Uncovering testimonios of traditional healing practices among Latinx college students in El Nuevo Sur.

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UNCOVERING TESTIMONIOS OF TRADITIONAL HEALING PRACTICES AMONG LATINX COLLEGE STUDENTS IN EL NUEVO SUR

By

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education and Human Development of the University of Louisville in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Counseling and Personnel Services

Department of Counseling and Human Development
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY

May 2023
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March 22, 2023

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am blessed to have the opportunity to bring these stories together and to connect and weave participant stories with their experiences of identity, community cultural wealth, and traditional healing practices. To be with the words, reactions, and expressions of each of the students was a deep, liminal process for me. It took time to make sense of each interview and pair it with the group's collective experience. To be able to show you a peek into windows of their lives, an area that they may not have talked about openly in the past, areas of their lives that are ever-evolving, has been soul-healing for me as a witness and designer for this body of work. I respect each student for their bravery, honor their people and all the people they came from, and I will always hold the testimonios of these students dearly.

I am moved by the people in the community who are making changes and transforming the world with their bodies, minds, and spirits. I am thankful to the Somatic Scribing Course I took with artist and teacher Kate Morales in the Fall of 2022, where I learned more about the concepts of epistimicide, composting, digesting, and somatics and feeling through the body our experiences from the outer and inner worlds. This process supported me through the meaning-making from the testimonios. To the compas in the fight for humanity and social justice across the southeast, your imagination to breathe life into new systems, structures, and community is inspiring. A special thank you to Colaborativa La Milpa and all the organizations and people held by them, you all remind me what community means and how to build structures of support by and for the people.
To my Louisville compas who fight for our rights through cultural organizing and for our own healing and creative practices through Aflorar Herb Collective, you taught me what being held by a community could feel like and more about collective healing. I am also grateful and moved by the work of La Casita Center, Louisville Latino Education Outreach Project, and Latino Leadership College Experience Camp and their abilities to honor the importance of community-led programs and the interwoven community-engaged practices that support students and families across the state of Kentucky. I have learned so much from all these circles and continue to learn from all the people and ways of being that each person and the collective show up in the world.

To my family, chosen family, and ancestors that have walked with me along this journey, supported me, gave me grace, time, and rest throughout the process, you all are my anchor, and I could not have done this without you. To my partner and love, María Teresa Mabry, for supporting me and guiding me daily to trust my inner wisdom and for believing in me, rooting for me, and providing me space to grow and learn.

To my educational advisors, committee members, and professors, Dr. Susan Longerbeam, for trusting my process and allowing me to be my full creative and inquisitive self throughout this process. You invited me to delve deep, supported my ideas, and always made me feel safe and seen throughout the doctoral journey. Dr. Adrian Archuleta, who opened doors to publishing and co-working together very early in my time as a student, guided me deeply towards my passions for research and writing and created space for me that previously felt unattainable. Dr. Meera Alagaraja, your teaching style, supportive guidance, and community-engaged scholarship are inspiring. Your belief in my topic helped me remember my roots and the reason for this study. Dr. Amy
Hirshy, you taught me more about the student affairs profession and always asked good questions of me, moving me to think more critically and intentionally throughout my educational process. Thank you all for believing in me and walking with me down this path.

Lastly, I am thankful to the herbs and flowers who have supported my body through stress and extended writing and research days. Lemon balm, tulsi, skull cap, chamomile, cinnamon, calendula, and rose have been the herbal allies that I have used to manage stress and supported my immune and nervous systems, heart space, and creativity along the way.
ABSTRACT

UNCOVERING TESTIMONIOS OF TRADITIONAL HEALING PRACTICES AMONG LATINX COLLEGE STUDENTS IN EL NUEVO SUR

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March 22, 2023

Latinx college students in el Nuevo Sur face many barriers to their educational success. Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur live in a part of the country where few opportunities to embrace their cultures are present or centered in educational settings. Reclaiming and remembering their cultures within the higher education setting could act as a catalyst for their success and is the motivation for this dissertation. Through testimonios, photo/image-elicitation, and journal writing with ten participants, I listened to and witnessed the students’ stories. Through unfolding the students’ testimonios, I uncovered and supported students to rediscover healing practices as a tool for their success in college and beyond. Through this project, I embarked on a journey with the testimonialista to discover when healing began for them, where they learned healing practices, how they defined and experienced their healing, and how higher education and community have played a role. Using my autohistoria, I shared with the participant's similar experiences and grounded myself in this research as a Queer, Latinx woman who grew up and was educated in the South. Using the lenses of Latinx critical race theory, traditional healing practices, Latino identity development and orientations, and
community cultural wealth and situating my own lived experiences in the research, this project uncovered the healing practices of Latinx college students in el Nuevo Sur.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Traditional healing practices promise opportunities for Latinx college student success in the Nuevo Sur through reclaiming traditions that have been lost for generations through acculturation and colonization. Latinx students who are exposed to authors, concepts, theories, history, and Indigenous wisdom through curricular settings in higher education will have a deeper connection to their identities, cultures, language, and histories. In exchange, students will feel a stronger sense of self and a deeper analysis of their identities and relationships to their surroundings, resulting in a greater desire to learn and succeed in college and beyond. In a recent quantitative study on Latinx student acculturation at a southeastern, predominantly White institution, authors summarized the study by stating, “Macro-level changes must be made to institutional policies and practices to encourage greater levels of inclusiveness and eliminate those that force assimilation” (Archuleta et al., 2021, p. 156). Some of these macro-level changes should include changes in student services, programs, pedagogies, and curriculum provided for Latinx college students in el Nuevo Sur.

The purpose of this testimonio research is to discover and listen for themes of how healing practices, community cultural wealth, and identity development are woven together and experienced in the lives of Latinx college students in el Nuevo Sur. Latinx students should be given the space and place in educational settings to reclaim and remember their roots which could be used as a catalyst for their success in education
systems and throughout their lives. Through this research project, using the methodology of testimonios, I will be introducing my own “autohistoria” (Bell et al., 2020, p. 849), lived experiences, as well as a model I created, *The Ecosystem for Latinx Student Success* (Figures 1 and 3), a student affairs practitioner and educators guide to working with Latinx students in the Nuevo Sur. Throughout this dissertation, I use my positionality, lived experiences, and autohistoria to provide a pathway for the reader into my own heart and mind as a tool into the context of living, working, and being a student in el Nuevo Sur. The ecosystem imagery I created in collaboration with Latino artist, Luis de León, is a living and breathing system that functions in tandem with students’ lived experiences, healing, and identity development. Weaving testimonios of Latinx student stories through my own lived experiences and that of authors, educators, artists, and wise feminists who have come before me is a part of this body of work. It is a privilege and honor to be able to witness these stories, in this time and place, as a Latinx queer southern student and educator researching in Kentucky.

Student success is dependent on many variables, some of which have been well-researched and others where research is lacking. Identity development, integration into social environments, sense of belonging, well-being, and cultural navigation are a few factors that can aid in a student’s success in college and beyond. A student’s success depends not only on their value in these areas but also on how faculty and student affairs practitioners engage with students in curricular and co-curricular traditional healing practices on college campuses. This research investigates current and former Latinx college students’ stories of uncovering healing and traditional practices. It provides tools for higher education professionals, faculty, and staff to address the oppressive conditions
that strip Latinx students of their culture and identity. This research focuses on how, when, and with whom healing practices were uncovered for students in curricular and co-curricular settings. These discoveries aim to provide educators with new avenues for student services, programs, curricula, and tools for creating equitable cultures and impacting Latinx college students’ college experiences.

For this dissertation, I used the research methodology of testimonios. Displaying how testimonio has been used across academia and in the community to share perspectives and act as a healing and liberatory practice for students in higher education is one of the aims of using the research method and design. This research invited testimonios of ten students and triangulated the data with journal and image entries submitted by the students interviewed. I used Latinx critical race frameworks to challenge systems of domination and oppression and to articulate the oppressions of today’s Latinx students and families in el Nuevo Sur. Furthermore, through the lenses of Latinx student identity development and orientations, traditional healing practices, and community cultural wealth, this study focused on the lived experiences of Latinx students navigating acculturation, colonization, and discrimination within the landscape of higher education and how they have experienced healing.

While working in activism, organizing, education, non-profits, and business focused on equity issues for two decades, I have a lived experience through community engagement and grassroots organizing that add to my experience for this research. These lived experiences fuel my passions for student identity development and life success and act as praxis for breaking the cycles of White supremacy culture within higher education and myself. I use my own stories as an anchor for this research. It is deeply personal as I
have been directly harmed by educational institutions throughout my career and education journey. I myself have been on a profound discovery of healing and liberation from the harm caused to my loved ones and me over the past 44 years. I would not have the praxis, experience, and passion I have today if it were not for my deep healing journey and ability to navigate educational institutions for myself, my family, and the students I advocate for. This anchor acts as my hope that this research, informed by my own experiences, will act as a tool to help the next generations of Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur, keep me engaged in the institutional changes to come, and inform new and seasoned student affairs professionals, faculty, and community-based organizations.

**Testimonios**

Testimonios are a research methodology and community organizing tool used across Latin America and the world. Traced back to the 1970s, testimonios are a form of literature and have been used through liberation theologies and pedagogies throughout people’s movements across the Americas in response to U.S.-backed military dictatorships and imperialism (Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012). The origins and history of testimonio have been used as an educational research method, tool, and community-based participatory approach by feminist, Queer, Chicana, and Black scholars. Liberation pedagogist, Freire (2013), Chicanx authors such as Anzaldúa et al. (2012) and Moraga and Rodríguez (2011), Black queer feminist authors including Lorde (2012), Morrison (2007), Reyes and Curry Rodriguez, (2012), and Walker (1972), are some of the most recognized authors who have used testimonios in their research, writing, and praxis. For this research, I used the previous work of many Chicana/o/x and Latina/o/x educators who have practiced testimonios through their anthologies such as *Telling To Live: Latina*
Feminist Testimonios (del Alba et al., 2001), This Bridge Called My Back (Moraga & Anzuldúa, 2015), Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women’s Lives (Facio & Lara, 2014), and Chicana/Latina Testimonios as Pedagogical, Methodological, and Activists Approaches to Social Justice (Bernal et al., 2016). Over the past few decades, testimonios have grown as a method and methodology in education research, mostly by Latinx/o/a/e and Chicana/o/x scholars across the United States (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). This research followed in the footsteps of former Latinx researchers. As I sought the best way to define and understand testimonios, I learned most from Huber (2009), who described testimonios from a position of “following a tradition of testimonio” (p. 643), and through her understanding/definition that she developed after conducting testimonio research with 20 Chicana students as, “A verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future” (p. 644). I chose this understanding/definition for my research as it resonated with my own lived experiences and the goals of this research project, to uncover healing practices and understand more about how identity and community wealth are woven together through students’ experiences. Huber’s (2009) focus on healing, empowerment, and advocacy truly resonates. Reyes and Curry Rodriguez (2012) further my understanding of testimonios with their description of the testimonial process as it “must include the intention of affirmation and empowerment” (p. 527), sentiments that will be present throughout the process of gathering stories and analyzing results.
Testimonio is a methodology in qualitative research where the listener (in this case, the researcher) listens to the stories of the narrator (testimonialista/o) who speaks on behalf of themselves and their past and present lived experiences in the form of resistance and liberation to uncover and remember that which may be repressed. For the testimonialista, it is a process of remembering their experiences and consciously and unconsciously bringing to the forefront their untold stories. The title of this dissertation, Uncovering Testimonios, is best done using the methodology of testimonios, as a cultural tradition deeply rooted in communities across Latin America and for Latinx students and educators across the United States.

Testimonios as a methodology and a method differs from formal narrative inquiry such as storytelling, oral history collection, and interviews. Testimonios is a process of witnessing the participants' experiences, trusting their wisdom and knowledge, using deep listening, engaging in dialogue about shared experiences, and asking guiding questions. As the researcher, I listened and witnessed the students, asked them some guiding questions, and was in dialogue with participants during our time together.

**Definition of Terms**

As this research study has been developed over the last three years, I offer several terms used throughout this dissertation. The list below is meant to help the reader better understand the concepts. Spanish words throughout this dissertation will not be italicized to normalize the use of bilingualism which flows (in English and Spanish) in and out of use for bilingual speakers and the participants in this study. This tool is borrowed from Moraga and Rodríguez (2011) who do not italicize Spanish words in their texts.
This research will be helpful to professionals and students who work in higher education regardless of any previous experience working with Latinx students and families. These terms can have varied meanings for each reader depending on their own identities and critical consciousness development. In addition, the meaning can change over time and is adaptable. What is presented today in these definitions may shift in meaning as the author’s mind, identity, experiences, and critical consciousness grows and expands.

**Latinidad**: “Translated roughly as latinity or latin-icity acknowledges all the traits and characteristics that would make something Latin” (Dominguez & Johnson, 2017, p. 22). I use Latinx to identify the broader United States Latine/x/o/a community in this dissertation. Through the testimonios, I use the terms that each participant identifies with (e.g., hyphenated identity, national original by country, Hispanic, Chicano/x/a, Latine/x/o/a, Afro-Latino/x/o/a/e). When generally speaking about the population, I interchange Latinx with Latinx/o/a/e depending on the context of the paragraph.

**Traditional Healing Practices** come from Latin American, African, and Indigenous roots and traditions. In educational spaces, they can be found through student activism, storytelling, circle dialogues, language justice, herbs, rituals, art, popular education, inclusive pedagogy, collectivist frameworks, artifacts and altars. Many of students' lived experiences can be translated into healing practices when the time is given to listen and make the students themselves the “holders and creators of knowledge” (Bernal, 2002, p. 121).
**Nuevo Sur**: A term used to display the transformation of the southern U.S. demographic, political, and economic landscapes over the past 100 years by Latinx/o/a/e immigration.

**Community Cultural Wealth**: Yosso’s (2005) model offers six types of community cultural wealth that bring the community into the educational setting and support socially marginalized students lived experiences. The types of wealth Yosso builds upon are aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant, and linguistic capital.

**Theoretical Approaches**

In this section, I summarize the theoretical approaches used in this study. In addition, I combine these theories with insight into my own lived experiences with a short autohistoria and presentation of The Ecosystem for Latinx Student Success, a model used in programming at a predominately White institution in el Nuevo Sur for five years.

Latinx critical race theory (LatCrit) is a critical approach and lens used in this research to analyze the lived experiences of Latinx students using the intersectionality of identities of ethnicity and race (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016), as well as immigration status, language, and culture as a central focal point to analyze the oppressive structures that are harming students’ ability to succeed in education environments. In addition, this section provides an inquiry into interwoven epistemologies that allow us to reclaim tools (such as testimonios) that honor indigenous ways of knowing and begin to support decolonization within education.

Latinx identity development and orientations provide a nuanced approach to view the identities of Latinx students while honoring their process of shifting and changing identities through the college years. This section offers a way to ground understanding of
the many identities that Latinx students carry. An introduction to Latina racial identity orientations by Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) and further information about identity are provided in this section to help give more context to what makes up identity for Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur.

Community cultural wealth adds a vital thread to Latinx students’ experience, which is missing in educational settings, the family, and the community (Yosso, 2005). Through Yosso’s model, an expansion on cultural and social capital provides a much more integrated and refined model presenting aspiration, family, language, social, navigation, and resistance as aspects of community cultural wealth and areas Latinx students bring into the classroom. Yosso’s model adds a solution to a broken education system and pipeline and asks for deficient thinking, majority stories, and binary thinking to be replaced by factors such as lived experiences of students of color as a form of community cultural wealth.

Traditional healing practices, as performed across cultures of Black, brown, and indigenous families for centuries, look deeper into spirituality, homemade theory, sacred spaces, curanderas, and remedios de casa inside educational and community settings. As the central focus of this research, traditional healing practices in the education setting provide opportunity, hope, and reclaiming of culture and spirituality for Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur.

The Ecosystem for Latinx Student Success

The ecosystem for Latinx student success in el Nuevo Sur is a model for practitioners I created as a community organizer, student affairs professional, teacher, scholar-activist, and herbalist. Traditional healing practices, critical theory, my own
organic intellectualism, and homemade theory (Levins, 1998), which includes a keen understanding of el Nuevo Sur as a geopolitical space, have assisted this research design. My homemade theory is based on my lived experiences navigating academia in el Nuevo Sur as a Latinx mixed-race queer student and college student personnel professional. The ecosystem I developed is malleable while also defined. It is grounded in home, family, belonging, community, purpose, and passion. The ecosystem can shift and mold to the changing seasons, weather, climate, and surroundings. As crises arise, with the model in practice, offices, and programs can rest assured that while using the Latinx ecosystem for student success (see Figures 1 and 3), their students and the programs will withstand many external factors. Some external factors could be families separated from immigration raids, family death or sickness, navigating work and home responsibilities, institutional bigotry and racism, and navigating the Black/White binary thinking within higher education settings. These external factors will be explored more in-depth in Chapters Two and Four through the theoretical frameworks and research results.

Latinx students comprise many identities that can be complex for students, practitioners, and faculty in el Nuevo Sur to unpack without guidance and practice. As educators and student affairs professionals working on college campuses and in communities with Latinx students and their families, practitioners require tools, concepts, and techniques to understand students’ experiences, cultures, identities, and needs. These resources can support the students overall experience in college and beyond. For professionals working with students, this research brings us closer to the students’ experiences. It can aid in shifting paradigms and creating spaces and programs in higher
education settings to support Latinx students’ overall experience in education, college, and community.

In the testimonios and oral histories presented in an earlier study I conducted from 2015–2020 while employed as an associate director of the University of Louisville (UofL) Cultural Center’s Hispanic/Latino Initiatives, I observed themes of four healing practice categories: healing ancestral traumas, acts of liberation, connection to land, and learning. Through these interviews, I realized that lived experiences have shaped students inside and outside the classroom, allowing me to adapt the research design, inquiries, and objectives throughout this study. This previous work provided the structure for this dissertation and is essential to my growth as a researcher and the concepts, frameworks, models, and theories I am exploring academically and personally.

Testing the research questions has shown me that the inquiries I am exploring are participatory and result in students sharing the depths of their stories, family histories, and memories needed for testimonio research. Additionally, students interviewed in previous studies felt comfortable and spoke openly with me. The same was true for participants in this dissertation; they showed that their discovery, guided by educators, friends, family, and their agency, led them to healing and moved them toward more liberatory practices in their everyday lives. I uncovered illustrations and stories of healing practices for the students that can be used to support student affairs practitioners and faculty in higher education and serve Latinx students for decades to come in el Nuevo Sur.

The ecosystem for Latinx student success in el Nuevo Sur that I developed and tested in the field as a student affairs practitioner is introduced in this dissertation. It is
spiritual, emotional, mental, and psychological. As Rendón (2009) described in

_Sentipensante_, individuals can unite and make systemic changes by applying a shared

“Dreamfield.” Rendón wrote:

> In higher education, our shared beliefs and teaching and learning constitute the agreements that guide our present pedagogical Dreamfield. This Dreamfield is fraught with some powerful, entrenched agreements that, though shared by many, are in need of revision because they do not completely honor our humanity and our freedom to express who we are and what we represent. (p. 25)

I invite you to take a journey with me in this research and be open to creating a new

“Dreamfield” as educators, scholar-activists, student advocates, and student affairs professionals.

***Lived Experiences: An Autohistoria from the Researcher***

I intend to mimic _Sentipensante (sensing/thinking) Pedagogy_ described by Rendón (2009) as a process that “strives for balance and harmony: there is consonance between inner work, focusing on emotional and spiritual nurturance, and outer work, involving service and action in the world” (p. 135). For Latinx students, navigating the campus life and culture at a predominately White institution in el Nuevo Sur can be overwhelming (for all parts of their being). Couple this with the lack of representation of culture and family values in curricula, faculty, staff, and the campus environment; students can experience struggles in navigating the culture and environment and their identities. Through sentipensante (sensing/thinking), a new process is created for students to share what they are going through. This process can be a container for the student as well as staff and faculty to hold the student in the complexities of emotions and the awareness that the answers to their most philosophical life questions will unfold in their journey. They may not know how, when, or why in the moment but through embracing
sentipensante, all are invited to trust the process. I share a healing practice (journaling, reflection, and storytelling) that unfolded when I presented my story for a Story Telling Festival in Asheville, NC, in 2014.

I was so touched looking for archives from my past where I told my first story as a storyteller to a live audience. The experience was deeply transformational as it led me to understand more about my ancestry and healing practices that made me whole and remember the food, culture, and dichos from Colombia. My story focused on home, the stepping stones of my identity, and the stories of my abuelita, Cecilia. Concepts of home unfolded for me through the story, and this catalyst moment was one of my first memories of healing through testimonio. I am guided towards something that is way beyond my understanding or even explaining … an interconnected web of healing, unraveling my own lived experiences as I create a world we dream of through stories, community, and activism. It’s a form of healing through testimony. It’s the reason that I keep pushing. Moments that break me open and never close me off. Moments that make me feel my heart’s grief and joy. The unraveling of my heart through creativity and a pedagogical process like Rendón’s (2009) “sentipensante” (sensing/thinking). I am alive and ready.

The practice of finding joy, freedom, transformation, and redemption through testimonio drives my passion for this research and the reason for creating the research design. As a mixed-race, queer woman raised and educated in the South, without exposure to feminist and queer theories and diverse faculty until well into my thirties, the experience of remembering what I know in my soul, a sentipensante knowledge that liberation is a practice that spans cultures of my people, across Latin America and Europe. While researching Chicana educators, I came across an anthology, *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life, Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemology*, by Delgado Bernal et al. (2006). One of the authors in the anthology compiled stories from final papers written by her students to bridge the lived experiences and theories of Chicana authors. Delgado Bernal et al. stated:

The significance of all that students realize is that becoming conscious of the ideologies and beliefs by which they are socialized reflects a beginning step to
demystifying the power of ideology, to liberating oneself from oppressive forces, and to challenging forms of oppression, which can motivate change. (p. 91)

Furthermore, this change is also illustrated by Reyes and Curry Rodriguez’s (2012) explanation of testimonios, “Both the narrator and the listener experience cathartic epiphanies that open their eyes to the power of individual accounts that ensure that social and political events become part of the greater human consciousness” (p. 528). This research and methods promise to open up paths and be one of the beginning steps and cathartic experiences students can take toward liberation through their healing, community, and identity stories.

Lived experiences, storytelling, and strategic programmatic models guided my work for seven years in Louisville, Kentucky. Through my role as an associate director in the University of Louisville Cultural Center’s Hispanic and Latino Initiatives (HLI) from 2015–2020, Lecturer with the Honors College (2016–2021), and Co-Director of Latinx Oral History Project (2016–2020), I developed and implemented the ecosystem for Latinx student success. The model is a flower with six petals representing the practices essential to the success of Latinx college students (see Figure 3). Student identity development and community cultural wealth, collective impact, community engagement, Latinx retention models, traditional healing practices, and shared power are the concepts in the model. Applying the framework directly with students, families, and campus and community partners in curricular and co-curricular settings during my tenure at the University of Louisville helped to grow the roots of Latinx programs as a part of the culture and student support systems at the university, programs, and culture that I hope will be sustained and become part of the “greater human consciousness” (Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012, p. 528) of the institution as well as signify the importance of lived
experiences and testimonios as a tool for healing and liberation for students journeys in college.

To better understand the concepts and methods created in this research, I commissioned Louisville Latinx artist, Luis de León, to assist me depicting this model in an art form (see Figure 1). Pictures, images, symbols, color, and art show what the mind and words cannot articulate. The flower is rooted in fertile, solid ground. It takes responsibility of both the student and the institution for the ecosystem to thrive and flourish. How much harvest it bears will depend on the amount of care, community, and culture that goes into the flower, the student, and the ecosystem from the institution, self, and environment. Through this work, I am constantly reminded of the symbolism of the flower, its stem, and the roots that keep it growing. The flower comprises diverse people, spirits, and natural elements. It grows larger each year and bears more fruit with the more love, tenderness, and care it receives. The flower is supported by a strong stem with a caterpillar that appears in motion up and down the flower. When any external factor comes into the flower's life, it is held firm by all the components that make up its body. The flower is a metaphorical image used to translate the results of the testimonios. The flower as a whole is the student, made up of a flower face that represents the complexities of identities of being Latinx/o/a/e in el Nuevo Sur, the stem and the caterpillar is community cultural wealth which lives inside all of the dimensions of the student’s experience. The flower leaves are the healing practices that support the student throughout college and life and bring them closer to their cultural spirituality (Triana et al., 2020).
Note. Luis De León’s commissioned art piece depicts his understanding of the ecosystem and vision being brought to the forefront through this research.

In this art, the flower symbolizes the student. It is larger than the institution, a reflection of student-centered practices higher education practitioners can bring to their
consciousness and aid in creating their values as higher education professionals. No one student looks the same, and their characteristics are unique while also displaying leaves as though they are blowing in the wind, full of possibility and fluidity. A self-authored auto-historia of my time with Luis is described below:

On an early spring day in 2021, Luis and I sat, drinking Colombian coffee and charlando in the garden at the Casa Lirio, about how this research came into play. I found myself telling stories of my identity journey with my first trip home to Bogotá, Colombia, in 2000, at the age of 20, my first time returning there after moving to North Carolina at the age of three. The redemption and love I found on the streets of Bogotá led me to the path of education, activism, and art. It must have been the people’s faces on the bus rides and the kids who sold flowers on the streets. Their eyes said more than I could comprehend at the time. This led me to a path that, 20 years later, I am writing, researching, and working to help the next generation of students in el Nuevo Sur understand and find redemption in their own stories. Luis and I spent about two hours talking, reflecting, and dreaming through imagery which made me think of what it might have been like for authors like Gabriel García Marquez as he constructed his realities through magical realism.

For the purposes of this research, I focus on two of the petals: student identity development and community cultural wealth and healing practices (see Figure 3). In addition, the ecosystem for Latinx student success in el Nuevo Sur worked as a lens in developing the syllabus for a course I created and taught, *The Inside and Outside of Activism and Advocacy: Paths to Resiliency, Liberation, and Equivalence of Power.* Utilizing inclusive and contemplative pedagogies, art, and circle dialogues in class, I was able to apply the theories in praxis around how the classroom can also be a healing environment for students. The curricular settings for students are just as crucial as the co-curricular ones. My own lived experiences and auto-historias have shaped this research design, and my position in education and community spaces plays an equally important role in this research.
Bringing life to the stories of Latinx students at the University of Louisville will guide the outcome, and using the knowledge and wisdom of past experiences will ground the process. Testimonio is the gateway to identity development for Latinx students and begins to take us to the “pedagogy of dreaming” (Monzo, 2019, p. 28). Educators could benefit from using this vision to “move beyond the western lens of rational thought to an embodied knowing that draws on our human capacity for love, hope, and courage” (Monzo, 2019, p. 28). Monzo (2019) and Rendón (2009) provided the concepts needed to root and ground the stories and experiences of students in a tradition that brings back indigenous ways of knowing and centers the needs, voices, and experiences of Latinx students in higher education.

**Barriers to Success**

Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur face many barriers to access and success in education settings (Powell & Carrillo, 2019). Powel and Carrillo identified “border thinking and pedagogy” (p. 436) as an identity and concept that Latinx students in the New Latinx South have to navigate in themselves, education systems, and society. Although the physical border between the United States and Mexico is far from the states that make up el Nuevo Sur, the authors provided an analysis of students’ experiences in North Carolina, one of the fastest growing states for Latinx populations in el Nuevo Sur, as a “border related lens that address these issues (healthy academic and personal development) in this part of the country” (Powell & Carrillo, 2019, p. 435). From parents’ limited knowledge of the education system to language barriers, racism, discrimination, acculturation, marginalization, and assimilation, the barriers to success for Latinx students en el Nuevo Sur to achieve are many. Student support services such as
peer mentoring and advising, including services that create a sense of belonging and values-based approaches, have been well-researched. These approaches are being applied broadly in both the classroom and in student support programming, however, they are based on research on White students and are not adapted to the growing numbers of students of color across el Nuevo Sur. Missing from the research and practice are guidelines for faculty, student affairs, enrollment management, administrators, and student success professionals on how to layer student identity development with healing practices using students’ cultural backgrounds, community cultural wealth, and identities through testimonios (stories) to impact student success. The stories I witnessed, recorded, and explored through this research are ones of liberation and freedom and a recall of lived experiences in students past and present. What have been their experiences of healing in higher education, and what were the situations, people, and scenarios that assisted students towards their healing? Best described by Reyes and Curry Rodríguez (2012), “The objective of testimonio includes the knowledge that reflection and speaking lead, eventually, to liberation … it holds the Freirian promise of conscientization to hope, faith, and autonomy” (p. 527). On the same note, remembering experiences of acculturation, discrimination, and racism can show that experiences exist while also providing space for dreams, resistance, and hope. I hope that through my autohistoria, stories, lived experiences, reflections, and art forms, readers can obtain a deeper understanding of the objectives, hope for change, and positionality that I hold.

**Research Design**

Using healing practices as tools in curricular and co-curricular settings will support student success. This research intends to legitimize and normalize these practices
for Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur. Through their testimonios, journals, and images, I observed how students uncovered and learned traditional healing practices, who taught them, what they learned, how they navigated educational institutions within their Latinx identity, and how they applied that healing to their experiences in college and community. While thinking deeply about these questions, situating myself in the research, and dreaming of magical realism for several decades, I have developed the central questions for this dissertation.

**Research Questions**

1. How do healing practices, community wealth, and identity affect Latinx students’ college experience in el Nuevo Sur?

2. In what ways do higher education institutions support Latinx student healing practices in curricular and co-curricular settings?

**Demographics of Latinx Populations in el Nuevo Sur**

El Nuevo Sur has the fastest growing Latinx population in the country. Specifically, the states closest to Kentucky, such as North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee, have experienced Latinx population growth increases of over 100% from 2000–2014 (Stepler & Lopez, 2016). With the increasing populations across the Southeastern United States, a delicate balance exists between the rising number of Latinx students attending college and the colleges’ commitments to Latinx student experiences. Universities and community colleges will find their recruitment and retention strategies impacted by these population trends. Strategic alignments and planning can assist the offices of admissions, academic departments, and equity offices to be more equipped to work with Latinx students and families. Students’ abilities to reclaim and remember their
roots is a catalyst for their success in education systems and throughout their lives. Hiring bilingual, bicultural staff and faculty, community-engaged practices, programs and curricula geared to these students, and scholarship funds to impact student success will improve colleges and universities’ success and retention of Latinx students. However, it cannot stop there. Integrating a collective impact campus approach in these initiatives can foster an environment where students feel seen, heard, respected, and welcomed.

