at the effectiveness of community colleges as equitable educational institutions for Chicana/o students (Yosso, 2006).

For some Latina/o students, community colleges will serve as the first and last chance to acquire a higher education (Martinez & Fernandez, 2004). Sáenz et al. (2018) indicate that for Mexican American students to succeed in community college their experiences must be conceptualized by way of understanding how cultural capital (Yosso, 2005), plays a vital role in students navigating the experience. In kind, it is urged that community colleges tailor their programs to the cultural assets that Mexican American students bring to community colleges.

Latinx are more likely than any other racialized student population to attend a two-year or community college (Adelman, 2005; Martinez et al., 2017).

² Mexican American in this article is in refer to students born in the U.S. of Mexican descent, or born in Mexico and raised in the U.S. at a young age.

Chicana/o is a person of Mexican origin or descent, but it also can refer to a social consciousness where a person is never closer to themselves than when they are to their community.

Latina/o is a pan-ethnic identity of solidarity amongst people of Latin American origin or descent.

Latinx refers to people of Latin American origin or descent and used as gender neutral.

Carnevale and Fasules (2017) further that even though high school and college graduation rates for the Latinx community are promising, data suggests that such student population has the lowest high school completion rate and is less likely to pursue higher education in comparison to Blacks and Whites. Moreover, many Latinx community college students do not complete their studies or transfer to four-year institutions. Shapiro et al., (2017) found that Latinx completion rates were 10% above Black students, but were much lower standing at 67% and 72% when compared to White and Asian students. Genthe and Harrington (2022) found in a review of the literature that financial, psychosocial, and familial/cultural barriers affect Latinx student persistence in community college.

Critically imperative to consider is that community colleges will continue to serve the masses of people who are failed by the public educational system, such as minorities, immigrants, poor, working class, and non-traditional students. Problematically if students from historically disenfranchised communities are tracked into vocational programs with a deficit view or disdain of their race, class, language, culture, and identity it will squash their aspirations to pursue higher education (Rendon & Valadez, 1993). Abrica and Rivas (2017) found there is a continued need to provide structured support that enables Latinx students to overcome institutional barriers that are deeply and ideologically entrenched in community colleges.

Andragogy and Transformative Learning for Educational Equity

A continued concern exists as students from minoritized, poor, and working-class backgrounds have become increasingly concentrated in community colleges, and not transferring to four-year institutions, or completing their studies. Shaw and London (2001) contend that the purpose, culture, and ideology of community colleges should continue to be interrogated in relation to ethnocentric social class views in the demarcation of differences based on prior schooling, race, class, and gender. Cohen et al., (2014) suggest problematizing deficit ideologies which indiscriminately classify students and serve as barriers in their transfer onto four-year institutions, and considering the ways in which minoritized groups in the U.S. are demarcated in regard to social power dynamics based upon race, class, ethnicity, student ability, gender, etc.

Brown (2006) suggests fostering leadership for social justice and equity within institutions of higher education by incorporating an 'andragogy of transformative leadership'. This stipulates an examination of ontological and epistemological assumptions, values, and beliefs in relation to early socialization, as it

assists future educational leaders to be both critically active and reflective scholars/practitioners in the transformation of personal agency and sense of social responsibility towards and with others Popović and Koulaouzides (2017) advocate that lifelong learning should have a global citizen education emphasis for equipping learners with 1). a deep knowledge of global issues; 2). cognitive skills to think critically; 3). Non-cognitive skills, such as empathy and conflict resolution; 4). Behavioral capacities to act collaboratively and responsively.

Popović and Maksimović (2016) recommend through adult lifelong learning to problematize discourses that de-differentiate, breakdown, blur, and increase the permeability of traditional norms and boundaries as methods for raising critical awareness of power dynamics within social structures. Orlović Lovren and Popović (2017) maintain that the power of adult education is in the active participation of all spheres of life that have specific dimensions in the context of community. But more importantly, meeting 'the people' where they are. Popović and Despotović (2018) argue that the key to a democratic civic society is in the realization of an individual's autonomy through a participative culture in relation to it.