Many institutions of higher learning across el Nuevo Sur are not equipped with the tools, staff, faculty, and programs to assist Latinx students with the wrap-around services and environments they need to be successful. Simply recruiting students, faculty, and staff and utilizing their gifts or pictures for diversity recruitment or initiatives for the campus is not enough. Students have unique challenges, which vary based on the institutions they attend (Batista et al., 2018). The social justice ethics of higher education practitioners should be to mold and change as society, students, and the community’s needs call upon them. As the current political climate and global pandemic worsen, Latinx students are compounded and also experiencing the separation of families through immigration deportations, racism, and discrimination. Little to no Latinx cultural and historical curriculums or resources address systemic oppression in K-12 and higher education systems. Students and their families do not have adequate access to the tools and resources needed to succeed in education. One startling example happened in Fall 2015 at the University of Louisville. Despite the slogan “you belong” in the division of diversity, the students, faculty, and staff felt the ramifications when the senior leadership of the university, including the President, dressed up like Mexicans in rebozos and serapes for Halloween and posed for pictures for the local newspaper, the Courier-Journal.
The effects of micro and macro aggressions occur across higher education. Batista et al. (2018) shared:

"College mission statements foster welcoming environments … however the literature demonstrates higher education has not been an idealized environment for Latinx/a/o students and professionals; rather, members of this population have had to struggle and develop strategies to survive hostile and unwelcoming environments." (p. 73)

Through this research, I aim to uncover new strategies, paradigms, and tools for Latinx student success in el Nuevo Sur.

In Louisville, Kentucky, the Hispanic population has grown steadily over the past decade. According to data from the U.S. Census, in 2000, 4,755 people identified as Hispanic, representing about 1.9% of the total Louisville population (United States Census Bureau, n.d-a). In 2015, 28,479 people, about 4.7% of the population, identified as Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d-b). In 2021, the total percentage of Latinos in Louisville, Kentucky, based on census data, was 5.6%, an increase of 3.7% over ten years (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d-c). The steady rise in population each year can also help estimate the enrollment of Latinx students across higher education institutions in the southeast, specifically at the University of Louisville. Information provided by the Cultural Center’s Hispanic/Latino Initiatives (HLI) office shows that from 2014 to 2018, Latinx enrollment increased from 3.93% to 5.34%, representing an approximate increase of 1.4% percentage points in four years (Nuñez, 2018). This trend in enrollment and population growth is expected to continue. As the Latinx population grows in el Nuevo Sur, it is critical to ensure that the erasure of culture, language, and traditions is not removed from students’ stories, histories, and lives. Programs and services for Latinx
students in higher education in el Nuevo Sur should be culturally relevant, resourced, and re-imagined.

**The New South/el Nuevo Sur**

The south is a geopolitical space (Carrillo, 2016) that has been framed and shaped by a deep-rooted history of racism, Southern culture, the “Black and White paradigm” (Valdes, 1997, p. 17), agriculture, farm labor, union organizing, immigration raids, and worker exploitation. Undocumented and mixed immigration status families reside in el Nuevo Sur, and navigating systems, policies, and life in this part of the country can be a significant challenge (Rodriguez, 2021). Historian Weise (2015) depicted the history in her book, *Corazón De Dixie*, through stories of Mexicans in the South over 100 years. Weise (2015) articulated the term and complexity in using this terminology as:

> When Latino Migration to the U.S. South became visible seemingly out of nowhere in the 1990’s. The newness of this “Nuevo” South went unquestioned. Journalists asked, “Will fajitas replace Moon Pie?”, as though Mexican food had no history in the region; anti-immigration activists described the coming of “Georgifornia,” as though Georgia itself had not relied on Mexican and Mexican American labor for more than forty years. (p. 1)

In *Globalization, Latinization, and the Nuevo New South*, Mohl (2005) revealed, “This is the nuevo New South. Ready or not, Dixie appears to be on the cusp of a long-term process of Latinization, mirroring what has already happened in other parts of the United States” (p. 56). While discussing the difference between the Southeast and Southwest Latino families’ experiences with Cherrie Moraga during a campus visit to the University of Louisville in March 2019, she explained that some of the differences between the regions are that folks in the Southeast are disconnected from their ancestral lands and thus experience displacement. The history of el Nuevo Sur for Latinx families has been shaped over the past century. Moraga advised me to draw from Chicana and
radical Black feminists while also being specific to the current circumstances in the region (C. Moraga, personal communication, March 4, 2019). Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, across states in el Nuevo Sur, Latinx populations were rising. Undocumented families’ ability to access essential social services became threatened by the lack of ability to obtain a driver’s license. Specifically, in North Carolina, undocumented individuals could not get a driver’s license in 2007 when the law changed (Weise, 2015). The state policies that limit access to identification and anti-immigrant policies at the federal and state levels harm families, especially young Latinx students in this region. The Trump era immigration bans, threats to rescind deferred action for childhood arrivals (DACA), immigration raids targeting undocumented workers across the South, exploitative worker conditions, limited access to Spanish language services, as well as the more profound cultural ramifications such as assimilation, acculturation, and the loss of language, culture, and tradition are a few of the ways that harm is caused to Latinx families across el Nuevo Sur. For Latinx students entering college life, these realities are even more exacerbated as their ability to attend college depends on the state's policies. Some states provide in-state tuition to undocumented or DACA students while others ban their attendance altogether (Rodriguez, 2021). For young Latinx college-aged students, navigating all these systems and understanding states’ policies and rules while figuring out how to pay for, succeed, and make future decisions that will impact the rest of their lives is a huge burden to carry. However, many students successfully use their lived experiences and cultural wealth to navigate all the systems and barriers that hinder their success. In tandem, I often wonder about the Latinx students who never make it to the front door of the college admission office, those who decide not to continue, and those
who were never provided the opportunity. Through this study, research, and body of work, I aim to address how traditional healing practices inside the higher education, community, and family ecosystem have supported students as they navigate the many harms, policies, and systems working against their success.

Using the term el Nuevo Sur is a political decision that recognizes the current realities and past histories. It is a decision made in resistance to the erasure of Mexicanos in the South and all immigrants from across Latin America to the Southeastern United States over the past 100 years. The term, Nuevo Sur, acts to reclaim all that could be lost and has been lost and invites imagination into an education system dominated by individualism, assimilation, and capitalism.

**Research Significance**

The Southeastern United States is the area of focus for this project due to the emerging Latino populations that have come to this region over the past 100 years.


> The growth in the Latino population was even more dramatic at the county level, exceeding 1,000% in some counties and 500% in many others. The dramatic increases occurred across a range of county types, from small, non-metro manufacturing counties throughout North Carolina and north of Atlanta to counties in the heart of large metropolitan areas such as Nashville, Tenn. (Kochhar et al., 2005, p. 3)

Louisville, Kentucky, and the University of Louisville are the main sites of this research project. Although Louisville and Kentucky are not cited for their overall high population trends and growth, as mentioned in the Pew Hispanic Center Report, the proximity to the states (Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia) is significant. As Latinx families move for financial stability, proximity to family, cost of living, work, and other factors
influencing the quality of life, they find Louisville, Kentucky, as a home and place to settle. Barcus (2006) analyzed rural Kentucky and found that the state is growing in both urban and rural settings, and “between 1900 and 2000, 13 of Kentucky’s 120 counties lost populations and an additional grew by less than 2 percent, yet Latino populations expanded in all counties except one” (p. 106). In addition, Louisville is a refugee resettlement community for many Latinx/o/a/e immigrants from Cuba and has had that status for over 20 years. Additionally, Louisville Latinx immigrants align with the national trends as they relate to national origin from across the United States, with Cuban, Mexican, and El Salvadorian immigrants at the top (Kochhar et al., 2005).

**Summary**

Through this research of testimonios, I revealed common threads of intergenerational healing, family, ancestral trauma, identity, sense of community, and culture through the central research questions. I listened for what it means to make and be part of a community on and off the college campus, how students experience healing practices, where they have learned these practices, and what is leading them to further their healing, individually and collectively. Additionally, through this research, I explored how and where space is created for students’ healing and in what ways faculty, mentors, and higher education professionals support Latinx students.

The purpose of this research was to discover and listen for themes of how healing practices, community cultural wealth, and identity are woven together and experienced in the lives of Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur. This research was based at a predominantly White institution in Louisville, Kentucky, using the methodology of testimonios and the lenses of Latinx student identity development and orientations, community cultural
wealth, healing practices, and Latinx critical race theory to articulate the educational and societal barriers that exist for Latinx students in the south and make more sense of the root causes of these barriers. Through healing practices and philosophies of Chicana feminist scholars and authors (Anzuldúa, 2012; Bernal et al., 2016, 2012; Levins, 1998; Moraga & Rodríguez, 2011; Rendón, 2009), I intended to uncover how healing practices affect the college experience and how higher education systems can better support the full-bodied experiences of Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Abes (2016) considered resiliency, dissonance, community-engaged praxis, and agency as critical foci grounding the theoretical lens/framework for researchers. While developing this section, I found it challenging to decide which theory and framework to present first, as they all interrelate, intertwine, and are woven together. To visualize an abundant educational future for Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur requires me to see the frameworks that follow as a spiral, not one beginning point or linear path, but spiral thinking where each framework is part of the whole. In addition, I used a transdisciplinary approach using research from education, psychology, social work, nursing, and social sciences to present the frameworks that follow. For this section, I begin with Latinx critical race theory, then lead into Latinx student identity development and categories, followed by community cultural wealth, and end with traditional healing practices. It is important to note that these are not in order of importance or in any way related to linear thinking. Each framework needs the other to exist and is part of the visualization of the future needed for Latinx students’ success in el Nuevo Sur. Most of the research is woven around each framework as well. For example, a Latinx/o/a/e critical race scholar also speaks to testimonios (methods), or a healing practices scholar may also provide insight into identity development.
Critical Frameworks

The critical framework and new perspectives for this research provide the grounding for the ecosystem for Latinx student success and the praxis for future generations of Latinx students and professionals entering higher education in el Nuevo Sur. These times require policies, decisions, and procedures to be transformative, creative, and adaptable for Latinx students’ experiences. Currently, Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur have few faculty and staff that represent their cultures, and little to no cultural, historical, and political courses representing them or their families. They are disconnected from their ancestral lands, traditions, and languages. Moreover, they face fear from anti-immigrant discourse and policies at national, local, and state levels (Rodriguez & Monreal, 2017). This literature review aims to center the students’ experiences while engaging in dialogue around race, ethnicity, oppressive systems, values, and, finally, a remembering of the healing practices that have sustained communities of color for thousands of years.

Latinx/a/o Critical Race Theory

According to Huber (2009), “LatCrit is an extension of the efforts of CRT in education research, used to reveal the ways Latinos/as experience race, class, gender, and sexuality, while also acknowledging experiences related to issues of immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture” (p. 643). Latino/a/x/e critical race theory (LatCrit) as a tool for education researchers is described by Bernal (2002) as “a framework that challenges the dominant discourse on race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain racial or ethnic groups” (p. 109). As a branch of critical race theory (CRT), LatCrit takes the
components of CRT and adds a layer of analysis to view Latinx students’ and families’ experiences of oppression in education systems across the United States. LatCrit adds language, nationality, immigration status, ethnicity, and culture as factors in the students’ experiences. Solorzano and Bernal (2001) outlined five themes that frame LatCrit within education:

1. Intersectionality – “It’s at the intersection of race, class, gender, language, and immigration status that some answers to the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological questions related to Chicana and Chicano student resistance might be found”.

2. The challenge to dominant ideology – Moving from deficit frameworks and objectivity and challenging “traditional claims of the educational system to objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity”.

3. The commitment to social justice – “A critical race and LatCrit framework is committed to social justice and offers a liberatory or transformative response to racial, gender, and class oppression”.

4. The centrality of experiential knowledge – “View experiential knowledge as a strength and draw explicitly on the lived experiences of students of color by including such methods as storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, testimonios, cuentos, consejos, chronicles, and narratives”.

5. The interdisciplinary perspective – “A CRT and LatCrit framework in education challenges ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most analyses and insists on analyzing race and racism in education by placing them in both an historical and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods.” (p. 312–315)

For this research, I chose the LatCrit framework to support the students’ lived experiences and challenge higher educational institutions in el Nuevo Sur to rethink and reimagine programs, policies, services, and curriculums offered to Latinx students in the region through a critical lens. Critical frameworks challenge systems of domination and oppression and are useful for examining the experiences of Latinx students. By creating new perspectives and praxis, institutions can engage in creative and culturally-centered strategies to assist Latinx student success and retention. By using concepts such as embracing the messiness by Johnston-Guerrero (2016), Solorzano and Bernal’s (2001)
transformational resistance, Bernal’s (2002) race-gendered epistemology of students of color as holders and creators of knowledge, and Bernal and Villalpando’s (2002) apartheid of knowledge, the possibility to shift the power dynamics within education systems exists thus providing students more access and educators more responsibility to the Latinx experience. In the following sections, I examine each of these concepts, starting with the shifting of power dynamics.

**Shifting Power Dynamics Through Intersectionality**

Johnston-Guerrero (2016) argued that distinctions between race and ethnicity should be made for student development researchers and that, although the United States does not have clear boundaries of differences and similarities between race and ethnicity, we should embrace the messiness of these categories and apply intersectionality to analyzing college student development. This allowed the research to take shape and “better understand how a student is developing within larger systems and structures that perpetuate inequity through the oppression of some groups over others” (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016, p. 47). This distinction is important because of how systemic biases occur in colleges across el Nuevo Sur. For example, a White-passing Latinx student who has several societal privileges (e.g., class and race) and some barriers removed towards their ability to access college, scholarships, and resources may still struggle. While these students may appear White (race), their Latinx identity (ethnicity) will still affect their ability to succeed in college. At the same college, an undocumented Afro-Latinx student who has to work two jobs to pay for tuition has less class and resource privilege than the White-passing student. In the higher education system in el Nuevo Sur, they may identify as Hispanic, White, Black, and/or Latinx/o/a/e. They will be treated with some of the
same programmatic interventions even though their needs will be completely different.

Johnston-Guerrero’s (2016) approach to intersectionality for this research is significant as it allows us to hold the complexities of identities that Latinx students experience (e.g., race, language, ethnicity, immigration, class) and gives space to capture these complexities in the research process. As this process unfolds, the shifting of the power dynamic happens by allowing the student’s experiences to drive the outcomes, production, and teaching provided by the educator for the Latinx student. Bernal’s (2002) analysis of Latinx students as holders and creators of knowledge and Bernal and Villalpando’s (2002) apartheid of knowledge in academia looks at the experiences of students at the “intersections of racism, sexism, classism, and other oppressions” (Bernal, 2002, p. 107), providing an opportunity to dive deeper into epistemologies and a deeper understanding of LatCrit and its use in this research.

Interwoven Epistemologies

Waterman and Bazemore-James (2019) stated:

Epistemology involves the study of knowledge itself - its nature, how we come to know it, and how we evaluate it. Epistemology informs how we relate to the world around us and thus how we come to know what we know. (pp. 159-160)

This quote is by Native educators and researchers who relate epistemologies to Indigenous ways of knowing and argue that educators need to use antideficit models when engaging with community-informed research. An analysis provided by Latinax/o/a, Xicanx/o/a, and Chicanx/o/a scholars mimics the practice of Indigenous ways of knowing and describes students of color as holders and creators of knowledge (Bernal, 2002) and disrupting apartheid of knowledge (Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Huber, 2009).
Bernal’s (2002) analysis of students of color as holders and creators of knowledge used a raced-gendered and Chicana feminist epistemology in her research with students to challenge Eurocentric educational practices to “reconceptualize the so-called deficits of Mexican culture into assets and view Chicana/Chicano students as holders and creator of knowledge” (p. 110). We can further challenge the oppressive systems within education with Huber’s (2009) analysis of disrupting apartheid of knowledge that builds on Bernal and Villalpando’s (2002) previous work. Huber directly connected feminist epistemologies through testimonios and LatCrit frameworks. Huber (2009) shared, “In the field of education, dominant ideologies or meritocracy, individualism, and color blindness can mask the complex struggles of Students of Color and the systems of oppression that create the conditions of those struggles” (p. 640). These concepts provided by Bernal et al. (2016) and Huber (2009) combine as LatCrit concepts to challenge oppressive systems and allow students more power within the walls of the classroom and programs provided for their success in college.

The key lessons from these epistemologies and scholars for this research are through a community praxis which provides agency to challenge the dominant Eurocentric behaviors and center concepts such as learning to listen to counterstories (Bernal, 2002), honor sources of knowledge (Huber, 2009), and community and family knowledge (Bernal, 2002). Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur deserve for educators to commit to Latinx students experiences, using their cultural excellence and brilliance as the guide to understanding and creating knowledge for them. As this research uncovers Latinx students’ experiences of healing, identity, and cultural wealth in education, I
expect new avenues to emerge that will allow the students’ stories to guide the process and situate it all within feminist and race-gendered epistemologies.

**LatCrit and Transformative Resistance**

Solorzano and Bernal’s (2001) transformation resistance and analysis of LatCrit framework allow for further analysis into the student identities and purpose and is best described by the authors as “transformational resistance framed within the tenants of CRT and LatCrit frameworks allows one to look at resistance among Students of Color that is political, collective, conscious, and motivated by a sense that individual and social change is possible” (p. 320). This analysis is essential to the framework of LatCrit being adapted to this research as we look beyond what has been provided for students and begin to dream and imagine what is possible. Understanding resistance from the confines of the classroom or hallways into a transformation of self and community through resistance would not be possible without the LatCrit framework. This research can provide details of the uncovering of healing practices in the lives of Latinx students which is personal, psychological, philosophical, and multi-dimensional, while leaving room for hope and changes in the field of higher education. This is a form of resistance by the student, practitioner, and educator to push up against White supremacy culture and open space for healing as a form of transformative resistance.

LatCrit in this research is pursued through the lenses of Bernal and Villalpando (2002), Delgado Bernal et al. (2012), Huber (2009), Johnston-Guerrero (2016), and Solorzano and Bernal (2001). These frameworks bear witness to Latinx students’ stories while allowing educators and systems to shift power dynamics. LatCrit analyzes the oppressive structures that exist for Latinx students based on race, ethnicity, language,
culture, and immigration status. Through transformative resistance, embracing the messiness, and analyzing the ways we know our knowledge, practitioners are provided more possibilities to break oppressive structures as a form of liberation and transformation in educational systems for the Latinx student in el Nuevo Sur.

*Latina/o/x/e Identity Development and Categories*

According to Anzaldúa et al. (2012):

> El choque de un alma atrapada entre el mundo del espíritu y el mundo de la técnica a veces la deja entullada. Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their values systems, la mestiza undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. (p. 100)

Understanding labels and categories of Latinidad (Latino identity) is one of the most critical and complex pieces for students and practitioners. Anzaldúa et al. (2012) described the complexity as an “inner war” and “cultural collision” (p. 100), and is a vivid description of what happens in the hearts and minds of students during their identity development and the complexities that exist. The ecosystem for Latinx student success includes identity development as one of the petals of the flower. Concepts provided by Ferdman and Gallegos (2001), Gloria and Castellanos (2012), and Serrano (2018) provide initial frameworks to guide this research as it relates to race, ethnic identity, and the categories that could be used to describe Latinx students’ identity. These researchers support the reality that Latinx development is a complex process for students and the need for higher education practitioners to develop critical consciousness support services for Latinx students’ success throughout their college years. In trying to provide specialized support to Latinx student populations, we know that employing faculty of color, understanding familial ties, tracking retention from two-year to four-year for transfer students, curricular and co-curricular culturally appropriate learning
environments, and training faculty and staff are practices that aid the success of Latinx students within the context of higher education (Hurtado et al., 2018). When working with Latinx students, special considerations must be understood regarding racial constructs, ethnicities, culture, immigration status, cultural values, gender, and sexual orientation within the Latinx community to effectively work with this student group. For example, taking into consideration mixed-status families, historical impacts based on country of origin, anti-immigration policies, work obligations, and familial ties can assist when developing programs, data tracking, counseling, and advising programs servicing Latinx students. Latinx realities and perceptions are extremely complex. Ferdman and Gallegos (2007) suggested “organizations and their leaders should resist simplifications about any particular group or sub-group, and should constantly strive to learn more about the particular manifestations of diversity that come from the specific groups and their members” (p. 38). Understanding the student’s complex identities in the context of their lived experiences is why this Latino and Latina racial identity model can be used as a starting point and a tool for higher education practitioners to understand the complexities of latinidad in curricular and co-curricular settings. However, Ferdman and Gallegos’ research is over 20 years old, and identification categories and language have changed. For the research, I centered the students’ explanation, categorization, or definition of their identities as they relate to their experiences in college in el Nuevo Sur. Explanation of the categorization, intersectionality, and complexities of identity for Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur is an attempt to sort through the lived experiences of students while also holding students in a process of identity exploration that will change as they develop, age, and move through their own seasons in their college years.
Through their model on Latino and Latina racial identity orientations, Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) demonstrated how Latinos come to develop “patterns or orientations” (p. 48) based on experiences with social institutions. These orientations, shape how Latinos view themselves and how they interact with those within the Latinx community and those outside of it. The scholars provide a guide that details the possible types of identities Latinos associate within the context of race and racial order. This model is not supposed to be a stage model of development, but rather a description of patterns and lenses that occur for people and can change or not change through their lives and experiences. The model examines how individuals form their identity orientation, by what lens an individual views identity, how individuals prefer to identify, how Latinos as a group are seen, how Whites are seen, and how race fits in the experiences of being Latino in the United States (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). There are six orientations that Latinx individuals may choose to adopt and the authors suggest that these can change over time for Latinos or they can also stay in one stage their whole lives. The lenses are Latino-integrated, Latino-identified, subgroup-identified, Latinos as other, undifferentiated/denial, and White-identified (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). Further explanation of each orientation/lens according to Ferdman and Gallegos is described below:

Latino-Integrated – The lens for this category is large, “utilizing the widest lens possible” (p. 51). The person or persons are able to articulate their identity as a member of the group through all of their identities and subgroups, using both/and philosophy.

Latino-Identified – The lens for this category is broad and not as wide as the previous. This group “views Latinos as a whole as constituting a distinct racial category across all Latino subgroups” (p. 51) and identify closely to “la raza” viewing the full spectrum of Latinos as a broadly defined category, very positively.
Subgroup Identified – This category describes Latinos who “think of themselves in terms of their own ethnic or national origin subgroup” (p. 52).
Latino as “Other” – This category describes Latinos who are “not aware of their specific background, history, or culture … but see themselves in a generic fashion as a “person of color” (p. 52).
Undifferentiated – These individuals choose to identify as “just people”… and accepting dominant norms of society without question” (p. 53).
White Identified – These individuals “see themselves as racially White … and generally superior to people of color” (p. 50).

These lenses provide an initial analysis in viewing Latinx identities and coupled with the work of Gloria and Castellanos (2012), these authors provide an additional layer of analysis to apply to Latinx student identity development as a whole while considering other categorizations in which students may identify.

Gloria and Castellanos (2012) provided several categories for how Latinx people may identify as “reflective of ethnicity (e.g., Peruana), ethnicity and geographic region (e.g., Nuyorican), sociopolitical identity (e.g., Xicana), indigenous origins (e.g., Taíno), spiritual connections and Indigenous roots (e.g., Mestiza), or generational status and ethnicity (e.g., Boricua)” (p. 169). These categories are useful to this research as they provide a deeper exploration into the students experience using geography, race and ethnicity, politics, indigenous roots, and spirituality.

Additionally, Serrano (2018) provided a deeper analysis of the term Latinx and its adoption within higher education settings as it relates to gender. He says Latinx is used “to describe someone who does not identify within the binary and or who are LGBTQIA and of Latin decent” (p. 94). Serrano also described the term Latinx as having no consensus within higher education and community. Serrano cited a NASPA Latinx/a/o Knowledge Community survey where, “56% of 313 respondents strongly supported the term Latinx” (p. 95), with those who supported the changes being between the ages of 18
and 25, showing generational differences in the use of terms. Concepts of intersectionality for Latinx students attending colleges and from el Nuevo Sur that touch on racial constructs, ethnicities, culture, immigration status, cultural values, gender, sexuality, and intersectionality are important to embrace throughout this research process and to understand when considering students’ experiences in el Nuevo Sur.

These lenses and orientation models do not portray a linear path and students can move in and out of identities depending on their critical consciousness, depth of understanding of cultural histories, analysis of colonization, and lived experiences. This stage of life, in the college years for both traditional and non-traditional students, is critical in student development for their understanding of themselves and how it relates to their surroundings and critical consciousness (Freire, 2013). I hope that through the process of testimonios this research will uncover more about the students’ racial and ethnic identity and relate this critical step into the healing practices the students will discover through this research.

An area of expansion for these identity orientations, lenses, and definitions is to relate situations of violence or traumas that Latinx students may experience due to land displacement, colonization, socio-political issues, racism and discrimination, oppression, immigration status, isolation, deportations, regionality, or identity crises. The Latinx identity orientation model described here can be adapted to this research as a guide for how students may identify, move through their development, and describe their experiences. Through these testimonios, I hope to uncover a new way of seeing students’ experiences emerge that can situate their experiences of violence or trauma with the complexities of identity inside the orientations and definitions of previous scholars.
Latino/a/x/e identities within the college setting in el Nuevo Sur are complex and many factors can influence a student’s decision to identify in any of the aforementioned lenses or orientations. For this research, I will add a Latinx Critical Race lens and allow the students to define in their own words how they identify with special attention given to the intersection of identities of the students, their race, ethnicity, and oppressions, along with a systemic analysis of their experiences.

**Community Cultural Wealth**

Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth model is also appropriate to this research because it takes into consideration all the lived experiences and oppressions that students of color experience while removing Black/White binary thinking and centering counter-storytelling. Yosso (2005) “draws on the knowledges students of color bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom” (p. 69), and challenges the concepts of cultural deficiencies and cultural capital with her model of community cultural wealth. Yosso’s analysis lends a particular analysis to CRT that brings to the surface what academics have most forgotten from students’ lives, their lived experiences, family, and community.

This framework of Yosso’s centers the student, family, and community as a whole for student success, and provides educators with new and distinct ways to support Latinx students lived experiences. Yosso (2005) cited examples of how cultural capital is defined in the school context and pushes back on those frameworks. She show examples of how Latinx students and students of color who are bilingual run errands on the city bus or translate for family members as valuable experiences and cultural knowledge, yet this does not always translate to “capital in the school context” (p. 76). Many colleges across
the southeast are using frameworks and praxis based on serving White students’ and that does not translate into the needs, values, and cultures of Latinx students. To understand further the community cultural wealth model, I begin by addressing counter-storytelling and binary thinking.

Counter-storytelling is a tenet of critical race theory and a tool Yosso (2006) used in her book, *Critical Race Counterstories along the Chicana/o Educational Pipeline* to bring to life examples of how theoretical model and research is carried out in education and community settings as well as how it is experienced by communities, students, and families. She described counterstories in comparison to majoritarian stories and cited that “instead of blaming Chicana/o students or cultural traditions, a counterstory addresses the structures, practices, and discourses” (p. 4). Furthermore, Yosso (2006) critiqued majoritarian stories because they amplify one person’s story as the whole story or experiences of people of color as a token or stereotype. These stereotypes hurt educators and students in many ways and further divide the community into binary thinking that leaves out complexities of identity, experiences, and cultural values. For this research, these testimonios seek to embrace Yosso’s (2006) functions of counter-storytelling through “listening to the voices and experiences of racism’s victims” (p. 15) and to “preserve community memory of the history of resistance to oppression” (p.15).

Binary thinking is ever present in academic settings across the United States and is one of the reasons LatCrit as well as other branches of critical theory (FemCrit, AsianCrit, and WhiteCrit) have been developed to influence thinking in academia and social science research (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). For this research, situated in the Southeastern United States, it is important to address racialized binary thinking as seen in
Black vs. White terms. Yosso as well as other Lat Crit and CRT scholars speak to lifting the veil of Black and White binary thinking within higher education (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Valdes, 1997; Yosso, 2005) as instrumental to the dismantling of the consciousness, policies, and practices that exist within the higher education system. Yosso provided an example of binary thinking while telling a story of a professor and student encounter in the hallway in college. The student explained:

I feel like academia has yet to recognize that there are other shades of experience between and beyond Black and White … these issues (language, culture, gender, class, and immigration status) are inseparable from student identity and should not be severed from what is considered valid curriculum. (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 478)

The professor agrees and supports the student’s ideas while providing more examples and ties in these frameworks of LatCrit and her experiences as a higher education professor. This example is important to this research because in el Nuevo Sur it seems as if we are decades behind what Chicana/o students and scholars presented in their research more than two decades ago across the Southwest and California. In the community, the field, and educational settings, practitioners could benefit from an expanded view of Latinx identity. A view that embraces one of the original LatCrit legal scholars, Valdes (1997) through his critique of Black/White binary thinking, “The reductionist tendencies of Black/White binarisms impede sophisticated scholarship because they compress the racial richness of Latinoas/os into a false and dichotomous homogeneity tracking Black/White poles” (p. 21). Counter-storytelling brings the students’ lived experiences to the fore and removing binary thinking allows us to fully embrace the students’ multiple identities including their gender, class, immigration status, language, and race.
Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth model expands the theory, practice, and application of cultural capital to issues that center liberation, healing, and new ways of thinking for students of color. Yosso (2005) described the centering of individuals as “empowered participants … part of a legacy of resistance to racism and the layers of racialized oppression” (p. 75), and in the development of this model, she used research participants to craft and design the descriptions through counter-storytelling. Yosso viewed community cultural wealth as “dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth” (p. 77). The six types of wealth Yosso builds upon are aspirational, familial, social, navigational, resistant, and linguistic capital. In the next section, I dive deeper into each type of wealth (capital) in Yosso’s model and its application to educational research.

**Aspirational.** The hopes and dreams of parents and parental figures for those in the next generation to succeed past what they may have been able to achieve. Yosso’s (2005) research participants described aspiration as “the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of barriers” (p. 41).

**Familial.** Seeing familia as kinship and a broader non-isolated sense of community to help each other succeed. According to Yosso (2005), it is a wealth that “students bring these teachings from home” (p. 48) and “maintain a healthy connection to community and its resources … which inform our emotional, moral, educational, occupational consciousness” (p. 79).

**Social.** Understood by Yosso’s (2006) research participants as “networks of people and community resources” (p. 45) and mutualists or networks of mutual aid connections where people are connected through the community in places like
neighborhoods, organizations, and peer groups. These networks help students to obtain jobs, scholarships, health care, and other important benefits.

**Navigational.** The ability for people of color to navigate systems that were not made for or by them despite the presence of many life stressors and obstacles students succeed and navigate the system.

**Resistant.** Skills and attributes built from traditions of resistance passed down by family and social justice resistance movements and ideologies. Also described as “knowledge and skills cultivated though behavior that challenges inequality” (Yosso, 2005, p. 49).

**Linguistic.** This type of wealth embraces bilingualism as well as oral traditions like storytelling and dichos, as well as non-verbal communication styles such as reading facial expressions and verbal cues such as tone of voice, and art like graffiti, poetry, and visual arts as a form of language. According to Yosso’s (2005) research participants, this wealth translates into educational settings through providing students “a sense of family and community responsibility, and even social maturity” (p. 43) and “memorization, attention to detail, dramatic pauses, comedic timing … rhythm and rhyme” (p. 79).