Popović et al. (2018) through conducting research in the former Yugoslavia advise to raise awareness as to the social dimension of 'well-being' in adult learning. This provides adult learners to draw upon their common sense which derives from a cultural, social, and constructed system. Ergo, suggesting a 'public pedagogy' where public spaces become alternative learning sites for adult education and transformational learning. Taylor and Laros (2014) concur that andragogy requires deep reflection in adult education. Thereby, being essential for fostering transformative learning through critical dialogue, the role of emotions, and whole person learning.

Alienation and Education

Karl Marx was the first who theorize alienation and its linkage to human productivity. Marx inferred the manner in which humans produce within the means of production of an economic system created alienated labor. Alienation lies in the deformed relationship amidst what the worker produces, productive activity itself, and lastly her/his species-being (Le Roy, 1965). Hall (2022) takes alienation to task within education suggesting the conditions of labor are defined within the capitalist reproduction of social relations attributed to historical and material dynamics. Troublesomely, their relationship to power reduces education to a commodity through the normalization of alienation. Turk (2014) assesses alienation within the context of education and how it affects student motivation, engagement, and academic success. Turk maintains that alienation occurs when students

feel disconnected from the material being taught, the goals of education, or the wider community, and the negative consequences of this feeling on students.

Bakan and Dua (2014) provide a linkage for understanding Marxism and anti-racism, and furthering how Marxist Theory can be used to understand and critique systems of racial inequality. Bakan and Dua in a further critique of Marx's thought on alienation point out that such a concept explains another form of human suffering, abstractly distinct from exploitation but continuously interacting with it. They put forth alienation creates a sense of aloneness and isolation anchored upon an ethos of market competition with other human beings. For Hill and Maisuria (2022) social class is manifested within structural systems and personal relations within the context of education and beyond, thus marking social, cultural, and economic differences.

The negative messages minoritized students internalize in relation to racialized social class during their K-12 schooling experiences break the spirit and contribute to internalization of alienation in society. In a study by Middleton (1963) he identified six variants that comprise alienation 1). Powerlessness in being able to respond to social problems; 2). Meaninglessness or not understanding the complexity of society; 3). Normlessness in order to get ahead, one must be unethical in practice; 4). Cultural estrangement where the individual accepts popular culture; 5). Social estrangement or loneliness, a feeling of lack or loss of companionship; 6). Estrangement from work, not really fulfilled with what one does, but needing to do so to obtain things needed and wanted. Such findings should continue to be drawn upon in studying the outcome of alienation through early schooling socialization and responding with a social justice lens for furthering educational equity in community colleges.

Hegemonic Whiteness

Mayo (1999) in drawing upon Antonio Gramsci's vein of thought defines hegemony as a social condition where all aspects of social reality are enforced by a dominant group. Also, such aspects are generated and made acceptable to people by way of exercise through influence and the winning of consent. Hegemonic whiteness developed over hundreds of years of human encounters developing into hierarchies that sustain and promote arrangements of affective, attitudinal, behavioral, and cultural standards embedded into institutions, cultures, and individual identities. Cote (2009) states that Whiteness is considered a homogenizing force that unifies White people in maintaining the benefits of White social privilege and supremacy.

Flores (2016) puts forth the origins of hegemonic Whiteness being rooted in colonization and in the rise of nation-states. Whiteness as a social construction can be traced to early settler colonialism and the anxieties that surrounded the boundaries of identity. From its inception early on, Whiteness would be reinforced through money and social status which were predominantly attributed to Euro-American settler colonialists. Purporting that both were integral in the spread of capitalism and in the discursive production of the White subject in opposition to the racialized other. Once racialized categories developed through processes of force and discrimination, hegemonic Whiteness was maintained and normalized through standardization within complex social processes (Bakan & Dua, 2014; Miller, 2022).

De Saxe (2022) avows that hegemonic Whiteness continues to be firmly entrenched because it relies on collective social forces and not solely on individual White people through a normalized default status in which people of color are viewed as racialized and othered. Cabrera (2018) explains that Whiteness serves as a discursive means for normalizing inequality which projects people of color as a deficit in their ability to change their socio-economic reality. Thereby, camouflaging capitalism and how it creates poverty by normalizing it and leaving it unchallenged. Furthermore, hegemonic Whiteness is mutually constitutive of dominant logic and transmitted through social structures such as education, religion, media, the medical field, and the military, besides Whiteness being able to obfuscate material and racial inequality (Hughey, 2010; Romano, 2018).

Casey (2020) mobilizes a Marxian lens in explaining how White supremacy utilizes capitalism for reproducing racial exclusion and discrimination. At the same time in reverse, White supremacy relies on capitalism for socially reproducing the private ownership for the means of production. Mayo (1999) urges the critique of 'social location' in relation to difference and refers to the Southern question furthered by Antonio Gramsci. Within such an ethnocentric frame of thought the darker peasant people of Southern Italy were viewed as having an inferior way of life, while the people of Northern Italy were viewed as having an affluent culture with a higher status. Such views have been unexamined notions of hegemonic Whiteness & racialized social class that have been left behind in history.

There is a gap in academic literature and empirical studies within community college scholarship that problematizes and deconstructs hegemonic Whiteness within such institutions of higher education and the communities in which they serve. Klein (2019) reminds readers that Whiteness is not White people in community colleges, but a discourse or social concept that that is deeply rooted in historical policies and practices that fail to recognize systemic racism. For ex-

ample, institutions of higher education fall short of identifying and deconstructing how hegemonic Whiteness serves as a barrier to institutional equity by lacking a critical examination of their daily business practices deriving from their founding philosophies.

Evatt-Young and Bryson (2021) advise leaders in higher education to call out structures and systems that by intention or not normalize racism and racial inequity. Thompson (2019) contends that Whiteness is difficult to recognize because it has been socially reproduced and normalized. This particularly holds truth for White people who have benefited intergenerationally through social, economic, and political benefits by being socially constructed as White.

In working with the Mexican American student population it is important to interrogate the deficit ideologies of such a community and of all ‘minoritized’ student populations. This holds sway as to the early mission and philosophies of community college previously stated in this article, and that is to prepare students for the job market, or instilling in them the option to pursue a higher education. How students are viewed with bias must be considered among instructors, staff, and administrators (Chapa & Schink, 2006).

Critical Race Counter-Narratives

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged as an intellectual movement that sought to debunk deeply entrenched racism in U.S. institutions. Crenshaw (2011) states “CRT was not, however, simply a product of a philosophical critique of the dominant frames on racial power. It was also a product of activists’ engagement with the material manifestations of liberal reform” (Crenshaw, 2011, p. 1260). The foundation of CRT derives from the teachings of Critical Legal Studies which interrogated liberal views of social hierarchy and meritocracy. A methodology of practice within CRT was to implement a counter-narrative as to the experiences of people of color in challenging the master narrative.

By using the counter-narrative approach a “shock story” foregrounds race relations and illuminates the socio-political realities of marginalized communities that render them invisible through negative and stereotypical perceptions (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2012). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) assert that society constructs the meaning of the social world by way of tacit agreements which are sustained images, pictures, and scripts that reinforce a master narrative. Therefore, much of what we accept is ridiculous and self-serving, but not perceived as such at the time when it is projected. Critical race theorists have utilized counter-stories to directly challenge, displace, and mock such harmful depictions of people of color.

In educational scholarship, counter-stories have been utilized to tell the stories of those who have been marginalized in relation to the lived experiences of their communities. Social struggles are often not valued, told, or acknowledged (Muñoz & Maldonado, 2012). Counter-stories are utilized as tools for solidarity by those on the margins of society, moreover for furthering the educational persistence and aspirations of such community (Macias et al., 2021; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Mayo (1999) advises recognizing stories that students tell based on their own experiences as they can be areas of subjugated knowledge that can serve a purpose for collective emancipation.