The model of community cultural wealth creates hope and adds to previous frameworks (LatCrit and Latinx Student Identity Development and Orientations) used in this research as a model to shift the understanding of Latinx students’ experiences in el Nuevo Sur, their shared oppressions, and the needs for transformation within systems. As Yosso (2005) described, this model “involves a commitment to conduct research, teach, and develop schools that serve a larger purpose of struggling toward social and racial justice” (p. 82).
When engaging in Latinx student identity development, using the work of Ferdman and Gallegos (2001), Gloria and Castellanos (2012), Serrano (2018), and Yosso, (2005, 2006), one experiences the complex racial and ethnic identities of Latinx students centered with community cultural wealth. Next, I add to these models and frameworks by including traditional healing practices, the central theme for this research, and a tool for liberation for students in el Nuevo Sur.

**Traditional Healing Practices**

Traditional healing practices in education are defined by the researcher as a set of conditions, practices, values, and/or beliefs that make students whole. These practices can be found in community, sacred space, storytelling, ritual, ceremony, activism, art, healing modalities, culture, and language. Traditional healing practices can be translated into a higher education setting in various ways. Dichos (Gloria & Castellanos, 2016), storytelling and testimonios (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Flores & Garcia, 2009), and cultural rituals (Triana et al., 2020) are a few that will be described below. In addition, Xicana sacred space (Gloria & Castellanos, 2016; Soto et al., 2009) spirituality among Latinas (Campesino et al., 2009), Curanderismo and Remedios de Casa (Cavender et al., 2011; Dominguez & Johnson, 2017; Godinez, 2006) and homemade theory (Morales, 1998) will be described in more detail in sections that follow. Art, popular education, inclusive pedagogy, language justice, herbal remedies, care culture, and honoring lived experiences are a few practices that I uncovered and found through the testimonios and my own lived experiences to be transformative for Latinx college students’ success in educational systems in el Nuevo Sur.
Dichos, as described by Gloria and Castellanos (2016), “Are cultural wisdoms and lessons frequently tied to early formative familial teachings and core cultural beliefs within a culture” (p. 111). The authors use these in therapeutic settings and urge therapists to “ask Latinas which dichos have the most meaning or relevance to them as they find their source of strength and connection” (Gloria & Castellanos, 2016, p. 111). Asking students about dichos could be a similar technique applied to higher education settings as a way to connect with students’ cultures, traditions, and families. When providing culturally relevant services through advising, programs, and workshops, learning more from the student’s lived experiences through dichos allows educators to apply these culturally relevant healing practices to the design and creation of programs for Latinx students and their families.

Storytelling and testimonios are a practice that unleashes various aspects of a person’s past, family, generational trauma, life, and lived experiences. In higher education and especially at predominantly White institutions, this practice is rarely honored or seen as beneficial for students. Flores and García (2009) provided an example of the representation needed when they said:

Having a space where Latina women's voices, stories, and testimonies are acknowledged at PWI’s is vital for their survival in higher education. The need to come together and collectively share experiences, while establishing a sense of community is strongly needed … the dilemma is that these spaces and voices are rarely heard and/or found at PWI’s. (p. 155)

Bernal et al. (2016) provided examples of how testimonios are healing in nature as they stated:

One must first listen to the testimonio in an effort to understand before one can be moved to action. Through this process, a pedagogy of testimonio can help transcend pain towards a space for healing and societal transformation. Listening to, sharing, and transcending struggles, pain, hopes, and dreams yields a type of
interdependent solidarity or *in lak’ech* - a Mayan philosophy that can be translated as “Tu eres mi otro yo” or You are my other me. (p.6)

While storytelling is healing and transformational, creating sacred spaces inside educational institutions to hold healing practices such as testimonios, stories, and rituals for Latinx students is an important aspect to developing curricular and co-curricular programs and pedagogies.

Through cultural rituals as practiced in artifacts, altars, and various kinds of spiritual practices, Latinx students can connect more deeply to their cultures and Indigenous ways of knowing and wisdom. Triana et al. (2020) cited many examples of the rituals used by Latinx students in their research as “wearing relics, lighting candles, remembering intentions and family sacrifices, taking quiet space for oneself, to creating energy and cultural concept of ‘hacer tiempo making/engaging time with others’” (p. 7). These are a few examples of how rituals manifested in Triana et al.’s (2020) research. I hope to expand and add to what they found and uncover further types of cultural rituals used by Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur.

Current education literature mentions some of these practices about Latinx students’ college experiences and some are left out as they are not considered part of the strategies for mainstream college student success metrics in higher education and student affairs. Additionally, most of the research that exists is place-based in the Southwest and West coast of the United States where the histories and experiences differ for Latinx families in el Nuevo Sur.
Homemade Theory

The aforementioned healing practices are a few that honor and embody what Levins (1998) referred to as being a certified organic intellectual and how collective testimonio is also a part of healing.

The ideas I carry with me were grown on soil I know, that I can tell you the mineral balance, the weather, the labor involved in preparing them for use...The intellectual traditions that I come from create theory out of shared lives instead of send away for it. My thinking grew directly out of listening to my own discomforts, find out who shared them, who validated them, and in exchanging stories about common experiences, finding patterns, systems, explanations of why or how things happened. This is the central process of consciousness raising, of collective testimonio. This is homemade theory. (Levins, 1998, p. 68)

When educators take time to explore and engage traditional healing practices from what Morales calls our “homemade theory” (Levins, 1998), the opportunity to begin to support the healing and remembering for the student is presented. As Latinx peoples living in el Nuevo Sur there are some shared identities of history and struggle that we all have to connect to from our countries of origins and immigrant stories. These traumas are colonization, forced displacement, economic refugees, and military coups, to name a few, and are also referred to as “soul wounds” by Comas-Diaz (2013), which can lead to “negation of the self” (p. 199). In el Nuevo Sur, Latinx students come from all over Latin America and are Black, White, and brown, some speak Spanish, some do not, and they are first, one-and-a-half, second, and third-generation immigrants. One commonality of being in el Nuevo Sur is that many are raised in predominately White schools that value erasure of culture, individuality, and acculturation, further adding to the layers of complexities students are navigating inside of education systems, community, and family. Traditional healing connects Latinx students to a truth that reconnects and grounds them to more than a common understanding, but an expression and lived practice of belonging.
and linking back to place, home, and the land. It is the collective healing of the soul wound that can support the entire ecosystem toward transformation and liberation. Through the testimonios, I seek to find what is needed to support students in creating sacred spaces and then uncover the layers of complexities that make up their lives.

**Spirituality Among Latinas**

Triana et al. (2020) urged educators to view Latinx student spirituality as “part of the daily-lived educational experiences” (p. 7). In addition, these authors demonstrated how churches are not the only places where spirituality can be practiced. Campus areas such as dining halls, classrooms, labs, and libraries are also places to practice Latinx spirituality (Triana et al., 2020). Furthermore, these authors provide guidance for university personnel to support students’ cultural spirituality in higher education with four considerations:

1. Expand the notion of educational wellness to include spirituality.
2. Confront personal and professional assumptions, myths, and biases about cultural spirituality to re-center the notion of strength-based advising.
3. Re(orient) energies of cultural spirituality as core elements of all teaching, learning, and mentoring.
4. Create congruent spaces that embrace and integrate spirituality to facilitate a sense of belonging and validation for Latinx students. (pp. 7–8)

Triana et al. (2020) provided a solid foundation to begin to think about how to integrate cultural values and healing into curricular and co-curricular settings in higher education settings for Latinx students. An additional study by Campesino and Schwartz (2006) on spirituality among Latinas gathered data from 95 participants using a Latino Spiritual Perspective Scale and research design that centered cultural values, an aspect of research that is not factored in regularly when studying the spirituality of people from diverse backgrounds. Campesino and Schwartz (2006) found that values such as
personalismo and familismo were central and that spirituality plays a significant role in Latino's lives, outside of the church and religious institutions. Personalismo is an interpersonal style that focuses on the acts of deep personal connection and with that comes the trust needed to build strong relationships within communities (Gloria & Castellanos, 2016). Familismo centers on the family as a core value and support system that offers spiritual, mental, or emotional support (Gloria & Castellanos, 2016).

The formative works these researchers provided center cultural values and traditions outside of the church to understand cultural spirituality in the lives of Latino families, giving a reason for the need for further research of healing practices in educational settings. Furthermore, while we see cultural values centered just as they were for community cultural wealth, I am left wondering what other motivations, theories, and concepts could act as motivators in the spiritual lives of Latinx students, outside of the church. Diaz (2012) explained cultural motivators in her article, “Colored Spirituality: The Centrality of Spirit Among Ethnic Minorities”. Diaz stated:

Since the dawn of time, people have explored the mystery of life and death through spirituality. Like most individuals, people of color endorse a variety of religious and spiritual beliefs. Although religion plays a major role in the lives of many people of color, spirituality offers them cultural relevance. (p. 197)

These next sections will explore a few of the culturally relevant practices present in the lives of Latinos in the United States.

**Xicanx Sacred Space**

Student affairs practitioners, scholars, and educators across the United States have implemented many types of traditional healing practices into their own lives (Facio & Lara, 2014; Gonzales, 2012; Moraga & Rodríguez, 2011; Rendón, 2009) through their collective work, scholar activism, and student mentorship. Sacred Spaces are experienced
by Latinas in various ways daily and Gloria and Castellanos (2016) described these experiences as “personal reflections, intimate conversations, positive exchanges, shared intentions, prayer, connecting, and bonding with others via conversations, positive exchanges, shared intentions, and collective efforts” (p. 100) and it is “through these scared spaces that healing occurs” (p. 100). The sacredness of these spaces allows them to be liminal, actual, physical, metaphysical, conscious, unconscious, and spiritual (Gloria & Castellanos, 2016), and supports the depth of the mind, body, and spirit connections.

One example of a program where my lived experiences interacted with sacred space and healing was through my doctoral internship with Las Maestra’s Center for Xicana[x] Indigenous Thought, Art and Social Practice (LMC) curated and led by maestras Moraga and Rodríguez (2011) at the University of Santa Barbara. LMC creates programs for students, parents, and community members on collective healing. Their programs at Las Maestra’s Center exemplify the Xicana Sacred Space (Soto et al., 2009) and aforementioned examples of traditional healing practices as the LMC supports students in the community, the academy, courses, and personal life issues, lifting students out of isolation and providing them a sacred space.

I spent virtual time with the LMC as part of my doctoral internship in the summer of 2020, during the shutdown of the COVID-19 pandemic. We planned a six-week series called Las Escuelitas, bringing in artists, storytellers, herbalists, body healers, and Danza Azteca into a bi-weekly program through the beginning of the global pandemic and racial uprisings in 2020. Sessions were attended by K-12 school teachers, families, educators, students, and community members. The healing modalities presented not only brought
joy and life to participants but also assisted to uplift spirits in a time of deep depression, major life transitions, and times when people were experiencing high levels of grief, trauma, and stress. As an organizer, observer, and participant in these sessions, I was able to experience how these kinds of programs can aid, support, and bring joy to students in times of grief and trauma. The collective healing we experienced together can be seen through a reflection journal entry I wrote. What I can share gives deeper insight into the “life and spirit” these programs created.

Realities were changing quickly and something was calming about it all. Yes, I was anxious and worried about money, health, and the state of the world. However, connecting to my family, classmates, mentors, and community groups through zoom calls helped me to quickly realize we were all at this moment experiencing the same things. Knowing we were all in the same boat carried a bit of comfort as if a sense of community was being formed as we had never experienced. All during a global pandemic. It became an anchor. A place where we would support, love, connect, and work in a way that we have never done before. I felt the earth breathing for the first time in years. The birds were louder, and the wind touched my skin differently. I was in deep time enough to get a sense of “spirit time” that Maestras Celia and Cherrie would teach me about later in the summer.

The sense of community, deep time, spirit time, and holding anxiousness and fear in the same breath would show up in my exhales over the next four months. Moraga and Rodríguez (2011) taught me in our time together that our (Latinx) tradition is oral and that knowledge is in our bodies and that we need to move beyond sound bites and look to our current situations and conditions to find our collective healing and liberation. Connect to the land, tell the stories, be in a reflective process, do art, read, and connect with elders. Healing practices that I learned in community with Las Maestras are what give us food for life, purpose to continue growth and nourishment to all parts of the ecosystem for Latinx student success. As Moraga and Rodríguez (2011) eloquently wrote, “These are knowing’s, not imaginings, not stories we tell ourselves to bring
comfort to the grieving. Because they do not comfort, they provide energy for hard change and transformation” (p. 198).

Curanderas/os/xs and Remedios de Casa

Curanderos/as/xs and folk healers are types of healers that exist across Latin America and the Caribbean. Using nature, ritual, plants, and animals as well as metaphysical ancient beliefs to curar (to cure) and “solve the health problems of their people through sacred, ritualistic, and magical practices” (Ortiz, et al., 2008, p. 272). These healers lend tremendous cultural significance to Latinx families across the United States. In a recent interview with a student on healing practices for coursework, she spoke of the traditions that her mom learned from curanderos. She used a raw egg to cleanse the body and remove bad energy. She referred to it as a limpia. The participant shared how she felt better after the limpias her mom would provide for her and her siblings.

According to Cavender et al. (2011), studying Latinos in Northeastern Tennessee and the use of remedios de casa and curanderismo found many herbs, practices, and traditions practiced in the community and outside of the medical system. This research is significant, based in a southern state adjacent to Kentucky, and shows how common and culturally relevant it is for families to use remedios de casa for many ailments for the mind, body, and spirit among Latinx and Anglo families in el Nuevo Sur and across Appalachia. In the study of 72 Latinos in Northeastern Tennessee, the researchers found that 1,193 remedios caseros were used, and of those 74.4% of remedies were herbs, 15.5% were animal substances (e.g., honey and chicken egg), and 8.8% were processed materials (e.g., rubbing alcohol and vinegar). From the research of medicinal plants, over half of them were foods and seasonings and can be obtained in local tiendas. According
to Cavender et al. (2011), “In terms of medical self-care, an awareness of curanderismo would enable better communication between Latinos and health care providers and, in turn, enable better health outcomes” (p. 165). This analysis could also be applied to educational and wellness/well-being settings to improve student success outcomes.

Through the testimonions, I discovered more about curanderismo, herbal folk healing (Ascani & Smith, 2008), and remedios de casa in the lives of Latinx college students in el Nuevo Sur. Much of what is taught and passed down through generations is given to the student at home and passed down through oral traditions.

Further exploration of curanderismo in education was found in Domínguez and Johnson’s (2017) thesis, “Existence as Resistance: Curanderismo as a Framework for Decolonization.” Domínguez and Johnson defined curanderismo as a “practice or framework of healing and can be used throughout all Spanish-speaking parts of the world to address systems of wellness, whether they are spiritually inclined or not” (p. 14). Further investigation found a form of spirituality and methodology called “trenzas y mestizaje” (Godinez, 2006, p. 30). While researching with Mexican American women, Godinez (2006) described her framework of healing as trenzas y mestizaje:

I found a thread of spirituality woven throughout the young Mexicans identities and worldviews. It emerged as a way of learning and knowing from their home space, as energy, from their mothers’ and elders’ cultural knowledge, from growing up in the homeland of Mexico, and from their own creations of images, rituals, and beliefs. (p. 30)

Support for the use of healing practices in education is provided by Bernal’s (2002) analysis of raced-gendered epistemology through which she shared that Godinez “affirms the community and cultural knowledge of students of color” (p. 116). This thread of family, community, and cultural knowledge continues to be found throughout
the literature review of each section of these theoretical models and is ever present for curanderismo and remedios de casa, one form of healing practice uncovered through this research.

Traditional healing practices are found in the home, with elders, in families, and through healers and teachers in the community. In higher education, separating the internal discovery of students’ identity exploration is not to be left to the side but to be embraced especially when designing new programs and initiatives for Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur. Incorporating healing practices into curricular and co-curricular campus programs and courses for Latinx students will help students to feel represented, honored, and seen and provide a path forward for them to begin a healing journey from all that has been taken from them through acculturation, colonization, and oppressive conditions that they experience inside and outside of the educational settings.

**Summary of Literature Review Findings**

Higher education professionals ought to strive to create sacred spaces that are welcoming, feel like home, and are safe for students to heal, grow, and flourish. When students feel as if they are strangers in a strange place and not part of the fabric of what makes the university the best place to be, it diminishes their purpose, further affecting their abilities to succeed in the higher education setting.

For educators researching Latinx student experiences, this literature review explains the frameworks and root causes to help understand Latinx students’ experience within oppressive educational systems, so new Dreamfields (Rendón, 2009) can be created. Through Latinx critical race theory, one can see the roles race, ethnicity, class, gender, language, culture, and immigration status play in a student’s life, especially as
they navigate systems that may or may not accept them based on these identities. These systems may not even understand the complexities which exist that further limit the student’s ability to succeed. While analyzing race and ethnicity, Johnston-Guerrero (2016) provided an outlook on this topic that allows us to hold the complexities of these identities within the context of being Latino in the United States in these times. Instead of it being a clean and well-defined idea, we are asked to “embrace the messiness” to help hold the complexities. Latinx student identity development by Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) showed how Latino orientation models and identity development are categorized and oriented for Latinos and how students do not all have the same lenses for experiencing their latinidad. Furthermore, identity labels are provided to give us more insight into all that goes into being “Latinx/o/a/e”, a label not easy to define or categorize for Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur. Hope, liberation, and resistance are held at the center of how community cultural wealth and traditional healing practices are tied into the theoretical frameworks to be analyzed in this research. Centering family, community, and a new approach to cultural capital, Yosso (2005) broke the mold with counter-storytelling and asking participants to think outside of binary, deficit thinking, and majoritarian stories. Through healing practices, we find spirituality, homemade theory, sacred space, curanderas, and remedios de casa as tools researched in education and being implemented in education as examples of what could be possible in higher education.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this testimonio research is to listen for and uncover themes of how healing practices, community cultural wealth, and identity development are woven together and experienced in the lives of Latinx college students in el Nuevo Sur.

Traditional healing practices are defined by the researcher as a set of conditions, practices, values, and/or beliefs that make students whole. These practices can be found in community, sacred space, storytelling, ritual, ceremony, activism, art, healing modalities, culture, and language. The research objectives are to get to the root of the oppressive structures, acculturation, and complexities of identity that exist in Latinx students’ lives and explore how students have experienced traditional healing practices in the college years. I listened for what motivates students towards liberatory and healing practices from their cultures. I sought to understand what is at the root of their healing experiences, what they have learned in the process, and how it has supported their lives in college. I intend to help higher education practitioners in el Nuevo Sur better understand Latinx students’ experiences of healing, identity, and community cultural wealth.

Testimonios

Testimonios as a methodology are used to transmit one’s soul to another. To share a story is an intimate moment and a vulnerable step into the dancing waters of a person’s mind. Almost always and without even knowing it, a part of the Latinx culture is how our
families and friends weave stories that unfold histories of the people, memories, and experiences that shape us.

Many Chicana and Latina scholars (Bernal et al., 2016; Flores & Garcia, 2009; Huber, 2009; Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012; Yosso, 2005, 2006) have used testimonios in the field of education to document inequities and learn about the lives of students and what shapes their experiences (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Equally, Latin-American scholars have used testimonios to document human rights abuses across Latin America (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). As the use of testimonios grows, Delgado Bernal et al. called it “social justice scholarship” and described the growth of testimonio in education as:

We believe the growth of testimonio into the field of education is a challenge to the status quo- a reclamation of intellect that would have otherwise been dismissed by power structures in academia. The growth of testimonio in academia is the result of the political urgency to pursue social justice education for communities of color, generally, and Chicana/o and Latina/o communities, in particular. Testimonio in academia disrupts silence, invites connection, and entices collectivity-it is social justice scholarship in education. (p. 364)

Delgado Bernal et al. (2012) further discussed how testimonios are used as a methodology that:

Align with a strong feminista tradition of theorizing from the brown female body, breaking silences, and bearing witness to both injustice and social change. Testimonio, then can be understood as a bridge that merges the brown bodies in our communities with academia as we employ testimonio methodology and pedagogy in educational practices. (p. 365)

Oral histories and testimonios are ways to tell stories and avenues towards the art and practice of storytelling which is a tradition passed down by elders of many walks of life across the Americas. In addition, Rodriguez (2010) shared the importance of storytelling as a coping mechanism: “sharing these experiences not only help students cope with
racism but also provides a space to affirm the lived experiences and knowledge of students of color” (p. 491). The tradition of testimonios is deeply rooted in Latinx/o/a/e culture, language, and history.

Displaying how testimonio has been used across academia and in the community to share perspectives and act as a healing and liberatory practice for students in higher education is one of the goals of this research. In *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women’s Lives*, Cantú (2014) described the “out-of-body experiences” (p. 206) she would have throughout her education experiences as a kind of spirituality being outside of the church and a deep desire she had to listen to the messages she received. Sharing testimonios of Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur will hopefully influence students’ experiences and change the culture and policies of the institution to better support students’ college experiences. Centering the Latinx students’ voices, listening to what they say, and finding ways to implement their needs are some of the first steps for systemic changes to occur on college campuses. Monzo (2019) described those who are “in positions of power in the institutions to be out of touch with the people and their ideas, strategies, and perspectives” (p. 202). Furthermore, Rendón (2009) shared her ideas of liberation and hope stating, “I believe we need a refashioned dream of education based on wholeness, consonance, social justice and liberation” (p. 2). This research aims to lift the stories of students so that educational institutions have more tools and resources to better serve Latinx/o/a/e students as well as change culture, policies, and practices.
Participants

I conducted interviews with ten current or recent graduates (on or before 2015) who self-identified as Latinx/o/a/e students at the University of Louisville. For the recruitment of participants for this research, I looked for students who had participated in the MLK Scholars, Honors College, or HLI Cultural Center programs at the University of Louisville. I decided to work with students from these programs because I was looking for students who had participated in social justice-themed programs, and community activism, and have been influenced by staff and faculty of color at the institution. It is through these experiences that students will likely develop a keener sense of “conscientizacion” or critical consciousness (Freire, 2013), as well as have praxis and understanding of theory in relation to their lived experiences (Bernal et al., 2016).

I chose to engage with current or recently graduated students because the memory of their experiences may be more accessible while telling stories of college experiences. Ten testimonios were conducted via Zoom and recorded for up to 120 minutes. Testimonios were transcribed using Otter transcription and reviewed by participants and researcher for accuracy and misspellings. Words in Spanish or Spanglish were not automatically transcribed correctly so special attention was taken to correct these words in the transcription. Before the scheduled time for the interview, participants received examples of the inquiries that were developed for the testimonios. I provided time for us before and after the testimonios for any questions about the research, design, methods, or concepts. In addition, transcriptions of testimonios were shared with the students to test for accuracy, and during the analysis, any questions I had for clarification of the student’s experiences were conducted via text message. Throughout the data analysis process, I
contacted the students for clarification on anything from their stories or experiences that needed additional information. In addition, the manuscript and poems were shared with students to be sure that their experiences were accurately represented in words and poems.

**Research Questions**

Before beginning each interview, I briefed participants on the research significance and desired outcomes of their participation. The desired outcomes were for the participants to feel safe, share, and be open and honest about their experiences. The current working definition of healing practices was provided to give the participants background to the study. In addition, the research questions were emailed to the participants before the interview so they had some time to think about the questions. The central questions for this study are:

1) How do healing practices, community wealth, and identity affect Latinx student’s college experience in el Nuevo Sur?

2) In what ways do higher education institutions support Latinx student healing modalities in curricular and co-curricular settings?

Interview inquiries that acted as a guide to the testimonio were developed to help students to uncover their stories. The general nature of the line of inquiry for the questions was seeking to understand more in-depth students’ ancestral roots, place of birth, home, experiences with healing practices, identity, and community cultural wealth, symbols, altars, activism, and feelings of liberation, belonging, and their experiences within higher education and with educators through their educational journeys. A full list of the inquiries used for the testimonios is listed in Appendix A.
Research Design


The ceremony always begins for me in the same way … always with the hungry Woman. Always the place of disquiet (inquietude) moves the writing to become a kind of excavation, an earth dig of the spirit found in the body. This impulse to write may begin in the dream, the déjà vu, a few words, which once uttered through my own mouth or the mouth of another, refuse to leave the body of the heart. Writing is an act prompted by intuition, a whispered voice, a tightening of the gut. It is an irrevocable promise not to forget what the body holds as memory … theatre requires the body to make testimony and requires other bodies to bear witness to it. (p. 34)

Moraga and Rodríguez’s example holds the essence of what I hoped to find in this dissertation. I sought to witness what students are holding in their bodies, discover memories, and unleash parts of themselves that they may have always wanted to express but were never asked. This research walks us through the student’s body, soul, and spirit connection through testimonios (interviews), writing (journal prompt), and art (image and poetry). I chose to design this research to embrace community-engaged participatory research, make meaning of the complexities that I knew would emerge, and start a healing process for myself and the participants. Through the testimonios we engaged in dialogues, sharing stories of harm, healing, and resistance. The testimonios were full of many life stories, memories, and descriptions. Each story could not stand alone and be the only method of inquiry. Through art, illustrations, and symbols the image analysis helped to answer more about how the students imagine their healing, what it encompasses, and opens up the sensing part of their being. Combining the images with
their journal entries created the possibility to see more into their experiences and embrace a more artful expression through found poetry.

I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this study (see Appendix C). I met with each participant over Zoom for up to 120 minutes. The interviews were transcribed using Otter Voice Meeting notes, then reviewed by the researcher for accuracy and to clarify all Spanish words throughout the testimonio. Copies of the transcription were sent to the participants for viewing and feedback. Each interview was recorded on Zoom and saved for future reference during the data analysis phase of the study. Participants were invited to participate via email and interview questions were sent before the interview. Following each interview, participants were invited to send an image and a journal entry explaining their healing journeys in more depth for the study. These images and journal entries were used to triangulate the data and provide a more well-rounded picture of the students’ experiences. Through blending the testimonios of the students with original writing and art, I gained more insight into the students’ experiences. In addition, peer member checking was conducted by sharing Chapter 4 with a former Latina student who worked closely with me and the research participants from 2015 to 2020. Member checking revealed that describing students’ positions within student organizations could help in identifying who they were. I removed identifying information from one section. Additionally, the discovered poems were shared with students to check for accuracy, sentiments, and feelings.

Testimonios as a Methodology of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research methods were utilized for this dissertation, specifically testimonio research methodologies. According to Creswell (2018), narrative inquiry “tells
the story of individuals unfolding in a chronology of their experiences, set within their personal, social, and historical context, and including important themes in those lives experience” (p. 73). I selected narrative inquiry and specifically testimonios as a methodology to apply critical theories to narratives while situating the method and theories in el Nuevo Sur. I sought to find meaning for Latinx students experiences in el Nuevo Sur and it is best to use methodologies that have cultural, historical, and political significance and impact. El Nuevo Sur is a place and space that has yet to have educational research developed in a body of work defining healing practices, community wealth, and identity as transformative practices for students’ success in higher education. Testimonios are the best methodology to use as the cultural and historical connection to the origins of the people and their experiences in family and community. This methodology will help future researchers to develop theories, models, and frameworks for Latinx students in the region.

I conducted in-depth interviews with ten participants and the questions were designed for participants to share testimonios. In addition to the interviews, I used “visual narrative inquiry” (Creswell, 2018, p. 74) to triangulate the data with images and journal entries from the participants. The journal prompt presented to participants was:

Thank you for the time to share your story with me. I would now like to request you submit a short journal prompt and image about your healing journey. Please submit an image of anything (art, drawing, poetry, picture, etc) that you find relevant to your healing journey. Please paste your picture into this document and answer the following questions: Please describe this picture to me. Why did you choose this picture? What does it mean to you? What significance does this image have for you in your life, past, present, or future?

The benefits of using visual data analysis, according to Saldaña (2016), is that “rather than one-word or short phrase codes, the researcher’s careful scrutiny of and reflection on
images, documented through field notes and analytical memos, generate language-based data that accompany the visual data” (p. 57). The images the students submitted provided the opportunity to use visual data through illustrations, art, symbols, and colors and to find meaning that could be coupled with the words of the participants through their journal entries.

**Testimonio and Document Analysis**

Several coding styles were used for data analysis of the testimonios from participants (see Figure 2). For the first cycle coding, I utilized in vivo coding, using the participant’s own words to identify general themes. I choose this method as a way to stay true to the essence of what was being said in the testimonios as well as to honor the language and word choices of the participants. In addition, this method urges researchers to trust their instincts while coding, using as many codes as needed (Saldaña, 2016) which seems useful to this research considering the depth of experiences I am analyzing through the theoretical frameworks. Second, I applied code landscaping to the words of participants to create a visual representation of the themes from the testimonios and to create codes and sub-codes. Through comparing the code landscaping to in vivo coding, I was able to visually see what came to surface for participants, compare participants’ testimonios, and determine what was spoken of most often. Through testimonios, I analyzed the participants’ experiences in their own words. Employing both of these techniques aided in the document analysis for this research which included analyzing a picture and journal entry that the students submitted as well as my field notes. Descriptive coding was used with the images submitted by students. In addition, I chose to use the technique of found poetry (Patrick, 2016) and wrote a poem using the student’s
own words to add to the analysis of the research. A collective found poem was also written for all ten participants as a part of the analysis of data. This technique uses art as a way to further detail and document the students’ lived experiences in their own words.

Finally, narrative coding was used as the final method to adapt to the testimonios to find elements such as tone, setting, storyline, and symbols (Saldaña, 2016) to use in the analysis. To triangulate the data, I used document analysis to gain a deeper understanding of students’ experiences. This began with doing a document analysis of the written words and art of the participants themselves. According to Creswell (2018), this is a validation strategy “from several sources” (p. 53) to achieve trustworthiness and is useful for sharing the data and document analysis with participants and other researchers prior to second stage coding to review for accuracy. The approach for the analysis of the journal entries and images with the words of the participants was coded using emotion coding to “focus on the mood and tone of images or the emotions suggested by human participants included in the photo” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 57). This method was adapted to the journal entries and images submitted by participants. In addition, descriptive coding was also used for the images submitted in the document analysis to describe what was present in the image including but not limited to shapes, colors, imagery, and symbols.

Once testimonios and documents were validated, I used found poetry and “visual narrative inquiry” (Creswell, 2018, p. 74) to further investigate the stories of students’ healing experiences as seen through their journal entries and images. Found poetry is a poem written by the researcher using the words of research participants (Patrick, 2016).