In this section, I provide an overview of the methodology and participants in this study. I then go on to present the analysis of themes that emerged from the data, followed by a discussion, and conclusion of the study. I argue it is critically imperative to continue to disrupt hegemonic Whiteness in the lived experiences of community college students in order to further social justice and culturally responsive pedagogies within such institutions. A critical consciousness can bridge an understanding of students' lives to guide their transfer to four-year institutions in furthering their educational and professional aspirations.

The following questions frame this study:

1. How do your early lived struggles influence you to pursue a community college education?
2. What do you foresee as you complete your studies at A Gathering Place of Peace Community College?

Participants and Data Collection

The data for this article draws from a larger qualitative case study conducted at A Gathering Place of Peace Community College located in Santiam, Oregon, USA. A total of 15 students participated in pláticas and semi-structured interviews, in-kind guiding their testimonios. Data was further collected by utilizing participant observation and field notes. All interviews were recorded and transcribed (Seidman, 2006). Three student participants were identified to reflect themes that emerged.

Methodology

Critical ethnographic methods were utilized to take upon an emancipatory positionality to the research. As such, furthering transformative goals while incorporating self-reflexive inquiry as opposed to an objective stance in research (Cer-

vantes-Soon, 2014; Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Yet, centering the stories of students of color is a necessity within critical race research for the disruption of master narratives that socially reproduce inequity within institutions of higher education (Duncan, 2005). *Platicas* as a methodological tool were fused into the study for the cultivation of dialogue with the student participants. Such an approach is Mexican culturally centric which is rooted in various forms of communal communication such as stories, cuentos/stories, or other narrative forms (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). Fierros and Bernal (2016) instruct that it being critical that such an approach be cultivated based upon trust and relationship building with the community which one serves.

The *charla* process is a culturally centric form of communication that enables the speaker to make sense of their world and is common in Mediterranean cultures (Gramsci, 1971). Mayo (1999) advocates that *charlas* promulgate democratic social relations which render the learner as a subject of the learning process. In such a way, the culture of the learner is present through a dialogic teaching interaction. Also developed through the '*charla*' practice is that actors create meaning and propose social praxis. Mayo (2005) further advises on the importance of recognizing the role that dialogue has in understanding the world and furthering a war of position through critique and social praxis. Whereby, the importance of listening is followed by evidence of such responsiveness for authentic adult involvement which is a matter of respect (Mayo, 2003). Zanoni (2008) states that *charlas* are Latina/o cultural practices utilized by immigrant groups in affirming epistemology, identity, and agency. Such a form of communication places value on close family interactions, common language functions, and informal verbal exchange.

Testimonio was tied to the study to honor the student participants as holders of knowledge by way of honoring their histories, experiences, cultures, and languages within an educational setting (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). In this fashion, challenging apartheid knowledge presumes that there is only one way of knowing and understanding the world which is sustained through epistemological racism (Perez-Huber, 2008, 2009). Rodriguez-Campo (2021) advances that *testimonio* within educational settings as a promising methodology for addressing the lived realities of students of color and to center their voices in furthering a liberatory praxis.

De Saxe (2022) argues that *testimonio* aims to disrupt the White canon of mainstream education while having the ability to engender and regenerate the discourse of solidarity. Recently, community college scholars have unveiled Latina community college leadership pathways by utilizing *testimonio* as a methodology (Elenes, 2020). Guajardo and Guajardo (2016) advise that to narrate ones cuento/story followed through critical self-reflection enables an understanding of a lived experience. Likewise, the importance of not getting stuck in one's

cuento, but to utilize it as a mechanism for exploring one's journey. Notably, this holds truth for those who live on the margins and find themselves in spaces of resistance, resilience, and struggle.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed by using a holistic coding process to identify basic themes that emerged. Students recalled and shared their memories, and identified feelings associated with their struggle to obtain a community college education. This served as a dialogical tool for further coding of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Saldaña, 2015). The themes that emerged were in relation to the student's resilience and idealism to overcome. Lived experiences were analyzed and utilized in the completion of the coding process (Richards, 2014).