As described by Patrick:

Research poets use the art of poetry to explore and explicate the lived experiences of their study participants … the academic poet’s express purpose is to represent
For this research, I created found poems for each participant and a collective found poem as part of the document analysis and to interpret results. I chose found poetry because I wanted to use the journal entries in a meaningful and participatory way and produce a product from the research that the participants could use after the research was conducted. Additionally, I knew that creating an environment for the students to reflect after the testimonio was conducted would allow their stories to take root, sink in, and digest within their bodies, minds, and spirits. This technique then provided another opportunity for participant engagement and reflection. Additionally, when member checking the poetry with students they shared how the poems are currently helping them to deal with the loss of family, and grief, inspiring them to create more art, and how the poems helped to bring their stories to life. Visual narrative inquiry was used with the images to aid the analysis process by making meaning of the stories, themes, codes, and data analysis through art. Field notes were also used during the analysis period to validate the data as well as be a tool for triangulation and validation through memos and notes taken during data collection and research (Miles et al., 2020).

The categories created from the students’ testimonios were first based on demographic data such as country of origin (who are their people), on or off-campus living, age, gender, identity used, major, and graduating year. Then, I sought to understand more about the research questions for this study, my favorite quote from their words, uncovering healing within family and community, incidents of harm, undocumented student issues/immigrant stories, complexities of identity, current healing practices, future dreams for campuses, anti-Black and anti-Indigenous sentiments,
activism, symbols/shapes/figures, language, herbal remedies, and cooking, healing intergenerational traumas, and significant books or authors. To connect all the data, I created a spreadsheet with all these headings, and the words of the testimonialistas were placed in each section in their own words. Additionally, I added a tab for myself where I reflected with the student on each of the themes created so I could easily recall our conversations and then threaded together the conversations and the internal dialogue I was having with myself over time. I wanted to be present with the words of the testimonialistas, take my time, and understand what was being said. The meaning-making happened for me in spirit time, in relation to the seasons, in nature, through patterns, and with loved ones.

**Figure 2**

*Data Type and Analysis Methods*
Positionality

As a queer, Latinx woman who grew up and was educated in the South, I have been negatively impacted by oppressive educational intuitions both as a student and professional. In addition, I have been on a healing journey of my reclamation and transformation for over two decades, which provides me more insight into the experiences of students I work with as well as what could be created as outcomes for liberatory practices within higher education settings. The students who participated in this study had previous relationships with me through my leadership on the University of Louisville campus in the Cultural Center (2015–2020), adjunct lecturer in Honors College (2016–2021), as well as a facilitator for programs with the MLK Scholars program (Spring 2021). In some cases, participants also had organized with the researcher through a national Latinx organizing hub, Mijente, and Aflorar Herb Collective, as well as participated in healing sessions, dialogue circles, art workshops, and organizing strategy meetings with the researcher in Louisville, Kentucky.

It is important to pay attention to the power imbalances that may arise through my positionality. I have had previous relationships with participants through coaching, teaching, organizing, or student support positions I have held through roles at the University of Louisville or through community and cultural organizing efforts in Louisville, Kentucky. For example, as a former student affairs professional in a program that provided scholarships, support services, and cultural navigation for students, I may be perceived as a person of authority to the student. Although some authority exists, I strive to practice “power with” versus “power over” with student interactions. Working to
diminish these kinds of power imbalances in a system that upholds and celebrates power imbalances is not an easy feat, but one that I have dedicated my career to dismantling. Some of the power imbalances that institutions of higher education value that I hoped to diminish through this research process are White supremacist attributes such as perfectionism, capitalism, individualism, and the right to comfort. To minimize this ethical issue, I obtained written and verbal consent after a thorough explanation of the study and provided a written explanation of testimonies, healing practices, and the research process to participants. In addition, participants had the opportunity to revise and review transcripts and manuscripts as well as meet with me as needed throughout the study. I have practiced the research questions several times through coursework and Latinx oral history story collection, lending to this understanding of power imbalances and revisiting the questions after each interview to support the creation of interview questions for this study. In addition, the research questions were designed in a way for open dialogue to take place and encouraged shared storytelling by the researcher and participant. My hope was the shared storytelling and flow of the interview would play a part in diminishing the power dynamics that may have existed. Participants had the opportunity to read, revise, and comment on transcripts, manuscripts, and poetry for this research project providing another layer of community partnership and reflexivity with research participants and being sure the data gathered was what they wanted to convey or share.

As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, my lived experiences have directly influenced the research design and throughout the meaning-making of the testimonios, journal entries, images, and found poetry, I embody my cultural intuition (Bernal, 1998) and
mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa et al., 2012) throughout this body of work. From the conceptual designs, research methods, meaning-making, praxis, and implications. The design of this research is replicating what I have experienced in my healing journey. I have used art, illustrations, symbols, and pictures to make sense of my life and heal. Examples of the tools I used in this research include the design of the Ecosystem for Latinx Student Success, commissioned art that translated and interpreted my ideas by Luis de Leon, thousands of pages of journals I have collected throughout my life, and in the stories I have told, am telling, and will tell. I am changed and changing through this work.

**Ethical Considerations**

An ethical issue to consider in this study is that while participants share intimate details about life, stories, ancestral traumas, generational traumas, healing, and movement work, I was aware of the potential impact of talking about traumas and healing for the students. I was available to provide contact information and connection to campus and community resources for the participants as well as provide follow-up coaching sessions as needed. Furthermore, an herbal community care kit from Aflorar Herb Collective was provided to each participant for participating in the study. These care kits include herbal remedies that aid with stress, anxiety, and have an overall calming effect. In addition, I made myself available to offer coaching and life support for any of the students during and after the research was conducted.

In addition to power dynamics and impacts of trauma, I paid special attention to the identities each participant held such as gender, race, and sexuality to maintain respect for each participant’s multiple identities and be sensitive to their needs. While not all the
identities students hold came forward in this research project, I expected students to share origin and immigration stories, immigration status, sexual and gender identities, and ethnic and racial identities.

**Limitations of Study**

The three limitations of this study are time, place, and societal norms and culture. This research covered one generation of students and I believe uncovering testimonios of past generations in el Nuevo Sur is essential to fully understand the experiences of healing practices as pedagogies of the home (García & Bernal, 2021) and gather the full spectrum of experiences. This research interviewed ten students about their experiences of healing, identity, and community in their lifetime. This leaves out past and future generations, creating the limitation of time. Students provided varied experiences of ancestral practices in their testimonies. While some spoke of not directly learning from family, their learning came indirectly through observation and seeing their families in their environments when they visited their grandparents in their home countries. For others, the memories of the family were very painful and they are currently focused on undoing the pain through therapy and their healing journeys. Pedagogies of the home (García & Bernal, 2021) were frequently experienced by students and found through traveling to their home countries, visiting sacred indigenous pyramids and land, and being taught or observed in the home. Through these pedagogies of home (García & Bernal, 2021), students connected to cultural traditions that they were not aware of, learned cultural practices and traditions, heard stories of their ancestors, and practiced rituals. I believe that by conducting research with their parents, kin, grandparents, and children, this research could further add to the understanding of Latinx students and
families experiences in el Nuevo Sur as they break intergenerational traumas, colonialism, White supremacy, patriarchy and could further uncover the pedagogies of home (Garcia & Bernal, 2021), intergenerationally. In addition, this research is place-based in el Nuevo Sur, on land which is not ancestrally connected to students, and in a place where traditional healing practices are not normalized in academic and professional settings, we are faced with the limitation of place. Although programs across the country and specifically on the West Coast and Southwest do have some traditional healing practices woven into community and educational settings, these practices are still new to higher education professionals and institutions in el Nuevo Sur.

Cultural and societal norms could also be present for the students themselves exhibiting an additional limitation. Student identity is fluid in the college years (Porter, 2020) and current students may still be discovering their own identities and the impacts that discrimination, White supremacist cultures, and assimilation have had on their own lives. Naming the injustices and their healing process may be a discovery or one being discovered by the student. Because this was an iterative process, I provided the students with time after the interview to reflect and share discoveries as well as read and review transcripts to add any new thoughts and ideas.

Recognizing the limitations of the research, it was my intention and hope to remove barriers and create an open, sacred space for the students to share their testimonios and lived experiences with the resources and tools available to us in this time and place. Acknowledging my positionality, cultural and societal norms, and limitations of time, place, and culture helps to provide a container to hold the students, their experiences, and stories as well as ethical and moral obligations as a researcher.
Summary

The ecosystem for Latinx student success introduced in this dissertation is one part of the full macro-level change that can create new paradigms for Latinx student's experiences in el Nuevo Sur. By isolating two of the petals from the model, student identity development and community cultural wealth, and traditional healing practices, I hoped to discover more about how, when, where, and what healing practices Latinx students experience both in and outside the classroom. Using the lens of Latinx critical race theory, community cultural wealth, healing practices, and Latinx identity development, I designed this research to bring forward Latinx students’ voices through testimonios, storytelling, lived experiences, and art.

Using the qualitative methodology of testimonio research through the methods of photo/image elicitation, found poetry, coding, and the development of the research design, data collection, and analysis, I embodied the essence of the participants’ lived experience. Using their voices in the coding methods and analysis as well as incorporating participant feedback to refine and review their own words and materials, I attended to limitations, power, and ethical considerations. I carefully crafted an analysis of data and documents that utilized student stories, journal entries, images, and researchers’ ideas through memoing and found poetry in the analysis process.

The purpose of this research was to discover and listen for themes of how healing practices, community wealth, and identity are woven together in the lives of Latinx students en el Nuevo Sur. The central questions for this study were: How do healing practices, community wealth, and identity affect Latinx student’s college experience in el
Nuevo Sur, and in what ways do higher education institutions support Latinx student healing modalities in curricular and co-curricular settings? Several research sub-questions were developed (see Appendix A) to guide participants to share their stories of healing experiences with me. These testimonios encompass the whole student, their family, culture, identity, healing, and lived experiences.

Through this research, I sought to answer questions and highlight current and former Latinx college students’ stories. Through this research, I provide tools for higher education professionals, both faculty and staff, to create a culture that honors and respects the student’s voice and increases critical consciousness of history and place. With this newfound culture and practice, institutions and individuals can begin to remove the oppressive conditions that strip Latinx students of their culture and promote traditional healing practices in curricular and co-curricular educational settings in el Nuevo Sur.
CHAPTER IV

WEAVING TOGETHER COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH, IDENTITY, AND HEALING THROUGH TESTIMONIOS, IMAGES, AND FOUND POETRY

Through testimonios conducted with ten students whose ages and identities span across many veins of life, I discovered and uncovered abundant stories of what, when, how, and with whom Latinx students experienced traditional healing practices and how their identity and community cultural wealth are woven together in these experiences. At times their healing was offered by a loved one, healer, curandera/o, family member, or friend and many times it was also a memory, experience, food, taste, herb, trip, and/or death of a loved one that aided in their uncovering of healing. Throughout the testimonios, journal entries, and images, it is evident that community cultural wealth acted as an avenue of healing for students throughout their college experiences of identity, incidents of harm, and healing practice remembering. Instead of being a framework to adapt or a lens through which to interpret the stories, community cultural wealth, itself, became a theme woven throughout the testimonios of the students. Community cultural wealth is the strength, the backbone of the students’ lives as they understand more about their identities and uncover traditional healing practices.

While students discovered healing in college through sacred spaces, cultural connections, art, activism, and community, students also shared experiences of their identity journeys through college and K-12 educational spaces. Through those experiences, they shared many significant memories of acculturation, assimilation,
discrimination, harm, and trauma caused at/by the institutions and by former educators in both college and pre-collegiate spaces. Many themes emerged through the testimonios and the discoveries uncovered from this research will provide tools for professionals working with Latinx/o/a/e students in college and pre-collegiate settings to “embrace the messiness” (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016, p. 43), reject White dominance and Black-White binary tendencies (Valdes, 1997), connect to Chicana feminist epistemologies (Bernal, 1998), and utilize and understand community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005, 2006) of the students as the guides and praxis for developing curricular and co-curricular programs for Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur.

Before introducing the testimonio participants, I outline the interview process, categories, and themes that came forward through the meaning-making of this research. The hope of this next section is to provide researchers and future scholars with more details on how to conduct a testimonio project and more about how my cultural intuition unfolded as a part of this research (Bernal, 1998).

**Testimonio Process**

At the beginning of each session with students, I grounded myself, made tea, and brought in several tools that I use for my healing practice such as smoke bundles, aromatherapy, herbal teas, gemstones, and candles. I was preparing to be fully present with the student as a form of community care and support and also set the intentions for the experience we were about to have together. To do this, I needed at least 30 minutes before the session to get my mind, spirit, and body connections ready to take the journey with the student. I wanted to be able to hold their experiences, be fully present, practice active listening, and be ready for any of the emotions that may arise and notice when and
where their stories were held inside my body. Throughout the session, I would use breath and hip and back movements to move the energies and experiences through my body. After each session, I made a point to move my body, take a walk, shake, stretch, and do neck rolls. At the beginning of each session, I thanked them for participating and provided them with an overview of the research and definition of traditional healing practices. In addition, we spent the first few minutes catching up on life as in some cases we had not connected in a few years. The definition I provided students about traditional healing practices was:

Traditional healing practices are practices coming from Latin American, African, and Indigenous roots and traditions. In educational spaces, they can be found through student activism, storytelling, circle dialogues, language justice, herbs, rituals, art, popular education, inclusive pedagogy, collectivist frameworks, artifacts, and altars. Many of the lived experiences of students can be translated into healing practices when the time is given to listen and make the students themselves the “holders and creators of knowledge”. (Bernal, 2002, p. 121)

The first question asked for each participant following the introduction was, of the practices mentioned what resonates most with you? Each student began by telling stories of their families, recalling memories of their homelands, and sharing examples of their experiences of childhood.

Analyzing Lived Experiences: Journals, Images, and Words of Participants

After testimonios were reviewed, I began making connections to each participant’s experience, my own experiences, and looking for the themes of how, when, and with whom they were remembering throughout their individual stories. The process became a form of mestiza consciousness at work through me while making sense of all the participants stories, individually and collectively (Anzaldúa et al., 2012). In first stage coding, I created categories as significant to each participant and a part of the story to be
analyzed. I categorized the data with code words and subcodes (code landscaping) into a spreadsheet and went through each testimonio to pull out the words of each participant (in vivo coding) about each theme created. This is where my cultural intuition began to come alive for me (Bernal, 1998). I asked myself: what am I hearing in common; how are their experiences similar or different; what is reoccurring; where did the students tremble in their stories; what seemed to make them get happy or sad? All of these internal dialogues led me to thinking and mapping out of ideas. From there, the categories for their testimonios were created.

**Meaning-Marking Through Art and Words**

As stated previously, through this research, I walk us through the student’s body, soul, and spirit connection through testimonios (interviews), writing (journal prompt), and art (image analysis and found poetry). Taking time to be in that spirit-time connection to nature and liminal space helped to guide me further through the analysis.

I created themes from the words of the students to connect their testimonios across themes such as incidents of harm, identity journeys, healing practices, and dreams for the future. This allowed me to make sense of their individual and collective stories. In addition, I began to draw in picture form and, with my own words, what was happening through the testimonios, what was common in the stories, what was different, and what shaped their lives. Additionally, I updated the Ecosystem for Latinx Student Success (see Figure 4) to add in the frameworks that this research is utilizing as the roots of the ecosystem and the use of the frameworks to metaphorically break through the ground where the flower (the student) grows. I wrote poems using found poetry techniques from each of the journals that the students submitted and applied descriptive and emotion
coding to each of the images that they submitted. This stage of the process helped me to
ground the words, images, and experiences of each testimonio and student experience. A
collective found poem was then written for all the participants to bring their stories
together. Throughout the process of data analysis, I used narrative coding to check for the
tone of voice, changes in feelings and emotions in the discussion, as well as facial
expressions. During document analysis, I reviewed notes taken by hand during the
interviews, read and re-read the testimonio transcriptions, re-listened to the recorded
interviews, and revisited drawings and notes I took during the analysis process.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this research was to discover and listen for themes of how healing
practices, community wealth, and identity are experienced in the lives of Latinx students
in el Nuevo Sur. The two research questions at the center of this work are: 1.) How do
healing practices, community wealth, and identity affect Latinx student’s college
experience in el Nuevo Sur; and, 2.) In what ways do higher education institutions
support Latinx student healing modalities in curricular and co-curricular settings?

**¿Quiénes Somos? Who are we?**

Table 1 summarizes the participants to the demographics of age, gender, national
origin, year graduated, and majors. Participants in this study were either current students
or graduates since 2015 from the University of Louisville in Kentucky. All participants
were part of Cultural Center programming at the University of Louisville during their
time in college. Student names have been changed to protect their identities and their
pseudonyms were chosen based on the testimonio, research notes, journal submission,
and found poetry created. I, the researcher as a part of these testimonios, witnessed the
students’ stories and was one of the people who supported them through their college years. I am a 44-year-old, Latinx/e, multi-racial, Colombian-American. I graduated in 2004 with a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies. The title of the major was Latin America in a Global Context. When I was studying at a small liberal arts university in North Carolina there were no dedicated programs in Latino/a or Latin American Studies. I was 26 years old when I completed my bachelor's, and I completed my Associate in Art at a community college after dropping out of high school at the age of 16.

Table 1

Testimonialista Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Year graduated</th>
<th>Major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Siete Azahares</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Political science and middle eastern islamic studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berimbau</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ventosa</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Current student</td>
<td>Business administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alebrije</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>2019 2022</td>
<td>Art and biology Masters of Science-Biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catrina</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Sociology and communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koi</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocodrillo</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Cuban</td>
<td>Current student</td>
<td>Communications and Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
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<td>------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cempasúchil</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Communication and Latin American and Latino studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chocho Roja</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Colombian</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>Masters in Urban Planning and GIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfajores</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Dominican/Bolivian</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Social work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three men and seven women participated in this research. Eight of the students were between the ages of 22 and 26, while one was 29 and the oldest was 36. Two of the students were currently in college and eight of them had graduated over the past seven years. Two had obtained graduate degrees and eight completed undergraduate degrees across many disciplines at the university. Three of the participants lived on the college campus for their first two years of college. Seven of the ten participants were commuter students living at home with their parents and commuting to campus through their entire college careers. Six were from Mexico; one participant was from each of the following countries: the Dominican Republic and Bolivia, Colombia, El Salvador, and Cuba. All of the participants submitted journals and images for further analysis and each participant fully engaged with the testimonio process and shared intimate and in-depth details about their lives and experiences. As a witness to their stories, I also shared significant memories as well as aspects of my story that we shared, making the process much like a conversation. We jumped around topics and flowed with the conversation as themes and ideas came up through our time together.
Theoretical Frameworks

The findings through testimonios (direct experiences, examples, and quotes) are presented as sections throughout this chapter: Weaving Meaning of Community Cultural Wealth, Identity, and Healing; Dreaming of the Future; and Finding Wholeness and Remembering. I outline the practices uncovered through testimonios in detail through the student’s voice interconnecting with each student's experience and relating the frameworks of identity development and orientations, community cultural wealth, and healing practices. In addition, Latinx critical race theory, embracing the messiness, Chicana feminism, and cultural intuition are epistemologies and conceptual frameworks I utilize throughout.

Interwoven Epistemologies and Epistimicide

Adapting students as holders and creators of knowledge, race-gender epistemologies (Bernal, 2002), and disrupting apartheid of knowledge (Bernal et al., 2016; Huber 2009) we find ways to understand more the testimonios of participants through connection to feminism and Indigenous wisdom and ways of knowing and remembering. However, these ways of knowing and remembering are not revered in academia, not adapted into cultural programming, and not commonplace in many institutions of higher learning in el Nuevo Sur and across the United States. Pérez and Saavedra (2020) provided an example of how spirituality supports Latinas in higher education:

Because injustice continues to be part of our everyday worlds, through spirituality, we seek solace and wisdom from the earth, Otherbeings, and our ancestors. As survivors of racialized and gendered violence, in our own lives, we have turned to the spiritual realm, which lies within us, among us, and connects us (each other, the earth, and the universe). (p. 317)
Therefore, with an understanding of how colonialism destroyed cultures and people, Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2016) provided an explanation of the destruction of Indigenous ways of knowing as epistimicide when he stated:

Colonial domination involves the deliberate destruction of other cultures. The destruction of knowledge (besides the genocide of Indigenous people) is what I call epistemicide: the destruction of the knowledge and cultures of these populations, of their memories and ancestral links and their manner of relating to others and to nature. Their legal and political forms – everything – is destroyed and subordinated to the colonial occupation (de Souza Santos, p.18).

Epistimicide took the ways of knowledge from thousands of years and centered a way of knowing that was colonial, White, and male. Epistimicide is important to tie into the findings at this stage in the research as it is central to understanding the use of images, thematic categories, tone of voice, body language, art, scribing, and other forms of communication outside of words for analysis of the testimonios of the research participants. I adapted these layers of observation and discovery to the data analysis. I sought to resurface a deeper discovery into the person and experiences that embraces my cultural intuition (Bernal, 1998) and lived experiences, challenge dominant ways of knowing, and embrace my spirituality (Pérez & Saavedra, 2020) as a Latina feminist researcher in el Nuevo Sur.

The Flower (the Student) of the Ecosystem for Latinx/o/a/e Student Success

Here, I bring back the frameworks to the surface of the earth and to uncover them from the dirt and soil that they have been nesting in over the season of research. My process was to expose the frameworks to the testimonios of the students and allow them to assist in the meaning-making of words and images of the participants. This process is a metaphorical discovery of the flower (the student) to flourish and grow with the time needed for healing while uncovering the stories, naming harms, and then giving space for
the flower to bloom and flourish in all the ways possible. The process became a discovery of harm, self, healing, and liberation for each participant. A metaphorical breaking through of all the systems of harm set up to be in their way of success and their stories of uncovering healing through all the harms and taking the time to name, be heard, be present with, and make deeper connections and meaning.

Before going deeper into the theoretical frameworks (the roots) for this study, I want to bring back the Ecosystem for Latinx Student Success that is the catalyst for this study and the body of work I have created through my own lived experiences. In the ecosystem, which is represented by a flower (see Figure 3), at the center of the flower is the student and their family. This is usually the part of the flower that we see in full bloom, it is the part that reproduces anatomically, and the part that makes seeds. As the students unleash their power and grow, they are abundant in their ability to reproduce and leave seeds for future generations. This research has allowed the ecosystem to metamorphosize, and I am connecting a new layer to the work by adding in the roots and the ground to the ecosystem (see Figure 4). The ground or surface is the institution and systems of oppression. The roots are the frameworks and interwoven epistemologies for this research (Latinx critical race theory, embracing the messiness, Chicana feminism, and cultural intuition) that penetrate and break through the surface and allow for full-bodied discoveries of the mind, body, and soul. As the researcher, I used my cultural intuition (Bernal, 1998) to make sense of and describe what is happening in society, for the student, and through my own lived experiences. I am a product of my ancestors, soul wounds, family lineage, educational experiences, work and career, home, community organizing, and nature. Bernal (1998) depicted cultural intuition as:
A Chicana researcher’s cultural intuition is achieved and can be nurtured though our personal experiences (which are influenced by ancestral wisdom, community memory, and intuition), the literature on and about Chicanas, our professional experiences, and the analytical process we engage in when we are in a central position of our research and analysis. Thus, cultural intuition is a complex process that is experiential, intuitive, historical, personal, collective, and dynamic. (p. 568)

Several lived experiences of my own allowed this research to happen, sparked the ideas and guided the praxis of my work while working with Latinx students across the South for two decades and being educated within these systems. In addition to cultural intuition, it is through trust, relationships, and community that we sustain, grow, and move through oppressive conditions and make meaning for future generations.

Through the testimonios, I discovered that each of us (testimonialista and researcher) experienced covert and at times direct incidents of harm such as discrimination, separateness, rejection, and at times anxiety, shame, guilt, and fear within the institution, in the spaces, and with people that were intended to make us feel safe and supported. Equally as unjust, current political realities created fears and harms that made it difficult to navigate the educational space and culture. Issues such as anti-immigrant sentiments, fear of deportations, and immigration raids on families surfaced in the testimonios of the students. Pérez and Saavedra (2020) called much of what Latino people experience in the country the “Trump effect” (p. 315) and they explain, “once elected, and through his presidency, Trump has continued to incite violence against Latinx communities, immigrants, and other oppressed people” (p.315), and the authors cite hate crimes, fear of deportations, ICE raids, hate speech as many of the acts of violence against Latinx people across the country.
While we discover what is happening in the students’ lives, I also pay close attention to their identity orientations and identity journeys through college using the Ferdman and Gallegos’ (2001) framework as well as Gloria and Castellanos’ (2012) orientations to help guide understanding of how students in el Nuevo Sur may identify within their Latinx/o/a/e identities and what circumstances have played a part in these identity orientations. Community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) becomes woven into the students stories through all of their lived experiences and becomes the backbone or the stem of the flower that supports them through the educational pipeline.

The flower (student) and metaphorical grounding in the ecosystem give this research a base, a thing outside of the self or person to hold the energy. A place and picture show the complex needs of the Latinx students and families in el Nuevo Sur, not just as a concept, but as a grounded flower in bloom and ready to take on life. The image (see Figure 4) is reflective of the complexity of the students’ lives as an entire being and acts as an entity to hold the harm, the complexities, the beauty, and the dreams for all that they wish to become. The student is the flower, their complex identities are in the face of the flower, and the stem of the flower is the community cultural wealth they experience throughout their lives. As they grow, their leaves grow into the traditional healing practices that support, sustain, and liberate the students.

**The Roots (Theoretical Frameworks)**

Latinx critical race theories (LatCrit) allow us to see the whole experience of Latinxs/os/as/es in the United States as an analysis of their experience to include “race, gender, sexuality while also acknowledging experiences related to issues of immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture” (Huber, 2009, p. 643). While I discover what is
happening for the student, I center their identity orientations and identity journeys through college using Ferdman and Gallegos’ (2001) framework as well as Gloria and Castellanos (2012) orientations to help guide in the understanding of how students in el Nuevo Sur may identify within their Latinx/o/a/e identities and what circumstances have played a part in these identity orientations. Through a Chicana feminist perspective (Bernal, 1998) and “embracing the messiness” of intersectionality (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016), I further analyze and unravel the student’s experience. Finally, we embrace the student’s whole life experiences, cultural knowledge, and family as we connect to their community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) as a central framework of healing, analysis, and meaning-making for this research. In Chapter Five, I bring back the metaphorical flower and roots system as we discover the Dreamfield (Rendón, 2009) necessary to water the flower garden and provide nourishment to Latino students’ lives in their college years.

**Weaving Meaning of Community Cultural Wealth, Identity, and Healing**

In the following sections, I begin with incidents of harm as an anchor to the stories from the testimonios and share a few of the highlights from their experience in college. Although educational spaces and educators did not always provide students with the supportive environment to thrive, some did and at times it took students well into their college years to experience these kinds of supportive environments. From the incidents of harm, we then take a journey into three students’ experiences with community cultural wealth (CCW) (2006) and how this framework acted as a pathway to healing. CCW became the stem of the flower holding up and supporting all parts of the flower (student) to thrive and survive through whatever came. I share students’ origin
Where We Begin: Incidents of Harm

“The LLCEC healed me before I knew I was broken.”
Berimbau, Graduated 2019, Economics

Berimbau’s experience at the Latino Leadership and College Experience Camp (LLCEC), hosted annually in Kentucky, are some of the words from over 20 hours of testimonios conducted during this research that I kept replaying in my head. For Berimbau to be healed before he knew he needed it, before he was exposed to the people, programs, and sacred spaces he may not have known existed is the essence of this research. To be exposed to and then taught new ways of being, discover more about your culture, meet other students who are in the same stage of life with whom you have many things in common is an awakening experience for students. For over a decade, the LLCEC has supported hundreds of Latinx students across Kentucky, like Berimbau, with support systems, mentorship, cultural programming, arts, politics, and activism education, as well as workshops and connections to professionals and mentors to support students throughout their education.
During Berimbau’s college years, he participated in several campus programs. Conocimiento and Undocupeers through the Cultural Centers Hispanic Latino Initiatives (HLI) that allowed him to share what he gathered from the LLCEC on campus with students as well as be an advocate for various kinds of student supports on campus. He shared:

Whenever we did Conocimiento for the students on campus, that was also very healing…being able to be part of a group that was holding a space that other people can make these realizations for themselves was very uplifting. I was doing something that I thought was necessary. Its healing through education.

His experience at camp during his senior year in high school set him up to choose the college he would attend. I first met Berimbau at the LLCEC. Throughout his four years in college, he was a student leader representing Latinx students on many campus committees, in student organizational leadership, and community service. Although the campus was a healing and supportive space for him, he also experienced harm and he spoke about his desire to support students through activism and fighting against the institution after the president of the university dressed up like a Mexican for Halloween in the Fall of 2015:

The same day of our Day of the Dead Celebration and a visit from Jose Antonio Vargas visit to campus … it was my first year at UofL and it was the infamous Sombrero Gate scandal. That was a lot. Given that I was a leader on campus, it was the first time that something had happened that affected, my culture … or my people. I felt like I needed to do something about it. I was in a place on campus or a place in the community where I needed to be the one to say something about this. And that was hard. I had to essentially learn on the go. That was very difficult, not only because of how much I had to learn to be able to do that relatively effectively at the time. But also (due to) the backlash that we got from speaking out about it, and people were like, well, y'all are just blowing this out of proportion. We got (backlash) from the (Latinx) community and some people on campus.
In Berimbau’s first year of college, the university president, James R. Ramsey, dressed up in traditional Mexican clothing for Halloween with his senior-level leadership and office staff and posed for a picture that was taken by the Courier-Journal (see Appendix B). Many people in the Louisville community and across campus coined the events as “Sombrero Gate” as it was a catalyst to an unraveling of issues that the President’s office was involved in around mismanagement of the university’s foundation funds. It was members of the LGBTQ student organizations, LGBTQ Center, and queer Latinx community that discovered the picture, exposed it on social media, and shared it with the campus community. It took only a few hours for the picture and story to go viral. As you can see in the picture, the university president’s office staff and leadership are dressed in sombreros and rebozos and the men are dressed as women, and the women are dressed as men. University employees and students are holding maracas, smiling, and seemingly having a good time mocking Mexican culture. Berimbau was present for the events leading up to the incident and following the incident. My department, the UofL Cultural Center’s Hispanic and Latino Initiatives, with the LGBTQ Center Director were called to the Chief of Staff’s office to handle and support the President’s office in their response. It was October 29, 2015, and the Latino Student Union was celebrating Dia de los Muertos, and Jose Antonio Vargas, a national activist and spokesperson for undocumented families with Define American, was visiting campus with the student group Fighting for Immigrant Rights and Equality (FIRE) that same day. As a mentor and friend, Dr. John Locke told me before I took the job with UofL, “Sarah, it will take an incident of injustice for higher education institutions to step up and support the students that you are working with.” While this was a significant incident of injustice, it was just
the beginning. Over the next three years, we would have incident after incident occur on campus. It was comparable to what was happening across the county, politically and socially, and explained as the Trump effect (Pérez & Saavedra, 2020). After the presidential elections, anti-immigrant and anti-LGBTQ legislation bills, murdering of Black and Brown men and women by police, immigration raids, attacks on the poor, and so many deep societal ills, what more could we take and how much would we be able to endure? One female student shared in her testimonio how it felt to be on campus at this time:

We got to see 2015-2016…pre (Presidential) election and then post (Presidential) election. That was that administration and was … just constant stress and constant hypersensitivity to the fact that we're not safe. You know, even if you feel like you're safe. Even if you're in this academic bubble. You and your family are not safe.