Findings

The data analysis culled three themes from the student participants semi-structured interviews, *pláticas*, and *testimonios*. They included:

- (1) *La Lucha*/The Struggle Matters, focused on students' family struggles, and drawing upon such lived experiences as motivation for pursuing a community college education.
- (2) Schooling Blockades, highlighted an array of stereotypes, and beliefs that the students endured during their early schooling experience.
- (3) *El Porvenir*/What is to Come, indicated goals and idealism the students had for obtaining a community college education, and how it would improve their futures. They reflected on the experiences of their families and community as they worked towards completing their degrees. There was an overlap in the emergent themes with the research participants described below.

La Lucha Matters

The students in the study shared their families' *lucha*/struggle as a focal point and motivation for pursuing a community college education. The memories they shared at times seemed with reluctance or insecurity towards the researcher. Their recollections were often narrated with deep emotion and sentiment in my obser-

vations. Through their *testimonios* they expressed feelings of powerlessness and subordination. As we discussed *la lucha* matters, *Dionisio Maldonado* (pseudonym) remembered his families immigrant struggle from Mexico City to lay roots in the city of Santiam.

When we got here my mom started working in the fields. She worked from four in the morning until three in the evening [seriously inhumane conditions]. I remember my mom coming back from work really tired, she couldn't even sit down because her body ached so bad. Seeing that as a little kid has an impact on you. The U.S. is supposed to be about great opportunities. The next thing you know you see your parents struggling working in the fields to get money for the family.

Such experiences of Mexican Immigrant families often go unrecognized by White middle-class mainstream society/educators. Mexican immigrant parents are often viewed as being apathetic to their children's education. *Dionisio's* testimonio illuminated the great physical hardships endured by Mexican immigrant families that labor in agricultural work. They are often unacknowledged for their social and economic contributions in the United States.

The notion of U.S. American exceptionalism and the reality of great opportunity is something else. Whereby, labor as a commodity is welcomed, while the dignity of the human being is denied. Another student participant, *Silvano Gracia* (pseudonym) *spoke* about his families hardships in Santiam,

My parents were born in Toluca, Mexico, they came here looking for the American Dream. There were few opportunities for them to give me a better life in Mexico. They didn't want me to have that life, they wanted me to do something better for myself. My family is a lower middle class [not poor]. My parents work in the fields, the fields are not a well-paid job. We have always struggled to pay rent, pay bills, and my education [it has always been a struggle]. It's always stressful for our family to think about next month's rent and the bills that are coming up. Or when we all [the family] have to look where we can find a job. Sometimes we pass by the fields and asked the mayordomos/supervisors for work, that we need money to pay for the rent and bills. Sometimes they would say you can work today because some people did not show up so you can replace them. It has always been back and forth trying to find work.

Silvano was very aware of his families hardships in relation to stress and anxiety to survive. He understood his place in community college was beyond him as an individual, but broader in respect to the struggles of his family and community. Cole (2022) asserts that the intensification of class warfare has left entire generations emotionally drained who have witnessed expanding and angst-ridden unemployed and underemployed condemned to privation and desolation. Furthermore, how insecure low-wage slavery squeezes the lifeblood of the collective will.

Jacinto Treviño (pseudonym) another student research participant was attentive as to what his family endured while laying roots in Santiam, Oregon.

My mom is from Reynosa, Tamaulipas, Mexico, and my Dad is from Guanajuato, Guanajuato, Mexico. When they left Mexico it was to get better jobs as they had just had their first child and they did not want him to struggle like they were. My dad is poor and works in the fields that are thirty miles away from where we live. My dad would barely make enough money during the day. We would always have food, but my dad was mostly gone during the day as he worked very long hours. We didn't have the best clothes, sometimes we went to goodwill (second-hand store) because we didn't have any money. We would get teased in school, and sometimes we would get mad and want to do something about it. After you get used to the mistreatment it doesn't really matter.

Jacinto during our *plática* mentioned his families struggle and was aware of the difficult hardships they had endured. He also made the connection of such struggle to his schooling experience, and the derision he experienced in relation to race and social class. *Jacinto* also became numb for protection from scorn and ridicule which has an impact on students schooling and building relations. Inferior views of Mexican Americans as a minoritized group have often depicted them as only having the cognitive ability in serving as labor commodities for agricultural labor (Healey & Stepnick, 2022; Menchaca, 1995).