Siete Azahares’ experience of feeling unsafe on the college campus and in her community was compounded when her family experienced an early morning immigration raid at her home two years later. Her father was detained and held in a detention center for months before they could get him out, and immigration agents returned for her mother a few days later. Her feelings of fear lasted throughout her educational experience, and she endured it all, exemplifying navigational and social capital along the way. Her connection to campus resources got her through a very difficult time in her life and she was able to navigate the educational and immigration systems with her community support systems. Her stories of uncovering healing in education, community, and family were supported through classes she took in college as well as a trip back to Mexico:

Going back to Mexico, being on the land that my grandparents tended to, and meeting extended family, is liberating because it takes away the unknown. I want to know about family, knowing is empowering, and it helps me know about myself.
While traveling and navigating life, Siete Azahares found deeper meaning in who she was and how she identified as a privileged student who received scholarships and was able to study paying in-state tuition, and travel out of the county back to Mexico, a privilege many of her peers did not have. She openly acknowledged her privileges.

*Community Cultural Wealth: A Pathway to Healing*

“I’m carrying them (family) with me even when I'm not around. So even if I’m far away, it always feels like she’s close.”

Catrina, Graduated 2020, Sociology and Communications

Community cultural wealth (CCW) comes to the surface to provide strength to Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur as they are experiencing healing in their home and community lives. The testimonios Ventosa and Cempasúchil demonstrate this power of CCW. Yosso (2006) described the kinds of wealth inside CCW as capital. For example, familial capital or navigational capital are terms she uses. I am adapting it to call it familial wealth and navigational wealth, for example. I substitute the term wealth for capital throughout the dissertation and discussion of CCW. The reason for this adaption is that the term capital carries a sentiment of individualism and the term wealth carries meaning that is expansive and collective and can carry from generation to generation. The use of the term wealth feels more collective for this study. All of the aspects of community cultural wealth are present in the lives of these students as they navigate education and familial responsibilities. Familial, resistant, and linguistic wealth combine for Ventosa as she described what it is like to support her siblings and parents while in college as hard and stressful and an intergenerational cycle that she wished to break by providing support to her younger siblings.

My parents have unloaded a lot of their stressors on me … which has been very stressful for me in the long run. With my siblings, my brother’s 12, my sister’s 14
… I was the one who’s having to take them to school, wake them up, and help them with breakfast, and then I had to come and get them too if they were sick, my parents can’t come, they were at work. So, it’s up to me to go and do that … I don’t know, it’s been very complicated. Where (my parents) haven’t been there for me. I’ve tried to be there for my siblings.

She sighs deeply, pausing for a second before continuing with her story.

When I started college, I had impostor syndrome when I started so that was already a thing … Having to worry about taking care of my family and working. It was a lot. And how did you handle the stress?

Ventosa graduated in December 2022, two months after she shared her testimonio.

During her college years, she had to take two months off from college to handle the stress of family obligations, work, and life. She spent some time with her aunt in California to get a break and reconnect to her passions and purpose. One of the healing practices she spoke of was healing with candles and cupping, a technique called ventosa, that her aunt provides to her for her back pain. At times Ventosa did not find the support she needed from her parents, however, other family members came to her when she needed it most.

This is inevitably how the family should work. We may not be able to always support and must rely on a network of support and people that can step in when others cannot.

Yosso’s (2006) familial wealth includes a larger sense of the framing of the family that many Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) in the South are not accustomed to working with inside the culture of the institution. Familial wealth is made up of intergenerational and community support systems, free of isolation, and solution-oriented (Yosso, 2006). This is what I witness in Ventosa’s life as she supported her family and navigated college. Linguistic wealth also provided support systems to Ventosa. As a bilingual woman, navigating systems for her family she used her bilingual language abilities to make life better for herself, her siblings, and her parents while also being
resistant to the pressures of society. She chose for herself a break for two months as an
act of resistance and then found herself back with her family, completing college, and
handling the family dynamics, during the global Covid-19 pandemic and national
shutdown. She graduated at the age of 23 with a Bachelor’s Degree in Business
Administration. Although it took her longer than she wanted, graduating is a huge
accomplishment for Ventosa who endured and resisted many barriers to her success. She
may have found it easier to drop out of school, work, or care for her family. Ventosa’s
experiences of healing were found by connecting to other Latinx/o/a/e students on
campus in high school. She shared:

I was always very studious. A lot of the Latinos in my school just weren’t doing
that stuff. I was out here taking AP classes and Beta Club and doing a whole
bunch of stuff. Not many Latino students were doing that. I never really had the
chance to be involved with and have a Latino friendship group. Once I came to
college, I found that. I was so happy, I felt more connected with my roots.

The representation of social, aspirational, linguistic, familial, and resistant wealth
throughout Ventosa’s testimonio show that her pathway to healing was opened and
exposed through her lived experiences of CCW. Ventosa is proud of her cultural lineage,
loves her culture, and shared in her journal submission how being connected to her roots
is a representation of her healing journey as she has accepted herself and her culture
through the college years. Later in her testimonio and this dissertation her experiences on
campus with the Cultural Center and finding a Latina friend group were experiences she
shared that were supportive to her in college. It is through Ventosa’s testimonio that
CCW began to show its support as a thread to the uncovering of her healing and a major
support system through her lived experiences.
Cempasúchil remembers her experiences in education while describing her first semester in college as challenging in a new place, learning how to navigate all the parts of the puzzle, with little support from family and educators.

I just remember sobbing when I look back on like my years in school, in a weird way, it almost felt very traumatizing to me … emotionally drained and physically too because going to school was already really hard for me. Moving away from my family and trying to find my place, especially because of my first year. I went to Western Kentucky University, in Bowling Green. I kept feeling like I was a puzzle piece that kept trying to fit in constantly … feeling very misunderstood … I couldn’t relate to anyone. It was very difficult and also just a normal college experience of trying to do it on your own. This is my first time in a dorm. I remember I did my whole college process myself. I went to my high school counselor and I asked her, I want to go to college, what do I do? I just remembered that experience was really difficult for me because I kept thinking don’t mess it up. And you know, my mom couldn’t help me and so it was one of those things where I was already stressed out about that and making sure my scholarship money went into my account, you know, the first week of class. It was all very difficult.

In the same line of thinking, she remembers how she was treated in grade school, and the experiences she took with her into her college years. Her story came through in such an emotional and grounded way. As if being lost, misunderstood, and emotionally drained in college was normal, she had endured it before, and it was familiar.

I grew up in Middletown, I remember being in the second grade and teachers pulling me out to translate for another student. My school was small, you know, it was the early 2000s. Being pulled out of class to translate and always feeling like the odd one out. (I also remember) when they (the teacher) asked me what my mom did. And I told them, Oh, she cleans houses. That was very normal to me. My mom was undocumented, you know, for most of my life up until when I was in college … then my teachers start laughing at me. They started joking and saying, can she come and clean my house and they continued to laugh. And that memory was my earliest memory and experience … of knowing and seeing myself in education. And from that moment, it was so traumatizing to me. I have to hide my Latinx identity as much as possible to fit in because apparently, you can’t be different. And in that moment, it was the harsh realization that because of where I come from and what I look like. I knew that the people that were supposed to help me were supposed to educate me and supposed to push for my success. They weren’t always going to actually help me and they weren’t actually looking for my best interests at heart and I would be laughed at, in front of my
whole class and I couldn’t understand why. So, from that moment, I knew, and I
felt like I didn’t belong there, and I felt like I wasn’t welcomed there.

Cempasúchil endured many traumas in her life and her testimonio was heartfelt.

We both shed tears of joy and sadness together. In her last semester of college, her father
passed away. She was his caretaker and power of attorney. Her father was estranged from
the family, undocumented, and very sick from alcoholism. I remember when she came to
my office while he was in hospice to tell me all she was going through at the time, I
listened intently and offered her a place to unwind, share, and be seen. In her testimonio,
she shared more about the pressure she felt as his caretaker:

You know, my mom divorced my dad when I was five, but she had not spoken to
my dad since I was five. There was no communication. It was all broken ties,
there was no connection whatsoever. So naturally, I became the power of
attorney. I was 21. I had always felt a sense of responsibility within my family.
You know, being the oldest, being first gen, you know, the responsibility of
having to know it all, and translate documents for my parents all the time. There
was always this role that was very specific to me being the oldest and the one that
knew the most about how to navigate American culture and live in the systems. It
was natural to fall into this role, but it was also something that I resented because
I obviously was older, and I was really mad because I felt like this was something
I didn’t ask for. I really started to notice the generational trauma and then how it’s
affected me and then I started getting angry because I didn’t ask to be in this
position. But yet here I am … once again being asked to do something that I
didn’t want to do, you know, I wanted someone else to take that responsibility
away from me.

Cempasúchil’s responsibility to her family was a role she has carried throughout
her life and she shared in her testimonio many experiences of caretaking, solving
problems, and crisis management for the family. Witnessing and supporting her father
through his death as well as navigating all his medical issues as an undocumented
immigrant in Kentucky was a lot for her to do and a situation that she did not ask to be in,
however, she continued to show up for family and navigate support systems for her
father. Today, Cempasúchil is employed at a non-profit that builds support systems,
resources, and community partners for immigrant families and refugees. She allowed the hardships she endured to guide her forward in life and support other families who have similar experiences as her own. Throughout her testimonio, she shared stories of how she would support her father, riding to an immigration detention center when he was arrested and detained when she was in high school, navigating doctors and end-of-life-care with hospice, and getting calls from her father’s co-workers to let her know he was sick. She loved her father so much and he was a mysterious, quiet, and artistic man. While she sat with his ashes and personal belongings recently, she shared the sweetest memories of painting and reading with him, eating food with him, and many special moments that they shared. During her life, she has gathered “funds of knowledge” (Yosso, 2006, p. 48), that supported her through some of the hardest times of her life. Through her experiences in college with the Cultural Center’s Hispanic Latino Initiatives (HLI), she was supported and seen in a way that supported her lived experiences and made her feel a sense of freedom and comfort in her identity, and inspired her to make changes in her life. She shares in her testimonio:

I spent most of my young adult life hiding who I was and where I came from and trying hard to blend in and not look any different or seem different. Now I’ve really embraced what is my culture … I went to UofL and I was seeking people through HLI. It was my first step of understanding who I am, learning who I am, learning who others are. I’m trying to take back my identity and to embrace that was the first step for me. I don’t think I could have really made it through like college and those really difficult moments in my life if it wasn’t for the support of the Cultural Center and you more than anything. Thank you, to meet you and to hear your story and to see representation … meeting you was also very healing, because I’m like, wow, there’s someone who is here who is similar to me. I think students see tidbits of themselves in you. I think that’s important. If it wasn’t for you I don’t think I would have had that experience in college of really freeing myself. Because look at how much it’s helped people and look at what it’s become, you know, our experiences, while they may have been painful are necessary, because that’s what will allow us to make change and allow us to change things in our own environment and create spaces and create programs that
are needed. These were my experiences … I’m creating something to one day help someone like me. When my dad died the first thing I did was come to your office at HLI, I went back to the space that brought me freedom and brought me comfort and that helped the healing process for me.

Through it all, Cempasúchil’s cultural wealth became her backbone and strength as she increased the support systems and her critical consciousness through attending co-curricular programs offered by the Cultural Center HLI programs. Cempasúchil found grounding and support for her identity and healing journeys and comfort in her resistance as well.

For both Ventosa and Cempasúchil, all elements of Yosso’s community cultural wealth model are present and demonstrate how familial, aspirational, social, resistance, navigational, and linguistic wealth are modeled through these Latina experiences in college and community. Some Latinx students find it hard to fit into any of the boxes that education or society wants to place them in based on identities. Chocho Roja is a Colombian student who came to Kentucky to live with her father from Colombia at the beginning of her college career. She was not an international student or a Latina who was raised in the United States, so she had a hard time finding her place. She shares what going to a university in Kentucky felt like to her as an undergraduate student:

My undergrad experience was definitely not a good experience. I arrived in straight from Bogota, which is a big city, into Lexington, Kentucky which is a college town. Everything revolves around sororities and fraternities. That's a concept that I still don't understand. I wasn't really an international student ... I never found a connection to anyone. I spent four years without a friend, which is strange, because I feel like I'm very social. I get along very well with people and I went through four years of college without making any friendships.

Once she came to the University of Louisville for her master’s degree, she felt more of a sense of community and she shares the experience of being a part of the Diversity Centers across campus:
People were interested in community … the connections that I made with you, The Cultural Center, International Students Office, and the Women's Center that really made that experience absolutely unique because I just felt like I belonged.

She embraced the social capital she was able to find in the Diversity Centers on UofL’s campus. The International Center and Women’s Center provided her with work study and scholarship opportunities and the Cultural Center provided her a space to meet people and participate in culturally relevant and critical consciousness programming to meet her social needs for connection and belonging as well as help her feel more accepted in her identities. Chocho Roja’s story of identity, belonging, and finding community cultural wealth is one example of how complex and diverse Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur experience their college years in Kentucky, and as they shared the ways they found healing it was usually tied to aspects of CCW. Through family, friends, mentors, coaches, campus programs, activism, resource mobilization, and bilingualism, they experienced healing from societal and educational incidents of harm. They did not feel like strangers as frequently and feelings of isolation, anxiety, and simply not fitting in became less and less. Self-reflection, compassion, and passion for their cultures began to take more of a central part in their lives. The stem (CCW) of the flower (student) held them up and supported them through some of the most difficult times of their lives in college.

The testimonios of all the students in this research shared common themes of incidents of harm that they have experienced in educational spaces (college and K-12) as well as in society. Many of the themes that students spoke of were familial obligations, being the first generation in college in their families, immigration status, being caretakers to dying parents, assimilation, isolation, and feeling unsafe in educational spaces. Although they had hard experiences, they were able to uncover parts of themselves and
their identities through participation in diversity centers on the campus such as the Cultural Center, LGBTQ Center, Women’s Center, and International Center as well as Scholarship programs such as Mohammed Ali and Martin Luther King Scholars. Seeing themselves in the staff and faculty on campus played a huge part in their feeling as if they belonged. In addition, the sacred spaces provided in the centers provided a sense of safety and belonging to the students. These spaces also provided critical consciousness and culturally relevant programming such as Conocimiento, peer mentorship, and Undocupeers for the students and campus community. Equally critical to students’ support in college are the resources, connections, and assistance they receive in the pre-collegiate spaces. Programs such as the Latino Leadership and College Experience Camp (LLCEC) hosted by Bluegrass Community and Technical College (BCTC) also provided students with the foundation needed to form deeper connections and support in college with education relevant to their cultural roots. With this knowledge, some students took part in activism on campus helping to further the support and resources students of color received from the institution by fighting back against the oppressive systems and structures they found in educational spaces.

Each testimonio provides many examples of Yosso’s (2005) model of community cultural wealth. I observed the students uncovering their healing through the systems of wealth outlined in the model. Familial, aspirational, resistant, linguistic, navigational, and social wealth are all a part of, interwoven into, and a major aspect of the understanding of their lived experiences and how the incidents of harm (societal and educational) impacted their lives but also made them more resilient to pressures, isolation, assimilation, and other forces of oppression that may happen for them in the future.
Latinx student identity journeys play a critical role in their experiences in college and are also interconnected to their healing. The more in-depth analysis and understanding a student has of their histories, political climate, colonization, immigrant stories, their people and land, and history of oppression for people of color across the Americas, the more they can get closer to themselves and their own identity exploration.

In the next section, I narrate student experiences of identity through Latino student identity orientations and categories and share testimonios of the complexities of identities that exist for students in the college years.

**Origin Stories**

I want to understand how we adapt all these different behaviors and … I also don’t want to pass them down. So understanding that will allow me to heal from whatever negativity has been around me, but at the same time, not allow that to be something that anyone else has to heal from, for instance, my little brothers.

Alebrije, Graduated, 2019, Art and Biology

While sharing incidents of harm within educational and societal spaces, each participant in the research also walked me through their identity as it relates to being Latix/o/a/e in the United States. All the students started with their family’s ancestry, stories of immigration to the county, where they were born, where their parents were born, where families reside today, various places they lived in the United States, their parents’ work stories, and what changed for them in their college and after college years regarding their racial and ethnic identities. For many students, while talking about home, land, family, lineages, and ancestors their spirits lit up and they smiled a lot while they were remembering where they came from. In addition, many testimonios were shared about the complexities of identity that they embrace and how antiblackness and anti-Indigenous sentiments in their lineages, histories, and countries have impacted how they identify and relate to their ancestry, land, and cultures. Furthermore, many students spoke
of confusion and not knowing or still figuring out what their identities mean in relation to their understanding of the history of colonization, domination, assimilation, immigration, and enslavement. They shared that their identity journeys are not a destination but ones they will be discovering for years to come. Finally, many students have spent most and or all their lives in the midwest and southeastern United States, in mostly rural or mid-sized cities, and in predominantly White schools with educators and students not like their own cultures. At the same time, some students lived and or visited their “home” countries many times in the college and high school years which supported their growth. However, several were not able to travel out of the United States due to their immigration status.

All these experiences provide context to their identity journeys and how they can be analyzed within a Chicana feminist (Bernal, 1998), intersectional (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016), Latino and Latina racial identity orientations (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001), and LatCrit frameworks (Valdes, 1997), while holding epistimicide and epistemologies close to heart.

Throughout this next section, every student’s voice will be brought to the surface to tell their stories and to bring more life to the identity orientations and categories presented in this dissertation. Bringing you closer to the student’s experience of their identity and the complexity of identity is the intention of this next section.

Situating Students Testimonios Into Latino and Latina Racial Identity

Orientations and Categories. While discovering more about each student’s identity, I found that while I wanted to fit them into the orientations model by Ferdman and Gallegos (2001), I was also hesitant to do so. It felt unnatural to try to frame these students into any category. From all their experiences, the students seem to be asking for
further guidance in education settings around their identities as well as to not be told who they are, to allow themselves to be a discoverer of their identity, while also letting it change as they develop and discover more about who they are, where they are from, and their families stories of lineage and origin. Many of the students shared they are all still figuring out their labels and categories of identity so it is likely what is represented below has changed already or will change for the students in the near future. Through my cultural intuition (Bernal, 1998), I decided to develop the following table to depict the student country/place or land of origin, identities used within Latinidad, and complexities of identities that they spoke of throughout their testimonio to seek further insight into how they identify, what impacts their decisions, and compare and contrast their experiences. From my analysis, all the students in the testimonios fall within the category of Latino-Integrated, embracing a “both/and rather than either/or” and are “quite comfortable with and inclusive of all types of Latinos … able to educate other Latinos about race and racial identity and quite likely to challenge the prevailing constructions of race” (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001, pp. 50–51). In addition, I brought in categories from Gloria and Castellanos (2012) to provide an example of using two theories and frameworks together to help me further understand Latinx student identity development during the college years. The categories Gloria and Castellanos (2012) used are “reflective of ethnicity (e.g., Peruana), ethnicity and geographic region (e.g., Nuyorican), sociopolitical identity (e.g., Xicana), indigenous origins (e.g., Taíno), spiritual connections and Indigenous roots (e.g., Mestiza), and generational status and ethnicity (e.g., Boricua)” (p. 170). I chose these categories as they provide a more nuanced approach to identity using aspects of ethnicity, race, geography, politics, and spirituality.
The students who participated in this research embraced terms like Latinx, Latine, Latina, and Latino and rejected the term Hispanic. Many of the students shared that they used to use the term Hispanic earlier in their lives and then changed it once they learned more about themselves and the history of the term. The majority of the students’ identities are driven by questions of ethnicity, followed by geography, then socio-political, and lastly by indigenous origins and spiritual connections (see Table 2). This section could be built upon further inquiries and time into students’ identities, categories, and stories. Since this study is focusing on three interwoven concepts, identity, community cultural wealth, and traditional healing practices, our time was limited to be able to dive deeper into the categories that Gloria and Castellanos (2012) used in their research. Diving deeper into geography, socio-political, and spiritual connections could be a study of its own.

**Table 2**

*Identity Orientations and Categories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>County/land</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Complexities</th>
<th>Latinx identity</th>
<th>Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Siete Azaharez</td>
<td>Guerrero, Mexico, Born in</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>Colonization, classism, racism</td>
<td>Latinx/o/a/e</td>
<td>Socio-political identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>from Kentucky,</td>
<td>integrated</td>
<td>integrated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chicana</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beribau</td>
<td>Born in El Salvador, has</td>
<td>Embraces</td>
<td>Southern culture, white passing,</td>
<td>Latinx/o/a/e</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lived in Tennessee and</td>
<td>Latino/x/e</td>
<td>privileges of being &quot;a</td>
<td>integrated</td>
<td>and geographic region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

in their descriptions. These categories were part of the testimonios and are relevant to this research.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Identity/Background</th>
<th>Integration</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ventosa</td>
<td>Guerrero, Las Vegas, and San Marcos, Mexico</td>
<td>Latina over Hispanic, likes Latinx/e Colonialism, interest in exploring more around Afro-Latino and indigenous ancestry</td>
<td>Latinx/o/a/e integrated</td>
<td>Indigenous origins and spiritual connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alebrije</td>
<td>Mexico City, Mexico, lived in Mexico from ages 10-15, roots are Mexican and Louisvillian</td>
<td>Latino and Mexican He is rooted in 2 places-Kentucky and Mexico</td>
<td>Latinx/o/a/e integrated</td>
<td>Reflective of ethnicity and geographic region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catrina</td>
<td>Born in Alabama, parents are from Mexico, raised in Louisville</td>
<td>Mexican-American, uses Latina over Hispanic Identity has shifted a lot over time.</td>
<td>Latinx/o/a/e integrated</td>
<td>Reflective of ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koi</td>
<td>Mexico, lived in Chicago</td>
<td>Mexican influenced by United Statesian culture Citizenship status, immigration, class, European colonization, Mestizos, and indigenous cultures</td>
<td>Latinx/o/a/e integrated</td>
<td>Reflective of ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocodrillo</td>
<td>Born in Havana, Cuba, Lived in Mexico, Arizona, and Kentucky</td>
<td>Latina, from United States and Cuban Identity shaped by living in many places and assimilation</td>
<td>Latinx/o/a/e integrated</td>
<td>Ethnicity and geographic region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cempasúchil</td>
<td>Aguascalientes and Nuevo Copaltepec, Mexico</td>
<td>Mexican-American, Latinx, Latino, did not like Hispanic Lack of knowledge of family, still in discovery</td>
<td>Latinx/o/a/e integrated</td>
<td>Reflective of ethnicity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Siete Azahares explained her home and land around what her family did for work as following the horses around Kentucky. Around her identity, she relates to being a Latina in Kentucky and is very proud to be from Kentucky. She also thinks of herself as a watered-down Latina because English is her dominant language. Berimbau shares that he uses Latino, Latinx, and Latine to explain his identity and he does not like the term Hispanic or to use hyphenated identities. Ventosa shares that when she started college, she used the term Hispanic but changed that once in college. In addition, she talked about the Afro-Latinos on her mom’s side of the family and how she would like to explore this more. She talked about Indigenous peoples in her family who spoke native languages. She carries a lot of feelings of "not Latina enough" and asks questions of home and community. Alebrije has 40% Spanish ancestry, and his great-grandmother was from Spain, a fact that he just learned so he is asking deeper questions of family to understand more. Catrina sees herself changing as the demographics of the city of Louisville change and her experiences in educational spaces opened her up to new ways of thinking. For Koi, questions of identity will change when engaging with other people, so she answers based on the person’s understanding of identity. Cocodrillo’s paternal side were Asian immigrants to Cuba; mom is from “gente mestiza.” Cocodrillo moved to Mexico at nine
years old, then to Arizona, then to Louisville. Her identity was shaped by all three places and each impacted her life deeply. Like Koi, when talking about her identity, Cocodrillo says that it's "untraditional," and wonders about "who is defining it"? "If I'm in Latino space, I identify as Cuban," she shared. Cempasúchil’s dad told her to always identify as Chicana, but she did not understand what that meant so was uncomfortable using the term. She did not know her families’ stories, and she is in the process of discovering her identity through her healing journey of grieving her father’s death a few years ago.

Chocho Roja shares that she has lived for 17 years in Kentucky, discovered Latinx when she moved to the United States, and that being Latinx to her means having a family outside of biological family. Alfajores shares about Afro-Latinos and Europeans in family was born in the United States, and continues to delve into questions of” how Latino am I” and being a ”hybrid” as a Latino and American of mixed ancestry. Alfajores embraced the wholeness of both identities.

Various factors inform the students’ identities and their experiences of ethnic and racial identity, community, and healing though the college years. Factors such as proximity to Whiteness, power dynamics, external factors, colonialism, geography, birthplace, travel to home countries, and cultural influences were woven into their stories and created many complexities for their identity journeys. The complexities of identity outlined below provide deeper understanding of what occurs for students in their identity journeys in college and are passages taken from the testimonios. These passages are not meant to be an exhaustive list of all the experiences that can impact Latinx/o/a/e college student identity but a peek into one frame of the window of Latinx student lives en el Nuevo Sur.
**Complexities of Identity**

Grounding in the identity orientations by Ferdman and Gallegos (2001), Latinx critical race theory (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001) and embracing an intersectional analysis of race and ethnicity (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016) can assist when making sense of the inquiries in the testimonios asking: Where are your roots? Who are your people? Where is your land? Also, enmeshed in this part of the testimonio, I asked students, how do you identify in your Latinidad or Latinx/o/a/e identities and have your identities changed since you have been in college? Table 1 illustrates this.

Latinx students experience many races within their experiences of Latinidad (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016) as colonialism and slavery in the Americas created a history of mixing European, Asian, Indigenous, and African ethnicities and races. Within the simple context of defining race in the United States, students can check the box of many of the categories that define race for the United States Census, admissions, applications, and scholarship essays. As Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) explained, “In terms of race and other markers used to categorize race in the United States, Latinos can span the complete range” (p. 38). They further described what impacts Latino student identity orientation, naming parents and extended family members, assimilation, teachers, language, exposure to cultures and peoples with shared lived experience, and adult experiences to all play a part in the message they receive about identity. This can ultimately impact the way they will orient to their Latinx/o/a/e identities (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001).

These formative Latino student identity scholars described the model as a labyrinth with intricate patterns that is nonlinear and a process that can or cannot change through the life of a person (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001). Johnston-Guerrero (2016) took
the analysis to “embrace the messiness” and they stated “focusing on individual student identities without explicit attention to the systems of power differentially influencing these identities fails to meet the demands of helping students successfully navigate the racial and ethnic landscape of U.S. society” (p. 47). Latinx critical race theory adds one more additional layer to the analysis of identity orientations model, intersectional analysis, and mix into the analysis the incidents of harm named in the previous section. Now that we have more insight into the incidents of harm paired with possible identity orientations and categories, a fuller analysis can be made about student experiences based on their many identities and how they resist these experiences and embrace resistant wealth and other aspect of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Some of the complexities as seen through the student testimonios are Europeanization and Whiteness, power dynamics, and external factors that influence the complexities of identities students experienced.

**Europeanization and Whiteness**

Alebrijes, a self-identified Mexican student, describes his Spanish ancestry in the testimonio as a realization that came to him recently and one that his family did not share with him. Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) introduced some questions for deeper analysis in their model of Latino/s identity orientations such as: Did students incorporate more than one identity at a time? What life events or situations could have impacted them in their orientations and how fluid are individual orientations? In the patterns Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) observed with Latinos, people can move through categories throughout their lives or stay in the same category their whole life. The model describes “various possible orientations” to the “myriad pressures Latinos face in coming to define
themselves in a society that often disparages their identity and seeks to impose definitions rather than allow self-identification” (p. 49). Alebrije shares his experience of recently discovering his great-grandmother was an immigrant from Spain to Mexico and how that impacted his questions of identity.

I see myself as just Latina and Mexican ... I took a genetic test ... it turns out that I'm only 54% Mexican ... turns out, I'm like, 40%, Spanish. I asked my mom “Hey, what's going on with this. It says that I'm 40% Spanish”. And then she's like, “Oh, you're great grandmother, on your dad's side of the family was the first of her family to come to Mexico from Spain”. And no one told us this? No one wanted to mention it? She's like, well, no one really talks about it. So, my great-grandmother! That's so close in the generational gap to be the first of her family to come from Spain! I'm never going to identify as Spanish. But the idea of knowing that there's a lot more to you and having that sense of your history ... It does give you a different perspective.

Alebrije’s acknowledgement of Spanish ancestry came for him later in his college career and seemed to surprise him. He studied genetics in college and shared how important it was for him to understand more about where he came from which became the impetus for getting the genetics test. European, more specifically Spanish, ancestry are parts of many of the student’s identity stories and many times the actual histories of the students are unknown and they can shift perspectives once students ask deeper questions of lineage and family ancestry.

Koi relates to Alebrije’s story, but in her experience, it is more around how she is perceived by others as not Latina enough or in her case Mexican. Many stereotypes exist for what Mexicans are supposed to look like and these stereotypes are based on a lack of knowledge of Mexican history. Koi is a White-passing Latina, and she shares:

One thing that I noticed is because of the way I look, people don't expect me to be Mexican. They don't really understand where I come from, there was a lot of European influence, colonization, all that stuff. So anytime they look at me, they're like, why you're … you're Mexican? And people like me, you know, we are light-skinned … We express ourselves genetically differently.
Koi and Alebrieje both found themselves confronted with their European ancestry and others’ perceptions of their identities. While they both brought up stories of their understanding of European influences in Mexico, they both carry a sense of pride to be Mexican and in love with their identities, cultural traditions, and both of their countries, Mexico and the United States.

**Power Dynamics**

For the students, power dynamics such as being White-passing or a White Latino, erasure of Black and Indigenous histories and roots within families, immigration status, class, generation in the United States, and assimilation came up in many of the testimonios in this research. Berimbau shared his feeling about the power dynamics and complexities of identities he carried when he explained more about how his identities have changed through his college years and how he works hard to be pro-Black. He shared:

One of the things I would classify as healing is (fighting) racism within our own community, that lens of being pro-Black in a very anti-Black space. That's changing a little, I think in the Latino community, but it's still, predominantly white and predominantly guided by white-passing people. Being pro-Black in that space is healing, in the sense that we want everyone to be included. And that is a mission that I have been on since I've learned about it. I think that that's something that we should actively strive towards…healing our community from anti-Blackness.

Being a pro-Black Latinx student or community member can have its challenges while existing in a predominantly White Latinx/o/a/e space, community, or school and while being a White-passing Latino. Berimbau also shared:

I'm a white Latino … Even though when I was in college, I was like, no one thinks I'm White. I still have the privilege of being a White person in our community … I am a lighter-skinned Latino. I don’t have to go through the struggles of not being that way. I benefited from colorism … but I’m not White.
As an immigrant from El Salvador, Berimbau understood his privileges and power imbalances related to his race, especially as a White-passing Latino. He recognizes it as a power imbalance but not as the central part of his identity. His identities changed while in college and were layered with the recognition of power imbalances and also a shame when he was in high school.

For years, I didn’t want to be Latino … I didn’t want people to see me that way. I was very against our culture and not wanting to be prescribed as a foreigner. And so that was trauma. Going to LLCEC, and realizing that other people also have this experience, and we don't have to be this way because our culture is beautiful amazing. It’s something that we can ground ourselves in because it's part of who we are. That was healing in the sense that I didn’t know that that was a part of me that I was missing. And so whenever we did Conocimiento to the students on campus that was also very healing … being able to be part of a group that was holding a space where other people can make these realizations for themselves was very uplifting. I was doing something that I thought was necessary, given that I went through it and thought that it was very beneficial for me. And I think that other people should have the same benefit.

Berimbau found refuge and sacred space in the LLCEC and Cultural Center’s Conocimiento programs and worked as a student leader supporting identity development for incoming Latinx students throughout his four years as an undergraduate student. His Latinx/o/a/e identities changed through college, and he became much more aware of his privileges as a White-passing Latino male and utilized the Conocimientos and LLCEC as avenues for his critical conscious to emerge.

Equally as challenging in the power dynamics of Whiteness and emotional insecurities of shame, embracing indigeneity inside of the self when little information about heritage, family, or lineage comes from their family of origin also proved a difficult challenge for students as they told stories of their identity. Berimbau may not identify as White in his ethnicity or his ancestry. Still, the color of his skin gave him different
advantages than other students with more visible Indigenous or African features and skins colors. These are important aspects to remember when situating students into categorizations or orientations (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001), holding all the complexities while embracing the messiness (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016), and making meaning of Latinx college student’s identities en el Nuevo Sur. Its not black or white, or able to fit into a box. Identity is best explored with dialogue, community, healing practices, and art.

Siete Azahares walked me through her lack of understanding of indigeneity in her lineage, language abilities, confusion with labels, and how others understand her identity through her story below.

I don’t go through the world perceived as native or Indigenous, but I know that’s in my background. I want to say that when I first got into college … I put (myself on the scholarship application) as a woman of color. I obviously felt like an ethnic racial minority. And then from there, I was, well obviously, I’m Latina. But that’s still to this day feels weird. I don’t know why it feels weird. Maybe it’s because English is so dominant in my mind. That I feel like a Latina has full command of both languages. And I feel like I don’t have that. I think it’s gotten more murkier and more confusing, actually, through college, because I remember one time actually, in our conversation, I look to you a little bit for a little bit of guidance, because I was like, Okay, here’s another Latina, she’s from Colombia. Still, she grew up here, kind of like me; how is she gonna identify? You said mestiza once, and I was like, You know what? That also feels a little bit more accurate, but still not. And I think we both agreed at that time that it still does not fully encapsulate because it’s so centered on a colonialist kind of mindset. So how do we decolonize our labels? I don't know because I can’t if I had to, I can’t even decolonize because I don't know what Indigenous tribe I’m from. I don’t know what Indigenous background I have. I’m American, but to be American doesn’t mean that there is a specific ethnicity or race; it’s just pure American. And so, it has only gotten more complicated, I want to say, and so the only one that I can think of that will feel like everyone will understand is Latina. A Mexican American, Chicana.

The questions she is asking and the frames she sees herself in the world are ones that all the students share about their identity. She carries many identities that are based on external factors as well as her understanding of her Indigenous roots and colonization. In
the end, she picked an identity that was easier to explain to others and that, at best, fit her partially but not entirely. Koi shares experiences of what it felt like to sit with her grandmother in Mexico and see outright favoritism for Whiteness and anti-Indigenous sentiments from her elders.

That is something that I’ve witnessed personally with what my grandma says, even from my father’s side, where her being Indigenous in appearance right and being my grandma from my father's side is from Tampico. It’s like the Gulf of Mexico on the other side of Mexico. She is more traditionally Indigenous, but I remember one day when I had gone to visit her, she was essentially making fun of this Indigenous girl for wearing red lipstick because of her appearance, and she was upholding this other girl because she had blue eyes and she was tall, and she was blond. And you get a lot of ignorant comments like that, where you almost wonder like, well, you know, where’s this mindset coming from? You know, you’ve lived and grown up in Mexico this whole time. That’s how you know that this way of being is established. You know? They’ve grown up with it.

Despite her grandmother’s connection of beauty to White characteristics, Koi did not carry these same sentiments toward indigenous people, as her tone of voice and facial expressions showed her disapproval of these ways of acting. Throughout college, her identities changed, and she is interested in exploring more about who she is and how she relates to her international colleagues in the medical industry. Koi’s career is in direct patient services, and she uses her bilingual and cultural self in the workplace and is a way that she hopes to make her parents proud of all they fought for by immigrating to the United States. While she is clear about her Mexican identity, she also recognizes how the United States has also influenced her identity and played a part in her life.

Power dynamics inside of the self are hard internal struggles to grapple with in life, and even more in the college years. Berembou, Siete Azahares, and Koi all honestly shared some of the internal struggles, such as anti-indigeneity, lack of knowledge of ancestry and roots, White passing privilege, and shame of their cultures and how they
experience these dynamics inside of their identities. Each student also used their resistant wealth to create new ways of meaning as “pro-Black,” “maybe mestiza,” and clearly “ignorant comments” within their experiences which will help to guide them further into their identity. As Torres et al. (2012) exposed in their study, Latino “adults continue to experience developmental tasks associated with their ethnic identity” (p. 14) and through this development, there are life circumstances such as marriage, job changes, and moving that will impact Latino adult identity experiences. Torres et al. (2012) descriptions of identity processes as “looping” fits well into this study as much of what students shared correlates to reflections of their past experiences about where they are now, “A refinement of how their Latino identity can be cyclical in nature and likely to happen repeatedly throughout adult life as changes occur” (pp. 9–10).

*External Factors*

Many external factors arose for the students about their identity. At the time of their experiences in college, the office for programming for Latinx Students was called the Cultural Center’s Hispanic/Latino Initiatives, which did not give way to the multiple ethnic and racial identities students carried. Some students may have been turned off by the name itself as they did not see themselves in it. However, through the years, the name has changed and adapted to fit how terms and language adapt. In addition, cultural conflicts (Torres, 2004), such as families influence, how others on campus or community understood their identities, or not feeling Latinx/o/a/e enough, were significant parts of their stories. I noticed embarrassment, little fluency in Spanish, not knowing their family history, and not being connected to the stories of their African and Indigenous ancestry as exterior factors that had students asking themselves more questions or doubting their
identity regarding race and ethnicity. Torres (2004) urged higher education institutions to move from pure statistical research of Latinx students to an understanding of how Latino/a student make meaning of their role or identity in academe. By understanding the conditions that influence how Latino/a students situate their identity, practitioners can create local definitions of identity that can better serve the institution in helping students maneuver the academic environment. (p. 458)

The following student stories highlight their need for deeper understanding and provide examples of the external factors associated with the cultural conflicts within identity exploration for Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur.

Siete Azahares
I, too, feel like even with Latina, I’m in a watered-down Latina because my English is so dominant, and I think in English. I speak English. I mean, I speak, Spanglish just like anyone else, but sometimes when I speak to other Latinos … first generation, they use slang. I don’t have that, you know … I feel watered down. But then again, it’s Spanish and in and of itself is also a colonial(ism), right? There are various parts of Mexico and Central America where there are communities that don’t speak Spanish, and they speak a dialect. And so that’s another layer of it, too. That’s why sometimes, Latina, it’s hard for me to accept because everything that describes us is rooted in colonialism.

Ventosa
I mean, it’s always weird to identify, especially here (in Kentucky). I don’t feel like I’m Latino enough for people that live in Latin America, but I also feel like I’m not American enough. It’s one of those things where I’m like in the in-between and how to juggle that.

Catrina
I’m Mexican, and my parents are both first-generation here. I was born here, and I feel kind of like, I don’t identify with being born here, but I also was not born in Mexico. So, for me, it’s always been kind of like a little struggle of like, what do I identify as? Very clearly Mexican American. I have no choice to identify as both.

Cocodrillo
My perspective is more like, I lived so much of my childhood and teenage years assimilating to what being Latina was like in America, you know? And now, I see that that version is not true to me, because what is being Latina in America? Like, how can somebody else tell me what that means?
I wanted to learn more about my own. And that’s when I started asking questions to my parents about my heritage and understanding my path through immigration. Now that I’m in college, I see again that I’ve shifted the mentality of, I’m so different, and that’s what makes me unique, special, I’m different. And so is everybody else. And every single day is a new opportunity for me to add new experiences to who I am. So, I think my identity now in college is much more open to learning about the world and the people around me.

Koi
I usually just tell people, yeah, I’m Mexican. If they ask me, I’ll tell them I speak Spanish. I understand it. And then I say (if they prompt) me with more questions. I’ll explain. Yeah, we come from Guadalajara, and I kind of explain as I see they’re interested in it; I consider myself fully Mexican. Like, sure, I grew up in the U.S. I had to get my citizenship too; I got my citizenship and in high school and sophomore year, me and my mom. My dad got it first and then we got it. We really took our time, and we got it the hard way, you know? And so, it’s really funny. I very much obviously identify with that part of myself. But I definitely see how I’m influenced by the U.S. and the culture here too. But that doesn’t mean that I stop identifying as Mexican.

Chocho Roja
When I arrived from Bogota to Kentucky, I didn’t really understand what Latinx meant. When people ask me what I am, I’m like, Well, I’m Colombian. And then it just evolved with time. So, it evolved into an understanding that I’m not just a single Colombian identity here. But I’m with this whole group of people have so many things in common. So, it grew into loving that identity as Latinx a lot more. It grew into wanting to make that a family away from family.

Ventosa
I definitely like to go more for Latina over Hispanic. I like Latinx or Latine; I say that I am a Latina. When I started college, I identified more as Hispanic, then changed it. What ended up happening there was that I just didn’t want to associate myself with the colonialism that happened. I just don’t want to associate myself with that. I want to identify myself more with my Indigenous roots. My mom’s side has a lot of Afro-Latinos on that side of the family. And then, on my dad’s side, I know that his mom they were Indigenous, and they spoke the language, but my grandma didn’t end up passing it down to my dad. But I do know that my great-grandma was Indigenous.

Alfajores
I look Latino at certain times, but then it’s just like this hybrid feel of like, I am Latino, but I’m also American. What does it mean to be American if I’m not White? ... The older I’ve gotten, the more that I’ve less pronounced my name _____ (says in a Spanish accent) versus telling people my name is _____ (in an English accent), and so I like using my accent that I have of like sharing and identifying myself as, as Latino or someone that is of Latin descent. A lot of times, when someone asks me where are you from? What’s your ethnicity? I would always say I’m half Dominican, half Bolivian, and my current partner. She has always challenged me. It’s like you’re never half of anything like you’re always full of that and full of this like you’re a full Dominican and Bolivian
because that’s just who your whole part is. It’s not like you’re split in half, and your right arm is this, and your left arm is that. That’s usually how I identify myself. When someone asks me questions like that, what’s your background? Where do you come from? What’s your ethnicity? I’m Dominican-Bolivian.

Cempasúchil
When I was at the thick of my grief with my dad, like in 2020 and besides the pandemic, I was deep, deep in my grief...it was so hard core. I remember when I collected my dad’s stuff, I left it in a corner and I didn’t touch it for two years. I didn’t touch it, and when I did start to move things around. It was so difficult to discern, you know because my dad was a really private person. My dad didn’t talk to me much about anything. I didn’t know anything about his childhood like you said, little snippets here and there. He completely shut me out, and that’s what addicts do. They isolate, and they push you away. But, you know, it sucks because when we’re going to the topic of identity, you base your identity so much on your parents because that’s what you see, and it was so difficult. I had issues with who I was my whole life, but it was extremely hard because he wouldn’t share his life with me. He wouldn’t share his childhood. He wouldn’t share his culture. He wouldn't share anything. So, I felt like there was a part of me that was missing from my identity, because I’m like, who am I if I don’t know that side? I feel like I'm relearning bits of my culture that weren't shared with me that I would have liked as a kid, like my inner child almost is like, oh, it would have been nice to have this confidence in my identity and culture and embrace it. As well as healing, you know, the subconsciousness of healing, the uncertainty and healing the lack of identity, like I’m finding my identity. I’m still in that process.

Later in the testimonio, Cempasúchil shared how her father told her to identify as a Chicana, which she couldn’t embrace because of her lack of understanding of the term.

When I was a kid, he (my dad) would always be like, if anyone asked you what you are, you’re Chicana, make sure you tell them … that’s what you are. And I never identified with it because I didn’t know what it meant. I just didn’t understand it. I didn’t know. I felt like it wasn’t in my right to accept an identity that was given to me when I myself had no connection to it. I didn’t know what it meant. And I felt like, who was I to take something on that I don’t even understand?

While this was an identity that she was unable to embrace at the time, I see why her dad would have told her to be a Chicana and made sure she heard him. She is a strong fighter, feminist, and resister of societal norms. She became the woman he always wanted her to be, whom he needed her to be, and through her deep love and commitment to the family,
she began breaking many cycles and discovering more of who she is and wants to become.

Many external factors were experienced by the students. They gave examples such as bilingual language abilities, colonialism, not feeling Latino enough, and basing their identity label on other people’s understanding of Latinx/o/a/eness. In addition, being both American and Latinx/o/a/e, assimilation, United Statesian cultural influences, little knowledge of family histories, basing their identities on parents, multi-racial/ethnic identities, and non-U.S. born understanding of being Latinx/o/a/e in the United States were other experiences named.

**Dreaming of the Future**

During the testimonios, I asked the testimonialistas, “What are some programs, courses, or classes you would have liked to take in college that you were not able to or were not offered?” Students began with a smile and happy tone of voice and shared ideas like Danza Azteca, courses on Indigenous cultures, the history of Cumbia music from Colombia to Mexico, and mariachi guitar classes. The following stories speak to hope for the future in education spaces for Latinx students en el Nuevo Sur. Siete Azahares shares how it felt to hear her uncle’s wife who went to school in California, talk about Danza Azteca and sweat lodges she did in high school. It felt to her like if she had these similar experiences life would have been so much different. She reflects,

I feel like those are so many missing chunks of my upbringing that I feel watered down … What would I be like, if I had that? You know, I think about that, and I’m like, would I feel less watered down? Would I feel more confident about my identity? Who knows? But that’s why I’m trying to seek those out now.

Cocodrillo also shares her desire to host sacred spaces and learn to be a facilitator. She has been inspired by the kind of spaces she experiences in the Cultural Center rooted in
inclusive, contemplative pedagogies. She desires to be an educator and support her peers and the community through shared learning processes. She explained:

I would love to do a course that was more hands-on experience of learning to guide spaces; mentoring is like an actual thing that people learn how to do. I would love to be in a facilitating course of some sort because I really love holding space. My job now is a lot of holding space, even if it’s virtually, and I would love in the future to do this as a career, as part of whatever it is I’m doing. Also, to be able to hold space for people to be themselves. I feel like at UofL, there’s a lot of possibility of learning how to do this learning, self-regulation of the body, learning how to feel yourself on how you’re doing, and how to journal.

Course development for Latinx/o/a/e students that focuses on their identity, cultural traditions, histories, socio-political realities, and leadership skill development were ideas shared by the testimonialistas. These stories mimic Castillo-Montoya and Reyes (2020) who conducted a study of cultural center service-learning course and found that “culturally relevant pedagogy and validation practices can have positive outcomes on Latino students’ development” (p. 145). Cocodrillo not only wants to learn these skills but also be someone who supports the next generation of Latinx/o/a/e students and community members. She is currently leading a coalition of educational and community-based organizations supporting Latinx student success across Louisville. She hopes to remain in this field after she graduates from college.

**Finding Wholeness and Remembering**

Through this research of testimonios, I sought to reveal common threads of intergenerational healing, family stories, ancestral trauma, identity, sense of community, and culture through the central research questions. I listened for what it means to make and be part of a community both on and off the college campus, how students experienced healing practices, where they have learned these practices, and what is leading them to further their healing, individually and collectively. Additionally, through
this research, I explored how and where space is created for students’ healing and in what ways faculty, mentors, and higher education professionals support Latinx students. In the analysis, many themes arose from the stories and it also became clear that discovering their identities was a healing practice for them. This journey was supported by campus programming, staff and faculty mentors and coaches, and their peers.

**Healing Through Campus and Community Programming**

The following stories highlight campus and community programs discovered through the student testimonios and answer the research question, In what ways do higher education institutions support Latinx student healing modalities in curricular and co-curricular settings? Each student described experiencing a sense of belonging and community in the Cultural Center (Lozano, 2010), which connected them to their identities around race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, critical consciousness, and social justice. Johnston-Guerrero (2016) combined both an intersectional approach with a sense of belonging when he wrote, “Intersecting ethnicity and race might be helpful in getting students to understand how a strong ethnic identity and sense of group belonging can help buffer against the negative impacts of racist experiences” (p. 52). While in college, many students found out more about their identities, found people like them to connect to, and were equally connected across cultures and countries to find many commonalities. Many students thought back to how many friends and support systems they gained while in college, which aided in their identity development and success in college (Alvan et al., 1996). Throughout the testimonios, students specifically mentioned programs such as peer mentoring (COMPAS and REACH Peer Mentoring), conversation circles, representation of their culture in
faculty and staff, World Cafes, inclusive pedagogy, and popular education, class projects, learning about others cultures and experiences (Undocupeers), having allies hold space for them, identity workshops (Conocimientos), student groups and student leadership, speaking Spanish and Spanglish, celebrating culture through food, music, and dance on campus (Dia de Los Muertos and Carnival), activism (Artivism Camp and LLCEC), authors, and courses in Latin American and Latino Studies Department, Spanish, and Sociology. These courses supported them in gaining more critical consciousness and frameworks for their identities and supported their healing.

Koi participated in HLI programs from the Latino Student Welcome Orientation, the summer of her first year, and in programming through graduation. Throughout her time in college, she was a mentor for students as a part of the inaugural peer mentor program founded by HLI and REACH, and she was a peer mentor for incoming Latinx students through their first year in college. Later, the program developed into the COMPA Peer Mentor Program, providing support to both transfer and first-year students. Additionally, Koi participated in all the programs provided for the office and conducted research on Latino families in a psychology research lab on campus. She shares about REACH and peer mentoring, coaching, faculty diversity, and how her identities changed through the programming that she participated in on campus.

I did REACH, thanks to you. And we established our own Hispanic/Latino sect of REACH which was super important and connected me even more to other students on campus. We had one professor who was in the business school. I remember he stood out to me because he was one of the few professors who would come to our events. And it was nice to see a professor who cared about that and with a similar background. Because of the field that I was in, biology and chemistry, I did not really get to learn much about the personal lives or cultural identities of these professors because there weren’t many Latinx professors.
It was my time with you all and HLI, you know, so all of the events that we were prone to and Conocimiento being one of them. I think it was probably one of the most educational and inspiring out of all of them. I enjoyed every single one of them. Dia de los Muertos and Carnaval and all my personal coaching sessions with you. In Conocimiento, I liked the fact that we focused a lot on our personal roots and also really thought about what our ancestry is, what we think about it, how we identify, and how our family and our roots have shaped us.

Koi was able to experience programming that gave her a sacred space to ask critical questions about her race, ethnicity, roots, lineage, and identity while also being a supportive peer to other incoming Latinx students in their first years of college. This intentional programming model that included sacred space, community healing, and leadership for the next generation collectively supported Koi and her peers. Intentional programming for Latinx students can be a model for other programming in co-curricular settings on college campuses across el Nuevo Sur. Koi shares how her identity changed through college when she says:

I feel like I’m more engulfed, more interested, more aware, and more willing to learn than I was; I mean, I’ve always been willing to learn, and I’ve always accepted and loved that part of myself. But because I got to work with you and other students, I got more involved with that part of myself. It’s only been an uphill trend from there. You know, it’s only gotten better and better.

Koi’s experience in college allowed her to grow and support the next generation of students in their growth. She takes this support into her career as she studies to become a physician’s assistant. She seeks to be in the medical industry as a bilingual woman supporting families like her own.

Cocodrillo is a current undergraduate student and shared about Conocimiento, Escuchemos, diverse faculty and staff, and feminist community leaders that she looks up to as part of the campus culture that supported her healing the most.

Escuhemos, which is just like a hearing space for Latinos and Latinas to come and talk about their trajectory story through Latinindad. Conocimiento is very strong
because this whole thing that we’ve been talking about, everybody's identities are so shifted, and our perspective of our parents and the outside world, and how that ties into like us deciding what our identities are, rather than letting people tell us. That was very strong. And then, the Cultural Center always has food and supports naps and rest. The founder of La Casita Center (Karina Barillas). She speaks at UofL all the time … I think she’s like such a special person in the Latino community. I love hearing her talk. Especially when she’s on campus talking to the young Latina kids, you can be feminine and not be gentle. I enjoy seeing my peers express themselves in womanhood and whatever that means to them. And that’s special to me to see within the Latino community.

Cocodrillo’s experience in college and specifically at UofL has been positive, and she understands the collective healing and complexities of identities that are present in society. She uses her own critical consciousness to rise above all the societal pressures and be strong in her body, mind, and spirit while recognizing the mentors and leaders who are making ways for her to fully express herself and honor who she is.

Siete Azahares describes a course she took with a graduate student, Femi Rose, and a project she had to complete for the class, which supported her in thinking more critically about who she was through art.

At the time, my partner I was involved was a White man. I filmed a little scene of a snippet that I included in the film of him and me holding hands and against the background of a tree … for me, it was like when my Indigenous ancestors made contact with like the Spanish colonizers, that’s kind of what I wanted to incorporate from that project. And there was a scene where I had ink that was like spilling on the paper, and it just spread. It related to being descended from Indigenous peoples but not fully connected. Or feeling fully connected. And so that’s part of all of that was really nice for me to be able to think about and express this relationship and my identity. That was a really nice project to work on. Because it really did help reflect on like, my past my own connection, my own knowledge of my background, and my ancestors.

Siete Azahares experienced a freedom of expression in this course and the ability to contextualize and move through her feelings and confusion created by the complexities of identity. This student was in the honors college and participated in social justice scholarship programs on campus. She took many courses in college, and the one that
most stood out to her was a class in the women and gender studies department. Curricular programs that can strengthen students’ analysis and critical consciousness of identity and bring in art and other forms of expression can help students develop skills that will assist them in college and beyond.

Alebrije gives examples of what it was like to be a student leader in a Latinx/o/a/e Student Group, Latin American and Hispanic Student Organization (LAHSO), which later changed its name to Latino Student Union (LSU), as well as Conocimiento programming for him in college.

There are several, and a lot of it was definitely through LAHSO. Surrounding myself with people to whom I could relate is the most important one for me because, for me, I feel like being in a community where you are with people who speak a language similar to you alone is such a hurdle to overcome to be able to relate to someone and be able to say, I’m going to talk about this, it could be culturally oriented, and you’re going to be able to understand me and accept that, and not have culture shock. That alone, for me, was like a major, major healing space because you’re surrounded by people with similar, if not identical, backgrounds. That sense of being accepted takes a weight off your back, especially living here (in Kentucky). Through the Conocimiento talking circles that was another huge one, which allowed me to think about who I am, especially being surrounded by a support system that has such diversity; it got me thinking a lot about my identity and my identity as a Latin American student and a brother and everything … being able to see yourself in such different levels was also so healing.

Alebrije shares that connecting in the campus community and with people with similar cultural backgrounds, Conversation Circles, and identity exploration helped him through college. The weight lifted from his back helped him feel more accepted and whole on campus. Catrina shares Alebrije’s experience with student leadership and registered student organization on campus as she was seeking a community space and new friends with similar backgrounds.

I think LAHSO was and now LSU. I think that was a really good way to feel in a community, even if I wasn’t able to always go to events and stuff. I would see
people around campus, and I always felt like I had friends, even if we weren’t too close. Like they just kind of understood each other.

Both students can benefit from their social capital (Yosso, 2005) as a way to navigate college and find these tools within the college programs.

Alfajores shares how art and activism combined to provide him with an enriching weekend experience at a camp called Artivism in his time as an upperclassman in college, organized by a student group called Fighting for Immigrant Rights and Equality (FIRE):

I specifically remember we did an Artivist camp. That was really cool … It was somewhere south of Louisville … It was a whole weekend … we learned a lot of different pieces of art, whether it was through poetry, ceramics, painting, drawing, sculpturing, poems, and raps. And it was so eye-opening and also just powerful… The energy felt, for me, it felt like home like I was just around my own family. It was so enlightening to have folks who, when someone felt a certain way (scared, shame, etc.) everyone was attentive and just waiting to hear what their response was, and there was just no judgment; it was complete acceptance. And when somebody messed up, everyone would just stay quiet for a second and see if they were going to recover. And if they looked like they were fumbling, they would start clapping or have huge encouragement and be like, don’t worry, you got this, because, or at the end of the event, we had to do interactions or plays … had to do some type of role plays with, different instruments, or different designs or outfits and whatnot. And this one person just forgot their lines. And it was so powerful to see everyone, the energy everyone threw at that person, giving them the lines through their energy. And then they just continued. It was amazing. People were crying, and people were laughing.

Reclaiming spaces that offer support, connection, and comradery through artistic expression and are carefully curated and designed by artists and activists, as in the example above, can take students to new levels of awareness of “home.” Reclaiming space also acts as a release for students through their artistic expressions. Alfajores needed to experience this kind of community to realize it was possible as well as to help him create these spaces for others. Now, as a dance instructor, he curates lessons and inclusive dance halls for all levels of students. These experiences with the Artivism camp
and the programs he supported with HLI helped teach him about curating sacred spaces that feel like “home” for his students. In addition, he is currently working in the social work field, and he shares more about his service to others:

I think recognizing the work I’ve done over the years when it’s come to helping individuals with my resources, knowledge, experience, and willingness to give has been healing. Recognizing the tragedies that most people have gone through and that I’ve gone through has been rewarded in giving service to others.

Students were supported and experienced healing in ways that they had never experienced before. The peer leadership, sacred spaces, collective healing, freedom of expression through art in the classroom and community, lifting the weights of pressure from their back, and awareness of home and service were experiences that supported them, lifted them, showed them alternative ways of being, and modeled for them values that they can take with them for the rest of their lives. Through these programs and with student and campus support systems, students were able to transcend the oppressive dynamics in college and find “home” within themselves, on campus, and in the community through interactions with diverse faculty, participating in Cultural Center’s HLI co-curricular programming, and experiencing inclusive pedagogies in the classroom.

*Traditional Healing Practices: A Discovery Through Found Poetry and Image Analysis*

**Image Analysis and Found Poetry.** Each student’s image and journal entries showed me that their connections to art, nature, colors, artifacts, family lineage and roots, maternal and paternal love, culture, patterns, plants, flowers, musical instruments, water, and symbols were a part of their story. The dynamic relationship between their testimonios and the images and words they submitted as reflections in response to the journal prompt was inspirational, full of passion, and fully connected the dots that needed
to happen to analyze their experiences. Students were asked after their testimonio to submit an image of anything (art, drawing, poetry, picture, etc.) that they find relevant to their healing journey. In addition, they were asked to describe the image, why they selected it, what it meant to them, and its significance to their past, present, and future. Table 3 shares each student’s image, descriptive coding for each image, and found poetry written by me from their journal reflections. Each part of this table is meant to be viewed as a whole part of the analysis. The found poetry, image analysis, and image exist as one body of work versus individual entities. While reading the found poetry, I highlighted the parts of the poem that speak to the student’s healing.
### Table 3

*Found Poetry and Image Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Found poetry</th>
<th>Descriptive coding from image analysis</th>
<th>Image</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Siete Azahares | My late paternal grandfather  
Seated with his cane, surrounded by flowers of Guerrero Mexico  
At his death, I was devastated  
Loving  
Calm  
Peaceful  
The struggle of immigrant life  
Didn’t allow my parents to fully process all they endured  
Reminds us of the importance of documenting, celebrating, and speaking our history  
For future generations | • Love  
• At peace  
• Healed | ![Image](image1.png) |
| Berimbau   | Berimbau  
Encompasses healing for me  
I practice Capoeira  
It centers me in me | • Dance  
• Movement  
• Energy | ![Image](image2.png) |
It creates music
A community-oriented activity
Community
For as long as I can remember
I confide in people parents, brother, friends, community, elders
Our conversations are a part of my healing practice
Ventosa These images make me feel beautiful
I’m proud of my Indigenous roots
My first ofrenda, that my family never had, deserves to be celebrated
Mi bisabuela, one of the oldest living people in our small town in Mexico
She left a mark by a beautiful mural
These images make me feel connected to my roots
Are a representation of my healing journey
Accepting myself
Accepting my culture

Alebrije

Imagery, cuisine, music, and traditional décor

I am tethered to (our) culture regardless of the location

Showcased in my home everyday

To remind me of the beauty of my culture

- Roots
- Ancestors
- Care

Catrina

Gifted to me by my maternal grandmother

A skeleton dressed in fancy dresses wearing hats

It feels like a piece of her, she feels close even when she is far away

Encouraged me to look into their true meaning

Added to my growth in reconnecting to my roots

- Adornment
- Family
- Maternal

A reminder

To keep learning about the past

I want to continue as intrigued about my culture, my roots, and myself
A sign of love

A compass that helps guide me through my journey

**Koi**

Throughout my life I have experienced healing with the pond

I tend to the pond, during and with the changes of every season

What flourishes? What has to die to bring new life?

The scars left reflect in the moss, through the pond cracks, and the seemingly indestructible water lilies

I cultivate the life-giving energy that keeps my life going

**Cocodrillo**

Cuba is shaped like a cocodrillo and its so green from the sky

The view as an eight year old girl was astonishing

This little green corner

With its pieces of history and earth

Remind me that home is inside of me The
value of loving the people around you is priceless

The earth works so beautifully with us to make us feel connected and inspired

Cempasúchil

There was unfinished business after my father died

As a child of an alcoholic parent there was a lot of trauma

I blamed myself for not doing enough

I felt ashamed and insignificant because my dad didn’t share details of his life

I was filled with anger for taking on responsibility that I didn’t feel was mine to take on

I was mad at my mom for caring unhealed trauma from my dad when she raised me

I found reliability in books and poems

Words that describe how I felt at the time

The feeling of being unable to hold someone and having them out of reach

• Grief
• Transition
• Relief
But we find pieces of them in others and in the world

They live in our hearts

Pain is best coped with when its shared with others who carry the pain of loss

In the moments that feel too real
I celebrate Dia de Los Muertos

I'm reminded of the beauty in life, even in death and to feel close to my Mexican culture

These words, capture a moment in grief

While I am not at the end of my journey
I come to love and embrace my healing

Chocho Roja
I am my own friend in the process of healing all versions of me

Talk to and encourage the parts of myself that need love and tenderness

The green signifies nature through every step

The sun is a natural element that reminds me of how much a part of this universe we are

• Self-love
• Connection
• Earth and sun
Alfajores

The forces of two sides

Two worlds
Two viewpoints
Two decisions

What do we already know to be true and safe for us?