Schooling Blockades

Upon exploring the student participants schooling experience they were quick to share what they had overcome as Mexican immigrant students. In their *pláticas* they shared deficit views of Mexican students and the ways in which students either resisted or were subordinated by such ideologies within the culture of schooling. *Dionisio* shared,

In primary school, you are a little kid and get all of the basic knowledge. I don't think in my early schooling I ever thought about college. I just imagined what I wanted to be when I grew up. I didn't think I would have to graduate high school and college. High school was a big influence because teachers and peers tell you that if you don't go to college then you are going to be a big loser for the rest of your life. I would hear this in particular from teachers. My peers in high school, the people I would hang around with would say I don't give a crap what teachers say. I am going to work, work, work. I was the big one in my crew, I wanted to go to college, and I wanted to be someone in life. I just didn't want to work and have the same life as my parents.

Dionisio's experiences in schooling were devaluing by way of the messages received from teachers. The teachers projected a White middle-class ethnocentric view in the pursuit and obtainment of a higher education. Such views have often been reinforced through Anglo-conformity, Americanization, and assimilation of Latina/o immigrant communities into U.S. society (Orosco, 2016). Even though *Dionisio* recognized the realities of his situation, he still hung on to hope for a better life through his education.

Silvano vividly recalled his schooling experiences and the social environment he struggled against while obtaining an education,

I experienced quite a few things during my schooling experience. For example, I had a lot of friends in high school who were gangsters and used drugs. Some of them ended up killed or imprisoned. They would often try to get me to join gangs but I would refuse. I also remember in school a lot of people made fun of my accent because I did not speak English well or whatnot. Those students started in ESL classes and I ended up as an Ivy [valedictorian] student. Many people would put me down for what I was doing [finishing high school], they were jealous for whatever reason. It was really sad to see my own people [peers] trying to keep me from accomplishing my goals. But it was the motivation from my family and where I came from. I never forget all the farm work that we did, knowing the hard life, and staying away from all the destruction.

Given the social barriers that were ever present in *Silvano's* schooling experience such as struggling against self-fulfilling prophecies, violence, and internal-

ized oppression, he drew upon the struggles of his family and dignity through hard work for affirming his place in community college. Regardless, of the negativity and the expectations from the larger society, *Silvano* listened to his family's wishes and desires for better opportunities for himself. Mayo (1999) with respect to adult education advises recognizing dialects in communication styles and valuing them. Additionally, it affirms that the dominant language should be learned, but in doing so explains the process of hegemony tied to such language and its relation to power/knowledge (Mayo, 2014).

Jacinto spoke about different memories he had of his schooling experience. He recalled constant belittling by associating with peers from his own ethnic [Mexican] background,

In my elementary school experience, I was labeled a little troublemaker for my short temper with students. In middle school, people started telling me to sell drugs and I kind of started, but then my cousin called me and told me to stop because I could get in trouble. In high school, I changed from being a troublemaker to being the quiet one. I would just go to school and go home. There were gangs everywhere. When I would go to different towns, people [gangs] would ask me to join them, that I should be down with them. I would tell them that I kick it with everyone, I don't mind if you are Black, White, Asian, or whatever, or if you are in a gang or not. I would just tell them [friends] that it's not good. I used to hang out with them and stuff, but I didn't mind them having problems with other people when I didn't.

For many, such experiences would not be validated or accepted as knowledge in an educational setting. However, in *pláticas* *Jacinto* acknowledged that such experiences were a reality as to what his community lived, and what it took to overcome and pursue a community college education.

Scholarship in working with Mexican American students advises cultivating a sense of belonging for students from historically marginalized backgrounds within their schooling experience (Valenzuela, 1999). Therefore, acknowledging students' lived experiences in the community college environment and utilizing them for students to transmit such experiences onto an academic identity. In addition, furthering holistic and culturally responsive approaches for understanding diverse lived experiences in the curriculum and the pedagogical approaches of instructors (Ponjuán & Hernández, 2016).