When allowed to be free, there are numerous opportunities to take risks

When sheltered, there are few moments we take risks

The energy are forces of the two sides

They unite and continue to create life around us

Decision after decision

**Image Analysis.** Connecting the images with the words of participants from journals and testimonios bridged the experiences and memories of the participants. The image each student submitted offered me a deeper insight into their lives, what they see or experience as healing in their lives, and how it is represented. The words I created for
description coding for the image analysis for each student are love, at peace, healed, dance, movement, energy, beauty, pride, colors, roots, ancestors, care, adornment, family, maternal, grounding, flow, free, safe, love, peace, grief, transition, relief, self-love, connection, earth and sun, spiral, interconnected, and complexity. It felt intuitive at this stage to create thematic categories of the image analysis coding of emociones, spiritualidad, and el cuerpo to support defining the body’s experience of healing and connect it to more tangible realities familia, arte, and naturaleza for the student.

Within each part of the student’s being emerges their healing within familía, arte, and naturaleza, and the terms from descriptive coding from the images are as follows:

1. The words connected to familia are roots, ancestors, family, maternal, interconnected, and pride.

2. The words connected to arte and naturaleza are colors, adornment, earth, and sun.

The following categories created as part of the image analysis are meant to support more profound meaning-making for the student’s healing experience within higher education, community, and familial settings while also connecting to their whole selves of mind, body, and spirit connections.

1. I placed the words peace, healed, energy, beauty, transition, and self-love inside their spirituality to describe their images.

2. I placed the words pride, care, flow, free, safe, love, peace, relief, and complexity inside their emotional bodies to describe their images.

3. I placed the words dance, movement, and grounded from their images inside their bodies to describe their images.
The categories created from the image analysis are not meant to stand alone and can be interwoven and interconnected throughout students journeys with healing. The importance of this image analysis is that when pairing it with the journal submissions that led to the found poems for each student, we can see further into their thoughts and feelings and assess which words symbolize their healing experiences. The words from image analysis support the creation of found poems for each student and the collective found poem crafted.

**Found Poetry.** Found poetry provides an opportunity for me to be an “artful scientist” (Patrick, 2016, p. 385) and “explore and explicate the lived experiences” (p. 386) of the research participants. This method allows the data from the students' journal reflections to transcend the colonial educational frameworks of epistimicide (de Souza Santos, 2016) and make meaning centering the students lived experiences through Chicana feminist epistemologies (Bernal, 1998). Instead of using the words for the testimonies for the found poetry section, I used the journal reflections to weave in the concepts from the testimonios to the journals, images, and found poetry. This method provides for more meaning-making and layers of analysis to connect to the participants’ words and experiences. In each poem, I believe highlighted sections represented significant areas of healing for the students. I member-checked the poems with students by sending them both their own found poem and the collective found poem I authored. Students reactions to the poems resounded with feelings of excitement and hope. They shared that the poems connected with the emotions and the journeys they had experienced. They also praised how concise the poems were and how they resonated deeply with them. One participant was moved to wanting to create art from her poem.
In addition to the poems for each student, I also authored one collective found poem from all ten testimonialistas. In addition to combining their words, I also brought the themes from the image analysis of emociones, spiritualidad, cuerpo, familia, naturaleza y arte into the poem as I organized the words of participants and interwove their ideas together. Below is the collective testimonialista found poem I authored:

Our Healing Journey
I am my own friend in the process of healing all versions of me
The scars left reflect in the moss, through the pond cracks, and the seemingly indestructible water lilies

I talk to and encourage the parts of myself that need love and tenderness
It reminds me that home is inside of me
The value of loving the people around you is priceless
Pain is best coped with when it's shared with others who carry the pain of loss
I confide in people
Parents, brother, friends, community, elders
Our conversations are a part of my healing practice

Imagery, cuisine, music, and traditional décor
I am tethered to (our) culture regardless of the location
She feels close even when she is far away

I’m proud of my Indigenous roots
My first ofrenda,
In the moments that feel too real
I celebrate Dia de Los Muertos
I'm reminded of the beauty in life, even in death
To feel close to my Mexican culture
A representation of my healing journey
Accepting myself
Accepting my culture

A reminder
To keep learning about the past
Document, celebrate, and speak our history for future generations
A compass that helps guide me through my journey
What flourishes? What has to die to bring new life?
The energy are forces of the two sides
They unite and continue to create a life around us
Decision after decision
The earth works so beautifully with us to make us feel connected and inspired
The sun is a natural element that reminds me of how much a part of this universe we are
The green signifies nature through every step
Throughout my life, I have experienced healing with the pond

These words capture a moment in grief
While I am not at the end of my journey
I come to love and embrace my healing
I cultivate the life-giving energy that keeps my life going
Through this collective found poem, the story almost feels complete, but still undone. As the words are woven together, the themes of the imagery analysis with the words of the participants’ reflection journals provide a form of collective healing of the whole self (emotional, spiritual, and physical) while grounding the healing in practices found in family, nature, and art. We are more complete than before but never done with the work; we still need to remember the traditional healing practices found in home and community and weave them into the story.

*Remembering Traditional Healing Practices*

Remedios de casa translates into English as home remedies. The testimonios uncovered how students’ families heal them with herbs and herbal remedies and then expanded to encompass how food, song, music, altars, and cultural practices are used in the home for healing, love, and support. The remedios de casa remind us who we are, our strength, the intuitive sense where you just know it is in our bodies, wrapped like a rebozo or poncho around our hearts, and soothes the soul like a warm fire in the winter. Many of the students lived at home while in college. Their mothers, aunts, fathers, and siblings would support them with remedios of home and family, the smile or joke of a friend, an honest conversation with a mentor, a family recipe, remembering music from their countries, a symbol, ritual, or altar practice. Many times, in the process of
remembering healing practices or knowing what was soul-nourishing for the students, it took them a pause or an experience on campus, in the community, with friends, or at work to allow them to slow down enough to connect with the inner wisdom that they already have to remember what they already know. They needed to trust themselves enough to be guided by their own “homemade theory” (Levins, 1998). These remedios de casa, in the students’ words and through their eyes and remembering, bring us closer to their homemade theories.

**Altars and Artifacts**

Cocodrillo described her healing journey as “currently through season two of a really, really long show. Yeah, we got to know the characters. We have some favorites, but there’s still so much story to unfold.” I laughed during the testimonio and chuckle now while I write this. This student's humor and outlook on life are so positive and forward-thinking. Her humor continued throughout our time together; she had many stories about her family. Cocodrillo shares in her testimony the convergence of many religions in Cuba when she describes her altar at home, “I have Oshun, who’s an African goddess, but in Cuba, Yoruba and Catholicism is very mixed. So, you know le prendemos candela a Oshun, you wear your yellow, your white, and then you also go and pray to La Santa Maria… I always put the flowers out for them.” While Cocodrillo learned many practices from her mother, Alfajores did not necessarily learn the same. He reflects, “my parents and all my uncles and aunts were assimilating to American culture. So, if there were certain traditional healing practices, it definitely wasn’t brought over here.” Even though he could not recollect healing practices from family, he described a time in my
office when we used a gong to reconnect to ourselves and how it reminded him of the
music from his culture.

In the learning and remembering that students experienced, they are also inspired
to adorn themselves with the clothing from Mexico that brings them closer to home and
their families, as reflected in this passage from Catrina.

In college, I decided to touch base again and started wearing a lot more like
traditional embroidered shirts … Particularly where my mom’s from, there’s a
large Indigenous population, and so much of it is still represented throughout the
state. There are a lot of like artisanal things and I like to decorate my room with
pottery and jewelry from there. I like the way that it looks. It makes me happy. It
reminds me of home. I call Mexico home because I spend a lot of time where my
grandma’s from, and we check in and I visit her pretty often. And it’s like a
second home to me … My aunt does a lot of embroidery for a lot of clothes. In a
way, it’s like feeling close to my family … carrying them with me even when I’m
not around. So even if I’m far away, it always feels like she’s close.

Alebrije shares a sentiment similar to Catrina from the artifacts from Mexico he displays
in his home all year.

I have little alebrije here in my house. I have catrina, that’s always out regardless
of whether it’s the day of the dead or not. I have my catrina up all the time
because it’s something that I see, and I’m like, oh, home because I also got it from
home. I bring back little things here and there that always tie me back to Mexico.

Altars and artifacts from Mexico and Cuba supported these students in college by feeling
closer to home, family, and traditions even when they were far. The items act as sources
of influence on their memory and remembering. They are the items they carried with
them for their healing and remembering journeys. I can imagine each student telling
stories from these artifacts to their children in the future and using them as tools to pass
on their memories and traditions.
Art, Music, and Dance

Alfajores was the first student ambassador I brought on to support the design, creation, and implementation of the programs in the Cultural Center for Latinx students. He had a small desk and space to study when he was not in class or working. He shared this memory of one day in the office with me when I lightly tapped a gong we had sitting on the bookshelf beside my desk, and he was reminded of music from his culture.

I always remember that one day in your office ... there was an event coming up and you hit the gong and then you looked at it, and you’re hearing the sounds and the effects of that. I thought that was so cool ... hearing certain sounds was like one of the things that I felt like was healing because then it also reminded me of how music is such a huge importance within our culture ... I remember from my family all the Cumbia they would play ... the Bachata or Merengue ... so I felt like that was more of sounds that we would create or have in the office. Which was indirectly healing ... it was almost like you’re in a trance, the circular thing where you know, you’re falling asleep, you’re just looking at it, but you’re hearing it, and that’s what having what makes your brain just stop and settle, for your eyes to relax and just witness what’s happening visually. Then your ears ... blocking out other sounds or even allowing other sounds to be heard, but still focusing on that one specifically, I’ve always thought that was that good.

The memories of music that they hold in their spirits can provide them with practices they will want to do forever. I was not surprised to hear Alfajores love of music come forward. He is a salsa, merengue, and bachata dance teacher now, and when on campus, he taught dance lessons for our events. His rhythm and skills move his feet in a familiar way that transcends him from his body like he is dancing with his ancestors. It is beautiful to witness. Similarly, Berimbau shares his experience with Capoeira, a Brazilian martial art:

I never picked up something that I was just like; this is what I want. I want to continue to do this for the rest of my life. And every time I’m sad, I’ll do capoeira. If I’m trying to think through something, I’ll just do capoeira. And, you know, it’s something that grounds me in who I am, my principles and purpose.
Dance and movement are essential to our body's healing, and connection to art and music can support students’ healing journeys. Practiced as a hobby through college, the students found passions that supported their healing journeys into their careers and later in life.

**Connections to Earth and Community**

Siete Azahares reminds herself that “our ancestors wanted us to have an embodied experience to fully feel the earth,” and this brings me back to the realization that even though all students did not learn about traditional healing practices directly from the family, our ancestors do want us to decolonize and learn new ways of being that can sustain us through life. Conversations with friends create a sacred space for the students through feeling validation and support. As Siete Azahares speaks more about what the ancestors desire, she reflects:

I try to keep that in mind because I have a tendency to really get in my head. I’m trying to move my head from not thinking of healing as oh, you light incense and you drink herbal tea, and you just meditate, which is that. I mean, that’s part of it. Right? But also, I like, trying to expand my definition of healing too. I do feel healed when I have good in-depth conversations with friends, you know, where I do feel like it helps me heal even if it’s just complaining or venting to someone and having them affirm, Okay, you are not overreacting, your feelings are valid, it's okay, that helps me heal a little bit from the daily kind of trauma in my experience with capitalism and is also not being in that academic bubble anymore.

As Siete Azahares has left college, she is finding new ways to cope with all she is facing. Koi’s family makes their unique practices and traditions and shares them with all the children. She told me about a vial of sand that she and her family carry with them from sand that they gather in Destin, Florida, and the family makes containers of sand that act as a reminder to ground and stay calm. She shares:

We like to use things like this sand and seashells to ground ourselves. Anytime we’re feeling overwhelmed or feeling kind of up in the clouds, we grab this vial, massage it in our hands, and focus on center(ing) ourselves whenever we need to. She(mom) has her own, I have my own, and my brother has his own. That's like a
little thing we’ve come up with, and it really helps, surprisingly enough. I think you create a ritual like this, and it works.

Koi and Siete Azahares connect to earth using tokens of sand, shells, rituals, and deep connections with friends to help ground and sustain them, their families, and their communities. Healing as a practice happens in the community and through many natural elements, as seen through the students experiences. They reported feeling validation, grounding, and healing.

**Home as Sanctuary and Sacred Space**

The home was a continuous theme in the testimonios. The place of home can be in their existing homes with their families in Louisville, Kentucky, or their home countries. Home can also be in themselves, as Cocodrillo so eloquently pointed out in her reflection journal, “home is inside of me.” All of these examples illustrate students’ remembering of healing in the home through healing practices of wearing traditional clothing, dancing, martial arts, artifacts, stories, traditions, conversations with friends, and altars. The following stories are examples of herbs, food, herbal remedies, limpias, and rituals used in the family, home, and community as well as body therapies that students shared.

Hearing family stories is a practice that students can also carry with them into their futures and continue to lean on for the rest of their lives as a practice and to pass on to the generations that come after them. Koi shares,

For me, in my home, I know that we’ve never been shy or embarrassed to express those traditions. At home, we still have Dia de los Muertos altar that we do at our own home. We set up our mantle and our candles, and we have pictures of our great-grandparents. My mom still remembers her favorite foods, so she goes and she buys them conchitas, and she gives them beer and wine and all those things. And she tells me stories about them, and particularly my great-grandfather … I didn’t get to meet him.
It is as though when the students discovered or remembered practices from their families, it unleashed a part of their memory that they can practice now even when their family is no longer here with them. Cempasúchil explained:

(Dad) never talked about his Latinx identity either, and so to have to dance with him and see how good he was in Cumbia ... I saw a bit of his identity there, you know, and I had a flashback, and it was one of those things where I was like, I’m just happy. I got to dance with my dad ... I never got to do ... it’s a memory I hold dear. You know, because it was like a little window to what he enjoyed in his youth that he didn’t share with me. And it was nice. It was healing ... I’m learning how to do this. I’m learning how to dance salsa ... I’m embracing it, and I’m learning more, and I’m sharing it with my friends ... we’re doing this in the community.

When dancing and remembering her father and the few memories she carried with him, Cempasúchil can work through her grief and find ways to take the memory of her father with her through the rest of her life.

**Herbs, Herbal Remedies, and Food**

Students spoke of many herbal remedies and food that supported them from their family’s kitchen. Chamomile was often the herb of choice if they were suffering from stress or overwork. In addition, many students shared that their moms or aunts would cleanse them with a huevo, a very common cleansing practice. Students also shared plants like cinnamon for cleansing and aloe and tomatoes for burns. One student even shared how committed his grandfather was to his remedios de casa, that he rarely went to the doctor and used artichoke teas for his blood sugar and diabetic conditions.

**Alebrije**

My grandpa had some crazy teas that he would drink. There was one particular tea that he called Alcachofa ... it's artichoke tea. Well, this man would make himself this Alcachofa every day. He’s diabetic, mind you. He would not go to the doctor. But he swore on his life that this tea kept him alive ... he would drink his artichoke tea every day, and like he had different teas this was the one that I remember the most. But I knew that the Alcachofa was specifically for his
diabetes, you drink it every day. He had all these different little containers with
different teas that almost looked like twigs too. And I didn't know what they were
so but that that was his way of that was his medicine. That was his way to relieve
whatever it was that was going on.

Siete Azahares
Herbs always play a major role in our diet and our culture. When I was an
undergrad, if my mom noticed I was stressed, it was always like tea de manzanilla
o te de siete azahares or some kind of herbal remedy. Whenever she saw that I
was very nervous, my mom sometimes would sonarme with the huevo, you know,
if she noticed that I was really stressed or if I just or If I just seemed off to her.
She would say, “let me let me cure you with the huevo so that you can feel
better”… because of the stress of school and flu seasons, and we were students
surrounded by each other’s germs, I inevitably got sick. It was again healing with
those kinds of herbal remedies. She would make this concoction of baking soda,
limon, and sal, in heated water, and she’ll give it to me to help clear my issues.
Catrina
Whenever we’re congested, she (mom) likes to make this tea. She puts onion,
apple, cinnamon, honey, and lime juice, and it detoxifies your chest and basically
like it lets you sleep better because you’re not coughing all night. She does also
like putting aloe on, like burns and stuff. Also, tomato. Whenever she would get
burns in the kitchen. She would rub tomato on herself so that it wouldn’t hurt. She
said her grandma used to do that and it always worked.
Koi
We put canela at your window to keep bad energy and bad things at bay. Of
course, peppermint tea and chamomile tea. And what’s hilarious, I know it’s a
meme, but it’s true … VapoRub, everything is cured with VapoRub.

Along with herbs, eggs, and other goods from the kitchen used for teas to support
ailments and cleanse the home, Ventosa provided more insight into the huevo cleansing
with her story below of “mal de ojo.”

Limpias and Rituals

Ventosa
I remember my cousin came a few years ago, and she had a bad stye on one of her
eyes. My tia did a cleaning on her, and it came out that someone did give her ojo,
and then it kind of started going away.

I asked Ventosa to explain more about what is meant by “si te dan ojo” (If you are
given the evil eye) or also known as mal de ojo, and she shared:

It just means that someone has looked at you with bad intentions, whether they’re
envious of you or something like that. And it can negatively affect your body and
your energy. So, to cleanse it, we use the egg, and it takes that energy away. And then you crack it open at the end of it. And it shows all the spikes from the egg to the egg yolk and stuff. And then the egg yolk will also have an eye on it. And you’re not supposed to look directly at it because then you’re bringing it back up.

Another practice that she learned in the family was from her aunt, who practices cupping therapy on her body to help her with her back pain.

My aunt knows how to do this thing called Ventosa, which is a cupping therapy on your back. I have really bad back pain. And for a while, I was going to chiropractic massages, and it just was helpful for the moment. But then, after that, it would come back. Then I just started going to my aunt. And she gets one of those small candles and puts it on a quarter. And then she puts a cup over it. And then she starts gliding on your back. And then, eventually, she takes the inflammation out with that.

During the testimonio with Chocho Roja, she was visiting her family in Bogotá, Colombia, and her aunt had recently hurt herself. Hence, the whole family was with her providing support while she healed. The memories of what she experienced as a child were ever present for her in real-time. She walked me through some of their practices and even let me talk to her aunt briefly about plants and herbs that they use at home.

Chocho Roja
I remember I definitely feel like I have celebrated ceremonies or rituals like that, throughout my whole life, mostly within my family, and are usually related to the wellness of a member of the family. So, for instance, if somebody’s feeling sick or ill … there’s always cleaning of the space. We clean the area with herbs, making sure if somebody is sleeping in a room where they are sick, they will like to ask the person to leave for a second and clean their room. So, they can continue healing, but there’s always a lot of space cleaning. Collective healing is happening. I think that the herbs and all the remedies come with it, and that’s what they do, they come to you, and everybody … will pitch in…we use calendula because that is like a cicatrisante, like healing inside. This kind of collective brings all the knowledge of everybody. Rosemary and Rue are definitely for home vapor … and many other herbs.

When babies are born, they put this little bracelet with seeds, you know, like red chochos or seeds that have like a cross … that’s a perfect example of we will make sure that it has some religious ties, but at the same time, we will make sure that it also has all our beliefs on it like these red seeds that will protect our children. And you know, remember … calling my mom and being like, Mom, I’m
feeling this way. Is there anything that I can do or drink to make me feel better? And even if I’m sick or just soul sick.

The limpias, herbs, herbal remedies, foods, and rituals found in the home and remembered by the students connected them to stories of childhood, family, and ways that their cultures supported them and their families throughout their lives. These traditional healing practices play a role in students’ lives and one that should not be forgotten and integrated more into the daily lives, support systems, and pedagogies in higher education.

Finding wholeness for the students was uncovered through campus programs, faculty, peers, and staff who provided sacred spaces, supported students through their critical consciousness development, and helped them through their identity explorations and college experiences. Through found poetry, a collective experience emerged with the journal and images that students submitted as part of this research. Students’ healing was tied to family and culture, naturaleza, art, and music and explored through their minds, body, and spirit. Healing was felt in the community, family, artifacts, and altars and at home for ailments such as being soul sick, mal de ojo, and general conditions like stress, lack of sleep, and anxiety. Cleansing energies, space, and the physical body were practices used in their homes and uncovered by the students. Additionally, art, music, and dance came through in the stories and are practices that most students are currently practicing and teaching others.

Summary

Through testimonios of ten Latinx/o/a/e students who attended the University of Louisville since 2015 or are current students, I uncovered incidents of harm, identity, and traditional healing practices. Weaving their experience of healing, identity, and
community cultural wealth through a feminist epistemology, LatCrit framework, and my cultural intuition (Bernal, 1998), many images emerged to make meaning of their stories. Using the flower, roots, and ecosystem for Latinx student success assisted in understanding and situating the students’ experiences within nature, this present moment and using my own cultural intuition as a researcher in the process. As their lived experiences emerged through their stories of home, family, culture, traditions, and immigration, many of the types of wealth from Yosso’s (2005) model of community cultural wealth (CCW) came to the surface. They were seen in all of their stories, including incidents of harm. CCW was seen as a pathway to healing for students as it provided a place and understanding for all that they have been through to support them through the educational pipeline and honor and respect all parts of where they came from and who they are in educational spaces. Not knowing it, CCW became their anchor and path to healing through college. As depicted in the flower (see Figure 4), CCW is the flower's stem with a caterpillar climbing up and down the spine. This caterpillar symbolizes the transformation that students will undertake in college while participating in cultural rituals and university-supported programs that center students’ cultural spirituality (Triana et al., 2020). Uncovering student’s stories of identity, many more harms, stressors, and feelings of shame came forward in their experiences. They also recognized that their cultural wealth, including linguistic wealth, were assets that would support them in their lives. Despite all they were going through in college, while also navigating the socio-political issues such as the Trump effect (Pérez & Saavedra, 2020), institutional barriers (The Sombrero Gate), and societal inequities (navigational wealth), they endured and resisted.
However hard all of this was and is for the students, dreaming, and wholeness were always present in their lives to provide a pathway to honor themselves further, their families, and their ancestors. Through their college experiences, they found healing with staff, faculty, mentors, and peers in Cultural Center programming, community connections, and the collective experience of healing and identity exploration with their peers (social wealth) and their families and home. Through a collective found poem I authored for the students from their journal entries, their resistance wealth (Yosso, 2005) came out strongly as they fought against the cultural norms and oppressions they experienced in college and their lives (navigational wealth). Their collective healing continued through their experiences with herbs, rituals, art and music, altars, artifacts, connection to earth and community, sacred spaces, food, limpias, and ritual. They described feeling at home, remembered stories of their grandparents, fathers and mothers, tíos, and tías, and desired a better future for their siblings and future Latinx/o/a/e students in el Nuevo Sur (aspirational wealth). These testimonios provide a glimpse into the students’ experiences of how identity, community cultural wealth, and healing practices were present for them in their college years. I hope these stories can act as a catalyst and driver of hope for the next generation of Latinx college students en el Nuevo Sur.
CHAPTER V
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? ¿HACIA DONDE VAMOS?: WATERING THE DREAMFIELD

Rendón (2009) outlined *Sentipensante Pedagogy* as a set of agreements for educators to “assemble and validate a pedagogical Dreamfield based on newly constructed agreements that speak to who we are as whole human beings- intelligent, social, emotional, and spiritual” (p. 48). This chapter is committed to watering this dreamfield through the experiences uncovered in the student's testimonios and to situating it within high-impact practices in the field of student affairs.

**Restating the Problem**

This research uncovered testimonios of traditional healing practices, community cultural wealth, and complexities of identity for Latinx students. El Nuevo Sur is a place where student experiences through the educational pipeline is inadequately supported, and students experience assimilation, discrimination, and incidents of harm. Furthermore, their institutional and societal inequities can feel like a tidal wave of negative experiences and emotions. When students arrive at college, they bring many of these experiences with them. It can be challenging to adapt to the environment and can create experiences of assimilation. On the other hand, college can be a place that nourishes their garden and helps them get closer to their healing and identity journeys. By embracing community cultural wealth and adapting the Dreamfield for student affairs, there is hope for the future. So, where do we go from here? We go to the Dreamfield and ensure that the
institution is willing and able to water the garden of flowers and provide the needed nutrients for student success and survival.

**Purpose of the Study**

This research aimed to discover and listen for themes of how healing practices, community cultural wealth, and identity are experienced and woven together in the lives of Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur. Through my research, I sought to provide the reasoning through the students’ voices for creating new frameworks for student affairs professionals and educators to use when developing programs and support services for Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur.

**Summary of Findings**

Though the testimonios, students remembered many healing practices, incidents of harm, and origin stories from their families, in their homes, through their travels, and memories of their land and lineage. The research questions I explored were:

- How do healing practices, community wealth, and identity affect Latinx student’s college experience in el Nuevo Sur
- In what ways do higher education institutions support Latinx student healing modalities in curricular and co-curricular settings?

I drew the following conclusions:

1. Educational institutions at the K-12 level have not been supportive of the students’ experiences of identity, cultural wealth, and healing. They were spaces where incidents of harm occurred for the students that framed their outlook on education as a whole. When they arrived at the university, they carried pain and
trauma with them that were addressed in the programmatic functions of the student support services in the cultural center.

2. The programs that have been supportive of students’ development, such as LLCEC and UofL Cultural Center’s HLI, other diversity centers on campus, diverse faculty and staff, and course work all integrated values of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005, 2006), embracing the messiness of identities (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016), and incorporating cultural relativity (Campesino et al., 2009), into their curricular pedagogies and co-curricular programming.

3. Healing practices, community wealth, and identity exploration and journeys are present and critical to the student’s college experiences. They are concepts that they will also carry into their careers, which makes these areas of focus essential to student programming and curricular pedagogies across the academy.

4. Student affairs practitioners and educators need to embark on the work of knowing more about healing practices, community cultural wealth, and identity explorations of Latinx students en el Nuevo Sur through a LatCrit, Chicana feminist perspective and embrace the internal work to “heal their own internalized dominance and oppression” (Lara, 2008, p. 37) and “one cannot facilitate, teach, and engage others unless one changes and shifts consciousness within” (Saavedra & Pérez, 2012, p. 441).

5. Collecting testimonios and oral histories of Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur in collaboration with digital archives and campus partners can provide more insight into students' lives, families, and experiences. It should continue as a tool for practice and for developing programs for future students. This technique also
provides the community a space to remember and document the contributions of Latinxs/as/os/es within the broader community (Thompson & Baugnon, 2017).

6. Students found sacred spaces in the home with family, on campus, community, and friends. Engagement around these areas in programming and the classroom can further support Latinx/o/a/e students’ college success.

**Discussion of Healing Practices**

Through image analysis, found poetry, and the testimonios, it was clear that students experienced healing at home, community, and on campus. The themes that emerged from their stories were naturaleza, community, family and culture, sacred spaces, art and music, and remedios de casa (see Figure 4). Students’ connections to these practices were profound and helped make more sense of the types of programs, services, and curricula that could be offered in higher education. Utilizing traditional healing practices in program development and curricula can support students in ways beyond the regular support services or pedagogies. Examples provided by the students that supported their college years were many and will be highlighted more in-depth in the Dreamfield section of this chapter. In the context of education, I found that the traditional healing practices uncovered by students, as explained in the Remembering Traditional Healing Practices section in Chapter IV, can be utilized in the classroom and programs as a way to honor student’s lived experiences, create sacred spaces (Soto et al., 2009), provide pathways to heal soul wounds (Comas-Diaz, 2013) and honor their cultural spirituality (Triana et al., 2020). Furthermore, faculty and staff can deeply engage through their healing and critical consciousness development through a Chicana and Black feminist “theoretical home” (Saavedra & Pérez, 2012).
Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth

Yosso’s (2005, 2006) community cultural wealth model provided a framework to understand the students avenue for healing. It supported the translation of the many harms that students have experienced throughout their educational pipelines into a wealth-based approach. It was evident in all of their testimonios that although they had endured many traumas, incidents of harm, socio-political, and institutional oppressions, they each persevered and gained more insight into their families stories, while discovering more about themselves and their identities, all while dreaming of creating a different future for themselves, their peers and siblings.

Discussion of Identity

Students experienced supportive environments, sacred spaces where they could critically analyze their realities and develop as individuals. When working with Latinx/o/a/e students, it is crucial to see identities through multiple lenses, such as the ones presented in this dissertation. In addition to understanding the lenses and categories, student affairs professionals can also create their analysis based on students’ direct experiences. This can be done through story collection (oral histories, testimonios, narrative research) and placing students’ lived experiences front and center. In addition, hosting identity workshops that allow students to collectively and deeply analyze the socio-political impacts of racism, colonialism, and genocide on their communities and personhood can guide students through these complexities and support them toward healing.
Discussion of Testimonios

The process of testimonio research is a process of becoming one with the stories, witnessing, and digesting the words of the participants for prolonged amounts of time. It’s a process of being ready to take a journey with your participants and embody their stories. Throughout the process, various parts of their stories moved, surprised, and disturbed me.

I was surprised by the experiences that students had when they traveled to their home countries. They shared feeling high vibrations from the sites of the sacred pyramids, supported and cared for by their grandmother's hands, nostalgia from the smells, and feeling liberated when they met their extended family members. Their abilities to tap into their senses and connect to the parts of themselves that felt moved or inspired and articulate it to me in such detail and with confidence felt like I was with them in those moments. The two DACAmented students, who can not travel back to their home countries, experienced similar feelings when they traveled outside of the city. I was surprised by how much traveling outside their home state or city could impact their experiences.

I was moved as students shared stories about how the Cultural Center supported them through their college years and the ways that the programs impacted their lives. The sense of pride students have as Louisvillians and from Kentucky made me think a lot about how we define home—being rooted in multiple places and the ways that make Louisville, Kentucky, a place where harm, resistance, love, and pride can co-exist. Being a Latina from Kentucky or from a family who “followed the horses” (equine industry)
was a form of identity for the students in addition to their ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality.

I was disturbed by the stories of death, grief, and intergenerational traumas shared by the students, especially those from Cempasúchil. Her stories were so detailed, and her vulnerability with me throughout the testimonies had me in tears many times while analyzing her testimonio, journal, and image. Equally touching were the stories of harm students experienced in society and educational spaces. There were many commonalities in their stories, and I was overcome with grief many times while witnessing their stories and making meaning of the research. Students shared many incidents that I was in proximity to as well. Many memories came to the surface for me while in the testimonio process with the students. The testimonio process showed me how powerful of a research tool this methodology is. It is witnessing, sharing, and connecting in ways that allow for the truth and stories to come alive through the research process.