El Porvenir

A cornerstone of the study was to explore the meaning and value that community college held for the student participants. As well as understanding their presence as students in relation to their educational aspirations and career goals. *Dioniso* reflected as a community college student,

A Gathering Place of Peace Community College has been like a huge melting pot for me. I like how different cultures blend together. I think this was a great way to start, you meet

a lot of people that have different ideas than you. First of all A Gathering Place of Peace is cheap [tuition] and I can afford it. Second of all, I heard the college is diverse, I figured that I would take the chance and get my general studies, my Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer Degree (AAOT). High school teachers told me that it was a great start for any kind of degree that you work for. So, I decided to come to a Gathering Place of Peace Community College. I think that the college is perfect how it is right now. I don't see myself as a minority here. I see myself as me, I haven't heard any stereotypes of racism going on, and I feel really good attending no negative put-downs against my race.

Dionisio's community college experience was one where he had been provided a space to pursue higher education as an individual. He did not see any flaws in the community college but saw it as a place where as long as there was no overt racism in his mind it was "perfect." Thereupon, his academic experience projected inclusivity through a responsive curriculum and teaching practices. *Silvano* spoke about his optimism in community college and optimism upon completion,

A Gathering Place of Peace Community College has been great. I really enjoy the diversity of the college. The teachers are great they are willing to help you with your homework even after work hours. I really enjoy working with students my own age, there are also students who are 40 or 50 years old. I can see various perspectives from joint generations and both merging together. It's really nice to see, I really enjoy learning new things from them. But I do advise the community college to be more united with schools. We have a lot of young Latinos who are studying in elementary, middle, and high school. We need those people who will be the

future of [U.S.] America to continue to study and get a higher education. They are going to be representing us, we need to continue students into higher education. Life is hard, but never give up on your dreams. Never forget where you come from, don't let anyone stop you.

Appreciative of the diversity at the college, *Silvano* learned from various ethnic and generational perspectives. However, he always looked back to his community and understood the importance of higher education to be attainable for younger generations. Through such experience, he believed in the familial transmission of knowledge for his community and the importance of obtaining a higher education with purpose.

Jacinto wanted to acquire an education to improve his future. He was mindful of the Mexican community not completing school,

It has been a good experience at A Gathering Place of Peace Community College. I have met good teachers, it is an unbelievable and unrealistic feeling to be in higher education. My community college education will positively impact my life because we (Mexicans) don't make it to college or get better jobs. Some of us like to get into gangs. It's not only for Latinos but for different races, there are different types of problems for each race. We can get a better career than our parents, because your parents may have a shitty job because they didn't go to school. Community college is giving you the opportunity to come to school and get an education, be better off than your parents, and get a better career. So, you can one day give your children what you wanted when you were small. I think community colleges should encourage more Latinos to come to college. This is a better life than living day by day, or getting into trouble and getting locked up. You can fall into a cycle of getting locked up, getting out, and getting locked up again. It can take your life.

The social extremities that had exiled so many of his Mexican peers from their schooling experience and society were deeply ingrained in *Jacinto's* memory, and the vital importance in completing his community college studies. For *Jacinto*, he realized that community college was a way in which he could improve his chances of having a better life.

Discussion

Through student *pláticas & testimonios* participants spoke about the hardships their families endured while they struggled to lay roots in Santiam, Oregon, USA as Mexican immigrants. There were various economic issues surfaced such as employment, financial necessities, rent, agricultural labor exploitation, prejudice, racism, and stereotypes aggravated by discrimination within their schooling experiences. Recalling such memories provided students with an empowering space within a community college in sharing their lived struggles to overcome.

Such experiences should be supported by faculty engaging in critical mentoring with students as they advance through their studies. Accordingly, validating their experiences through acceptance and action in furthering their educational pathways (Weiston-Serdan, 2017). Community colleges will continue to play a key role in the lives of Mexican American and minoritized students in furthering their education. A critical consciousness is needed in empowering students through solidarity with faculty and staff by challenging deficit views of historically marginalized communities within such institutions (Ponjuán et al., 2017).