**Impact on the Field**

Honoring the lived experiences of community cultural wealth, cultural practices and traditional healing practices, and the complexities of their identities, students can and do survive the oppressive conditions they experience in life and in college. Institutions of higher education need to water the flower (student) field and help nourish the students’ experiences so that Latinx students not only survive but thrive through college. This metaphor is essential as we consider what institutions can do and how they support student success. Through this research, many stories emerged of how students experienced support in educational and community-based programs. In the following section, I outline how student affairs can build on this research to further support Latinx
student success in el Nuevo Sur by adapting Rendón’s (2009) Dreamfield created for faculty, teaching, and learning into the realm of student affairs and co-curricular settings.

**The Dreamfield for Student Affairs.** In *Sentipensante Pedagogy*, Rendón (2009) provided educators with new agreements to subscribe to when engaging with her concepts of creating a Dreamfield for teaching and learning. Rendón outlined these new agreements as:

1. Agreement to work with diverse ways of knowing in the classroom.
2. Agreement to embrace connectedness, collaboration, and transdisciplinarity.
3. Agreement to engage diverse learning strategies in the classroom.
4. Agreement to be open and flexible about being grounded in knowing and not knowing.
5. Agreement of multiculturalism and respect for diverse cultures.
6. Agreement to balance our personal and professional lives with work, rest, and replenishment.
7. Agreement to take time for self-reflexivity. (pp. 32–48)

Rendón’s agreements inspired me to think of all that could be created for Latinx/o/a/e students in higher education. In addition to these agreements, I suggest three foundational pillars that can impact the field. Student leadership development, teaching and learning, and equitable practices are the three pillars to adapt for the Dreamfield for Student Affairs. Many of the interventions highlighted in the following sections are supported by Lozano (2010) in her discussion of the role of Latino cultural centers at PWI’s in higher education. In addition, Abes (2016) use critical frameworks to outline myriad support systems for college students today by encouraging student affairs professionals to reimagine their work in theory and practice. The following interventions (see Figure 5) for Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur constitute the Dreamfield (Rendón, 2009) for Student Affairs.
**Student Leadership Development.** The students in this research had transformative and supportive experiences in college as they grew as leaders, developed their critical consciousness, and supported the growth of their peers. In programs such as peer mentoring, they connected to incoming freshman and transfer students and provided support networks that they were also experiencing in their first year on campus. Being involved in student organizations gave them a place to make friends, celebrate cultures, and advocate for the changes they needed on campus. In addition, informal student leadership networks were also valuable in students’ experiences in college as they explored identity, community, and healing. Informal groups created within the Conocimientos, Artivism Camp, and LLCEC programs were examples noted from the testimonios that acted as spaces outside of formal student organizations. Another tool to support students is providing them space, training, and support for their development as activists, organizers, and advocates for their needs within the institution and the community. These co-curricular programs can leverage the needed environment, culture, and support systems Latinx students need in college.

**Teaching and Learning.** Evident in Rendón’s (2009) work, the model for teaching and learning within education needs reform, and she provides agreements for educators to bring forward the changes required. These same agreements can be adapted to student affairs, especially within program development and design stages. Utilizing techniques from popular education such as conversation circles and world cafes in the design of programs such as Conocimientos, learning about others and one’s own culture, course projects, and identity exploration could be utilized throughout the college, K-12, afterschool and summer enrichment, as well as community-based programs for Latinx
students in el Nuevo Sur. The existing educational pipeline must integrate supportive, culturally relevant, and culturally significant programs for students throughout their educational journey. As realized through the testimonios, these kinds of sacred spaces provided the students with an enriched environment of support, belonging, and acceptance. Creating sacred spaces, the room's setup and how we place our bodies in the area are practices that can be applied to curricular and co-curricular settings. For example, sitting in a circle without any obstruction from a desk or furniture that divides the students from the professors or presenters is one way to remove the obstructions and create these sacred spaces. Additionally, using art and creative class projects was shared as a form of healing by some students in this research. Some of these same students also participated in cohort learning and living, which played a significant role in their college experiences regarding identity development, community creation, and healing. As students receive culturally relevant leadership development and learning in college, the same is needed for faculty and staff on college campuses. Programs such as the United We Dream Undocupeers series, which is led and facilitated by directly-affected students, are an extraordinary example of how to train staff and faculty about the issues of DACAmented and undocumented students in college. Training for faculty and staff should include topics that include challenges specific to Latino students and their families and that translate into barriers to their success in college.

**Equitable Practices.** Diverse faculty and staff on campus were noted by many of these students as positive influences on their development. While equitable hiring regarding race, gender, and sexual identity is essential to today’s college campus, hiring and retention of diverse faculty and staff are not enough. An additional layer to introduce
is community-engaged praxis, and that these hires are prepared to honor the importance of lived experiences, community, and identity development in the Latinx student body. Equally essential is for student affairs departments to prepare graduate students as the next generation of student affairs professionals to provide coursework in these areas. Multiculturalism in student affairs has expanded, and redesign of these courses and their teaching methods should occur frequently to ensure the next generation of student affairs professionals are adequately equipped to take on the many challenges they will face regarding serving Latinx/o/a/e students in el Nuevo Sur. As campus staff and faculty become more self-reflective and critically conscious, they can begin to support both the students and each other in more ways. For example, they can act as a voice and champion for the issues outside of their identity areas or be a support system for a sector of the campus that is being called out or targeted by current socio-political issues. This allyship can alter the campus culture by removing the burden of advocacy from those directly affected. Another equitable practice found in the testimonios is language justice. Providing students and their families with multi-lingual support systems through using Spanish and English in promotional materials and on-campus visits can help everyone feel included and comfortable speaking the language they are most comfortable using. Embracing Spanglish is also a part of the decolonial frameworks that can be adapted to co-curricular programming. Not all students are bilingual, and their language fluency can act as a barrier to their fully embracing their Latinx/o/a/e identities. Students found themselves supported, seen, and celebrated at cultural celebrations offered on campus. Therefore, creating space for student leadership (formal and informal organizing) to co-create and design the celebration of culture on campus through programs such as
Carnival and Dia de Los Muertos were events where students connected to peers, found support systems and saw themselves represented. Finally, the creation of institutional scholarships to support the funding of students’ college expenses was a way for students to feel more supported by the institution. For example, a fund to support DACA applications, purchasing books, scholarships for tuition, or stipends to support the peer mentorship programs were a few ways that students shared the diversity centers across campus supported them.

**Recommendations for Future Study**

Through this research, I used testimonios to describe Latinx/o/a/e students’ experiences of identity, healing, and community cultural wealth. As I analyzed and made meaning, I realized that each uncovered section could be its own focus of study. Recognizing the complexities and interwoven frameworks leads me to question who may have been missing from the research and whose voices were not gathered.

In relation to gender, there were no gender non-conforming or transgender participants as a part of the study. This area should be included in further studies to be fully inclusive of all the identities possible and to gain a more comprehensive view of how identities intersect for students. In relation to race and ethnicity, while many participants acknowledged lineages and ancestry of Indigenous and African cultures and people, none of the students used identities such as Afro-Latino in their descriptions. Including Afro-Latinx students is an area for future research so that this perspective can be added to students' experiences and to further address anti-Blackness within Latinx/o/a/e communities, external factors, and power dynamics of identity orientations experiences for students. In addition, researching traditional healing practices as
pedagogies of the home (Garcia & Bernal, 2021) and conducting testimonios across generations interviewing family members, mentors, and educators could provide further insights into experiences and practices that influence student success.

Mixed method studies could be developed to engage more students and understand more about healing practices, what students would like to learn, and what they are bringing to campus from their homes. Situating these culturally significant practices with health outcomes and wellness targets within disciplines such as psychology, public health, and social work fields could assist in learning more about supporting students and the broader community through traditional healing practices. In addition, contemplative practices and pedagogies that explore transdisciplinary approaches and use mixed methods could research a more in-depth look into health outcomes for students. Adapting the testimonio research design of this study with quantitative methods could expand this research and bring together multiple techniques and modalities that could impact both college campuses and community-based programs across the country.

The research design was robust and could use some expansion. In the analysis and grounding of the words of the testimonialistas within LatCrit (Valdes, 1997), Chicana feminist epistemologies (Bernal, 1998), student identity orientations (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001), categories (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012) and embracing the messiness (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016), I realized that the research inquiries that I developed around student identities may have limited student’s answers to questions about their identity. Asking them how they identified within their Latinidad helped me see what language they use to identify themselves as Latinx/o/a/e. Still, it may have limited their ability to
be more expansive and share their other identities regarding other races/ethnicities, class, gender, and sexuality. For future studies, updating the inquiries asked around identity and specifically naming Whiteness, colonization, anti-Blackness, and anti-Indigenous sentiments could result in different results and get to a deeper analysis of the student’s understanding of their identity, definitions of home, how they have experienced colonialism within their own lives, and steps they are taking to address the privileges they carry. Also, including more complex models of identity orientations of student development theory could allow the opportunity to orient the testimonios into a model that genuinely embodies the nuance and complexities of identities present in research participant's lives. In addition, a study built only on Latinx student identity development in el Nuevo Sur would enhance what has been developed for this research and contribute to more understanding of student’s experiences in the college years.

In the design of future testimonio research, I suggest in-person and more extended interactions. While my time with each participant was sufficient, more time would allow for deeper exploration and insight into their lives. Additionally, hosting the conversation in person rather than virtually could provide a more expressive and interactive environment.

**Research Beyond This Study**

Studying the identities of Latinx students in el Nuevo Sur is an immense undertaking and could be the sole focus of a dissertation. In this research, I sought to find the healing, liberation, and resistance of students within the higher education system in relation to their identities and experiences of harm and healing through community wealth in college. Many other foci could be adapted to a study, such as students’
experiences in rural versus urban campuses. Also, hosting the research in community
settings such as programs like the LLCEC, summer camps, or community programs that
support cultural organizing and remembering (language, art, dance, music) could be
valuable. A longitudinal study would track changes over time and could investigate how
experiences changed for students during their college years and into the first few years of
their careers. In addition, interviewing their parents and mentors could deepen their
understanding of family practices, external barriers, community cultural wealth, and how
families impact student identity development. Another research area would be to include
more current students who have no access to cultural programming within their
institutions to compare their experiences to students who do have cultural programming.
This could take place on two campuses in the same city to compare and contrast students’
experiences who are living in the same town and exposed to similar socio-political issues.
In addition, for future research, diving deeper into their frames of origin for their
identities could spark deeper inquiry into Latinx/o/a/e student's critical consciousness
development through the college years and which external factors are impacting their
decisions. The terms used to describe Latinos in the U.S. are in constant debate and
transformation; there will not always be a consensus as to the best terms to use for the
broader community and among students. For educators, this can be remedied by centering
the student's experiences and allowing them to self-identify while staying current on how
the terminology changes, why it changes, and how the current terminology being used
will support, hinder, or impact student's identity exploration.
Summary

The Dreamfiled for Student Affairs, adapted from Rendón’s (2009) *Sentipensante*, provides tangible examples (see Figure 5) of how campuses can develop and design support services for Latinx/o/a/e students on college campuses across the South. Through pillars such as leadership development, teaching and learning, and equitable practices, more fertile ground is created for current students and future generations to succeed. Through these testimonios of current and graduated Latinx/o/a/e students, the environment was provided that withstood changing seasons, many external factors, and incidents of harm through 2015–2022. Future studies could include more diversity of participants regarding race, gender, and sexual identity to deepen inquiry into the intersections of identities for the students. Mixed method studies would be beneficial, and adopting an interdisciplinary approach with fields such as social work, psychology, public health, and contemplative practices and pedagogies could lead to more research on the areas of traditional healing practices and the impacts of students’ experiencing these practices in curricular and co-curricular settings. Lastly, hosting the testimonios in person and for longer than two hours will allow for deeper exploration of topics such as identity. Research beyond this study could cover topics such as expanding on identity to cover the intersectionality of students' many identities. Studying urban and rural colleges to understand the dynamics at play and how students are experiencing identity, healing, and community cultural wealth within these settings would add insight into the influence of institutional type. Also, conducting similar research in community settings such as after-school or summer camps would help to gain more insight into the educational pipeline and what is happening for students at each stage. In addition, hosting testimonios with
parents and mentors for students could help connect more around how the ecosystems for students’ success are nurtured and supported in the family and the community. Lastly, comparing students in the same city but attending different schools could provide a contrast and comparison of experiences and further lend a deeper understanding of the Latinx student, family, and community in el Nuevo Sur.

The ecosystem for Latinx student success is a living and breathing system that requires support from the institution, teachers, advisors, mentors, friends, and professionals to grow and flourish. We must address the oppressive conditions facing Latinx college students today. Latinx students and their families deserve to be supported and seen through educational systems in el Nuevo Sur. Oppressive conditions can be addressed by watering the garden, tending to the dreamfield, and supporting students’ lived experiences. Through these testimonios, we discovered how the student experienced support and how they worked through the oppressive conditions using healing practices in college. Uncovering these healing practices provides many tools that can be applied in curricular and co-curricular settings. In addition, through a community cultural wealth framework, we can support the student's strengths by honoring their lived experiences of family, community, identity, and healing practices.

A more profound journey into understanding student's lives is encompassed when we know more about who they are, how they identify, and what leads them to their identity and healing. Embracing the complexities of identity allows students to experience a full expression of self and provides them an experience of integrating of their lived experiences into the woven fabric of educational institutions. This research gives hope and creates futures of possibilities for the student. A pathway has been
developed through this research. It’s a pathway of choice and an invitation to experience healing when you may not know that is what you need.
Figure 3

Ecosystem for Latinx Student Success
Figure 4

Uncovering Testimonios Visual Representation
A DREAMFIELD FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS

Equitable Practices

- Allyship
- Equity Center Programming
- Institutional Scholarships
- Cultural, historical, & political celebrations
- Hire, Retain, & Support Diverse Faculty & Staff
- Challenge oppression, racism, & inequalities on campus
- Language Justice—speaking Spanish & languages other than English
- Encourage the challenging of inequalities by faculty, staff, & students

Learning

- Popular Education
- Conversation Circles
- World Cafes
- Creative Class Projects
- Learning about other cultures
- Learning about own cultures
- Create Sacred Spaces on Campus
- Cohort Learning Models
- Identity Exploration - Conocimientos
- Programs and curricula in K-12 settings
- Programs and curricula in community settings with grassroots leaders
- Training campus staff and faculty on issues affecting Latinx students and families
- Challenge oppression, racism, and inequalities within yourself

Student Leadership

- Peer Mentoring Programs
- Recognized Student Organizations
- Informal Student Leadership Networks
- Activism, Organizing, and Advocacy against oppressive structures

The Dreamfield for student affairs was adopted to this research based on Laura Rendón's (2009) book, *Seniornepante Pedagogy*. 
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APPENDIX A

Testimonio inquiries to help guide the process

Healing

Of the aforementioned list of healing practices provided in the introduction to the study are there any that speak more to you? Why?

Have you participated in any healing programs and can you describe them and tell me more about them?

Tell me the story about uncovering healing/Indigenous practices – where were you, what did you feel, how were connections made?

Where do you feel you are on your healing journey?

What is a time when you have experienced your family practice healing practices from your culture?

What have you found to be nourishing to your process of healing?

Are there any practices that you do on a frequent basis? How did you learn them, and can you walk me through what the practice is?

Do you have an altar or symbols that you keep close to you in your home space? Can you tell me the stories from the altars or symbols?

What have you learned about your culture, identity, ancestral lands, traditions, and families from educators (faculty, staff, others) and on the college campus?

Identity

Where are your roots, who are your people, where is your land?

How do you identify in your latinidad?

Have your identities changed since you have been in college?

How do you feel your gender, ethnicity, social class, religion, sexuality, and race has contributed to your healing and identity journey?

What do you do for self-care and self-preservation? What helps you get through the day with all the barriers in the way of your success in college and life?
Were you involved in activism on campus or the community? Can you say more about what that was like for you?

Describe a time when you felt liberated on a college campus?

Are there specific authors you have read that have aided in your healing and identity journeys? Were there specific people or professors who supported you in college around the topics discussed today? How were they supportive of you? What actions did they take to support you?
APPENDIX B

Flyer distributed by student activists on campus in October 2015

U of L Diversity Vision Statement

The University of Louisville strives to foster and sustain an environment of inclusiveness that empowers us all to achieve our highest potential without fear of prejudice or bias.

We commit ourselves to building an exemplary educational community that offers a nurturing and challenging intellectual climate, a respect for the spectrum of human diversity, and a genuine understanding of the many differences—including race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, disability, religion, national origin or military status—that enrich a vibrant metropolitan research university.

We expect every member of our academic family to embrace the underlying values of this vision and to demonstrate a strong commitment to attracting, retaining and supporting students, faculty and staff who reflect the diversity of our larger society.

#Cultureisnotacostume #WhatWereYouThinking?
APPENDIX C

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

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<tr>
<td>CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS:</td>
<td>Jackie Powell 852-4101 <a href="mailto:jspowe01@louisville.edu">jspowe01@louisville.edu</a></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This study was reviewed on 07/27/2022 by the Vice Chair of the Institutional Review Board and approved through Expedited Review Procedure, according to 45 CFR 46.110(b), since this study falls under Category 7: Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

This study now has final IRB approval from 07/27/2022 through 07/26/2025. The following items have been approved:
IRB policy requires that investigators use the IRB “stamped” approved version of informed consents, assents, and other materials given to research participants. For instructions on locating the IRB stamped documents in iRIS visit:

Your study does not require continuing review per federal regulations. Your study has been set with a three-year expiration date following UofL local policy. If your study is still ongoing at that time, you will receive automated reminders to submit a continuing review form prior to the expiration date. If you complete your study prior to the expiration date, please submit a study closure amendment.

All other IRB requirements are still applicable. You are still required to submit amendments, personnel changes, deviations, etc… to the IRB for review. Please submit a closure amendment to close out your study with the IRB if it ends prior to the three year expiration date.

Human Subjects & HIPAA Research training are required for all study personnel. It is the responsibility of the investigator to ensure that all study personnel maintain current Human Subjects & HIPAA Research training while the study is ongoing.

**Site Approval**
Permission from the institution or organization where this research will be conducted must be obtained before the research can begin. For example, site approval is required for research conducted in UofL Hospital/UofL Health, Norton Healthcare, and Jefferson County Public Schools, etc...

**Privacy & Encryption Statement**
The University of Louisville's Privacy and Encryption Policy requires identifiable medical and health records; credit card, bank account and other personal financial information; social security numbers; proprietary research data; and dates of birth (when combined with name, address and/or phone numbers) to be encrypted. For additional information: http://louisville.edu/security/policies.

Implementation of Changes to Previously Approved Research

Prior to the implementation of any changes in the approved research, the investigator must submit modifications to the IRB and await approval before implementing the changes, unless the change is being made to ensure the safety and welfare of the subjects enrolled in the research. If such occurs, a Protocol Deviation/Violation should be submitted within five days of the occurrence, indicating what safety measures were taken, along with an amendment to revise the protocol.

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others (UPIRTSOs)

A UPIRTSO is any incident, experience, or outcome associated with an unexpected event related or possibly related to participation in the research, and suggests that the research may place subjects or others at a greater risk of harm than was previously known or suspected. The investigator is responsible for reporting UPIRTSOs to the IRB within 5 working days. Use the UPIRTSO form located within the iRIS system. Event reporting requirements can be found at: http://louisville.edu/research/humansubjects/lifecycle/event-reporting.

Payments to Subjects

In compliance with University policies and Internal Revenue Service code, payments to research subjects from University funds must be reported to the University Controller's Office. For additional information, please call 852-8237 or email controller@louisville.edu. For additional information: http://louisville.edu/research/humansubjects/policies/PayingHumanSubjectsPolicy201412.pdf

The committee will be advised of this action at a regularly scheduled meeting.

We value your feedback. Let us know how we are doing:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CCLHXRP

Melissa Evans Andris, PhD, Vice Chair
Social/Behavioral/Education Institutional Review Board MEA/jsp
CURRICULUM VITAE

Sarah Cecilia Nuñez
Email: nunez.sarah@gmail.com

EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) of Education Counseling and Personnel Services with College Student Personnel Specialization, May 2023–University of Louisville–Louisville, Ky
- Davis Putter Scholarship Class of 2020-2021
- 200-Hour Internship, Las Maestras Center for Xicana[x] Indigenous Thought, Art and Social Practice, UC Santa Barbara

Master of Public Affairs (MPA), 2010 - Western Carolina University – Cullowhee, NC
- Service Learning - NC Acts AmeriCorps Service, 300 hours completed
- Awarded the North Carolina Research Recognition Award
- Awarded 2010 Dean’s Outstanding Scholar

Bachelor of Arts with major in Interdisciplinary Studies: Latin America in a Global Context, 2004 - University of North Carolina at Asheville – Asheville, NC
- Honors-Deans List: 2003, 2004
- Scholarship Recipient-Hispanic College Scholarship Fund

Associate of Arts for College Transfer, 2002 - Asheville Buncombe Technical Community College – Asheville, NC
- Honors: Phi Theta Kappa

PUBLICATIONS


Sarah Nuñez Consulting, Asheville, North Carolina and Louisville, Kentucky
Owner
2007 – Present
Specialize in bridging cultures and building connections through consulting, coaching, and training in the nonprofit, public, and education sectors.
Clients/Projects:
- Pennsylvania Digital Literacy and Workforce Development, Grant Evaluation Team (2022-2023)
- E3: Education, Equity, and Excellence, Teaching Faculty (2017-Present)
- Colaborativa La Milpa, Systems Developer (2022)
- WNC Non-Profit Pathways, Workshop Facilitator and Coach for Bridge Foundation Grantees (2022)
- Community Foundation of WNC, DEIA Workshop Trainer (2022)
- Ashley Round Tree, Equity Consultant (2021)
- Jefferson County Public Schools, Diversity and Equity Speaker Series (Fall 2020)
- The Graduate Network, LearnX 2020, Social Media Consultant (2020)
- Louisville Latino Education Outreach Project, Strategic Planning Consultant and Coach (2020-2022)
- Blue Ridge Technical Community College Office of Immigrant and Latinx Students, Guest Lecturer and Workshop Facilitator (Fall 2020)
- Louisville Center for Nonprofit Excellence, Annual Conference Plenary Presenter (2017)
- Faculty and Healing Accompaniment Facilitator for Liberation School (2017-2019)
- Facilitator on Race and Equity Initiatives for 55,000 Degrees (2016)
- Center for Diversity Education UNC-Asheville, Project Manager for Mi Historia Traveling Exhibit (2014-2015)

University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky
Associate Director Cultural Center and Hispanic/Latinx Initiatives
July 2019- March 2020
Led collaborative equity programming with the Cultural Centers leadership team, students, and staff. Created programs focused on student success and retention of Black and Latinx/o/a/e students, developed assessment tools, and managed reporting, community relations, and fundraising initiatives.

University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky
Assistant Director Cultural Center’s Hispanic/Latinx Initiatives
March 2015-July 2019
Design, plan, and implement programs to reach Latinx/o/a/e students, families, faculty, staff, and alums at the University of Louisville. Directed the mission to build robust support systems for students that explored identities, developed leaders, provided coaching and mentoring for life success, shared
campus resources, and built community and campus collaborations.

- Team leader for the Louisville Latino Education Outreach Project, a coalition of 15 community-based organizations and educational institutions serving Latinos in cradle-to-career programs in Louisville, Kentucky
- Principal investigator for the study of Latinx Student experiences of social networks and discrimination at the University of Louisville with the Kent School of Social Work
- Creator and Co-Director, of the Latinx Oral Histories Project with Ekstrom University Archives and Special Collections
- Established, managed, and awarded three scholarship endowments for Latino and Undocumented students raising over $22,000 in 2017 from individual donors
- Developed and hosted Conocimiento Leadership Training: Bridging the Black and Brown Divide for diverse student populations with over 50 participants for six years
- Created Compas Latinx Peer Mentor Program in collaboration with REACH Mentor and Tutoring Center for incoming freshman and transfer students
- Manage staff, interns, work studies, and student ambassadors

Asheville Buncombe Community Relations Council, Asheville, NC
Executive Director
Feb 2012-Dec 2013
Direct board of directors, funders, volunteers, and community partners to execute the organization’s mission of partnering with people and organizations to embrace responsibility for equity and inclusion. Managed organization operations and was responsible for all programs, fundraising, financial management, volunteer management, human resources, and expansion. Programs included resources, referrals, and education for discrimination cases, fair housing outreach, conflict mediation, police-community relations, and diversity and inclusion training.

Western Carolina University (WCU) Asheville, NC
Regional Assistant Director of Admissions based on A-B Tech Community College 2007 – 2012
Advised and recruited transfer, graduate, and high school students to WCU programs. Provided information about services, managed regional community engagements, acted as liaison for community college and university collaborations, and promoted college access to first-generation and diverse students and parents.

- Developed Latino Student Resource Guide and provided training/information at Gear Up NC, TRIO, NC Society of Hispanic
Professionals Hispanic Education Summit, CACRAO conferences, and to students and parents across NC

- Awarded the YWCA Tribute to Women of Influence Award, 2011

**Rotary Club Group Study Exchange, Rio Grande do Sol and Petropolis, Brazil**

Vocational and cultural exchange program participant for four weeks 2011

- Collaborated with WCU Office of Admissions, Kimmel School of Engineering, and International Student Programs to recruit international students from the Catholic University of Petropolis, Brazil
- Traveled to 13 cities in 4 weeks in the Rio Grande do Sol region and gave presentations to local Rotary Clubs about North Carolina
- Presented information about Brazil to Modern Foreign Language, the College of Business, and The Kimmel School of Construction Management and Technology at WCU

**Bibliobus Project- Asheville-Buncombe Library System, Asheville, NC**

Assistant Project Manager 2003 – 2005

Supported library systems in 5 counties with Latinx outreach and services to meet communities where they live and work. Managed grant writing, research, volunteers, and bus driving across five rural counties, promoted library programs, and coordinated all special events. The program was awarded Outstanding County Program in 2005 by Buncombe County Commissioners.

**TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

*UofL College of Arts and Science and The University Honors Program, Louisville, KY, 2017-2020*

Lecturer, The Path to Resilient Organizations: Building Equivalence of Power

*Duke University Nonprofit Management Certificate Program, Asheville, NC, 2013*

Instructor, Creating High-Performance Teams in a Multi-Cultural and Multi-Generational Workplace

*Asheville Buncombe Technical Community College, Asheville, NC, 2010*

Adjunct Instructor, Success and study skills course (ACA 115) for first-year students using OnCourse textbook and tools.

*Ingles y Español Como Segunda Lengua, Bogotá, Colombia, 2001*

English Teacher, class levels one to five for children and adults. Planned lessons and conducted classes for small groups and one on one lessons.

**KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS**
“William and Patterson Latinidad Cultural Heritage Celebration”
Conocimientos for Latinidad and Social Change, September 2020

“15th Annual UofL TRIO Student Awards Ceremony”
Lunch Keynote Speaker, April 2017

“Berea College Women and Gender Studies Peanut Butter and Gender Speaker Series”
Being Latinx in Kentucky: A High Price to Pay, April 2017

PRESENTATIONS AND PANELS
International Society for Contemplative Research, San Diego, California. Poster Presentation, Uncovering Traditional Healing Practices Among Latinx College Students in el Nuevo Sur (February 2023)


Southeastern Latinx Student Leadership Conference Presenter, Western Carolina University- Establishing an Ecosystem to Enhance Latino's Educational and Professional Success and Becoming Latinx (2019)

National Association of Student Affairs Professionals (NASPA) Annual Conference Presenter, San Antonio, Texas- Establishing an Ecosystem to Enhance Latino's Educational and Professional Success (2017)

55,000 Degrees N-CAN- Panelist- Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Students in K-16 system (2017)

SPECIALIZED TRAINING
Race Equity Institute- Training Participant (January 2022)
Training for Change- Cómo Diseñar Espacios Dinamicos en Línea, Training Participant (June 2021)
American College Personnel Association (ACPA)- National Conference Attendee (March 2020)
Define American Summit- Welcoming Committee Member and Attendee (October 2019)
National Association of Student Affairs Professionals (NASPA) Annual Conference Attendee, Los Angeles, California (March 2019)
White Privilege Conference- National Conference Attendee (March 2015)
School of Americas Watch Border Convergence-Nogales, Mexico (October 2017)
**Becoming Latinx** – Train the Trainer Workshop by E3, San Francisco, California (September 2015)

**Dynamic Governance: Building Consensus and Consent Training** – Sims and Steel Consulting (October 2012)

**Facing Race** – National Conference sponsored by the Applied Research Center (November 2012)

**Community Mediation Training** – Western Carolina University (21-hour certificate, March 2012)

**Leadership Asheville** – 9-month leadership training program. (May 2009)


**Duke University Continuing Education** – Center for Non-Profit Business Management - Completed Certificate Program in Non-Profit Management (October 2007)

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**COMMITTEES AND PUBLIC SERVICE**

**Member**- Board of Directors, Community Acupuncture Clinic (2019-Present)

**Member**- University of Louisville Enrollment Management Advisory Committee (2018-2019)

**Member**- University of Louisville Retention and Persistence Committee (2018-2019)

**Member**- Western Carolina University Board of Visitors (2016-2020)

**Member**- Community Leadership Advisory Council of the UofL Anne Braden Institute for Social Justice Research (2015-2020)

**Advisory Committee Member**- UofL Latin American and Latino Studies Program (August 2015-2020)

**Secretary**- La Minga Cooperative Farm Board of Directors (2015-2018)

**Member**- Z Smith Reynolds Foundation Community Leadership Council (2013-2016)

**Member**- Buncombe County School System Superintendent Advisory Council (2011-2015)

**Advisory Council Member**- WCU Masters in Public Affairs Program (2011-2014)

**Member Leadership Team**- Early College of Buncombe County (May 2010 –February 2012)

**President of Board of Directors** - El Centro Comunitario/ Latino Advocacy Coalition (2004-2008)

**President/ Founding Member**- El Proyecto de los Estudiantes en la Comunidad (EPEC)/The Students Community Project at UNC-Asheville (2002-2004)

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**AWARDS**

**University of Louisville**- College Student Personnel Program Excellence in Scholarship Award (2023)

**Jefferson County Public Schools**- Educators of Color Unapologetic Higher Education Award (2019)

**Community Foundation of Louisville**- Force for Good Billboard Campaign (2018)

**Prospanica of Louisville**- Partnership Support Award (2017)

**National Society of Hispanic MBA’s** - Partnership Support Award (2015)

**University of North Carolina Asheville**- Order of Pisgah Alumni Award (2012)