Conclusion

According to Lima (2000) it is a duty for educators to enact advocacy in the schooling of people of color while challenging and confronting indifference. As an example, Chicana/o Studies provides Mexican American students with a strong sense of self and being by building an awareness of civic responsibility to the community (Nuñez, 2011). Specifically, within community colleges it is important for raising awareness of how Mexican American students have historically been mistreated and exiled from the schooling experience in relation to intergenerationally and socially reproduced deficit views and still overcome and obtain a higher education (Jaime-Diaz & Dubkin-Lee, 2023).

There is a continued need to push for the incorporation of an intercultural *conciencial*/awareness that will facilitate culturally responsive pedagogies that value and uphold the dignity of the minoritized, poor, working class, and immigrant communities in community college (Jaime-Diaz & Ramos, 2023). There should be a consistent and persistent struggle to raise awareness through *conocimiento*/ reflexive knowledge in relation to self and others in interaction for identifying and deconstructing internalized prejudices and biases deriving from early socialization and which are socially reproduced. This approach will facilitate an under-

standing to assist community college faculty and staff in responding equitably to racialized social class, and linguistic and cultural diversity of Mexican American and minoritized student populations (Jaime-Diaz & Mèndez-Negrete, 2021).

Campa (2010) in her study of Mexican American community college students advised for the utilization of a critical resilience lens for understanding the hardships that students endure along the community college pathway. In essence, understanding that when drawing upon cultural resources Mexican American students view their purpose as a collective one that is inseparable from their families and communities. Campa (2017) found that resilience serves as a catalyst for Mexican American students to overcome hurdles through a sense of purpose for themselves, and a mindfulness to overcome difficulties while pursuing and completing a community college education. Additionally, Campa (2013) advances the pedagogies of survival and marked the need for community colleges to reconceptualize ideas of success and failure by understanding resilience. This should be understood within the context of students learning from their own struggles, and those of their ancestors, and family members as part and parcel of life-long learning.

Mayo (1999) endorses resilience through social struggle by positing that transformative adult education should reflect and act upon the world through rigor and dialogical education. This line of thought should be maintained for communal empowerment in the understanding of oppression in relation to power dynamics and struggling for the realization of a global/civil society (Mayo, 2003, 2014). For Mayo (2005) in order to cultivate such reality there must be a reflection and a mutual feeling of marginality between educatee and educator as this draws their humanity closer to realizing worker/student empowerment through the harvesting of critical consciousness in the spirit and pursuit of social justice for the common good.

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Narušavanje hegemonijskog belog identiteta: *Testimonios* kao kontranarativ kritičke teorije rase u procesu pohađanja koledža u zajednici

Apstrakt: Cilj ove kvalitativne studije slučaja jesu rana životna iskustva radničke klase meksičko-američkih studenata na koledžu u zajednici u Oregonu, SAD. U ovom članku se razmatraju teškoće koje utiču na odluku studenata da nastave obrazovanje. Istraživačka pitanja su: kako vaša rana životna iskustva utiču na vas kako biste težili obrazovanju na koledžu i šta planirate nakon završavanja studije na koledžu? Svaki student, učesnik istraživanja, ispričao je svoje svedočenje (*testimonios*), svi podaci su snimljeni, a zatim transkribovani. Dobijeni nalazi, proizašli iz *testimonios*-a, bili su u vezi sa porodičnom borbom, ranim školskim iskustvima i optimizmom u njihovom obrazovanju. Takva iskustva dalje naglašavaju potrebu za ispitivanjem otuđenosti u okviru institucija visokog obrazovanja. Autor poziva koledže da kritički ispitaju hegemonijski beli identitet, uzimajući u obzir šta se može naučiti od meksičko-američkih studenata u njihovim borbama za dalje obrazovne aspiracije.

Ključne reči: Meksički Amerikanci, koledž, hegemoniska belina, otuđenje u obrazovanju

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