"Échale ganas": Family support of Latino/a community college students' transfer to four-year universities

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College attendance among Latino/a students in the U.S. has dramatically increased over the past two decades, from 728,000 Latino/a students ages 18–24 enrolled in college in 1993 to 2.2 million in 2015 (Krogstad, 2015). Over half of Latino/a undergraduate students are enrolled in community colleges (Ma & Baum, 2016). Given the relative affordability and accessibility of these institutions, they represent an opportunity for entry into higher education and greater educational attainment among historically marginalized groups. However, while over 80% of students entering community college intend to transfer to a four-year institution, only about 25% actually do so within five years (Jenkins & Fink, 2015). These low transfer rates raise concerns about the ability of community colleges to level the playing field for low-income, first-generation students. To understand what drives low transfer rates, we examine community college students' decision-making as they navigate the transfer process, focusing on their family supports.

Families play a key role in students' school choices not only in K−12, but throughout their education. When students make decisions about higher educational institutions and where to attend, a key factor in students' decisions is family involvement (Bers & Galowich, 2002; Flint, 1992). For example, household income is associated with the number of colleges that high school students apply to and the amount of parental influence on the decision (Russick & Olson, 1976), which shapes students' options for college. Researchers have found that socioeconomic and familial characteristics explain a significant amount of the variance in selectivity of colleges that high school students consider (Flint, 1992). Higher levels of education or family income are associated with high school students choosing colleges that are more selective, with more degree offerings, and further from home (Flint, 1992). Although some policymakers and scholars have argued that the influence of family may constrain students' choices geographically, with negative impacts, the influences of significant others and strong family ties in distinct educational settings have been shown to have an overall positive effect on the academic and social transition to college as well as student persistence and success (Martinez, 2013; Nora, 2001).

A few studies have examined the role of parental involvement in community college contexts. One mixed-methods study found that parents of community college students expected to be directly involved and were involved at different stages in students' trajectories, but found community college systems to be perplexing and difficult to navigate (Bers & Galowich, 2002). However, while a growing body of research has explored the familial supports for high school students transitioning to college for the first time, including community colleges (e.g., Bers & Galowich, 2002), few studies have examined how family engagement plays a role in the decisions of *current* community college students seeking to transfer to four-year universities.

In this study, we explore how community college students in Texas navigate the institutional context, and the roles that their social ties to community, immediate family, and other relatives play in the decision making process (Karp, 2011; Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2014). Using asset-based theoretical frameworks, such as the *community cultural wealth model* (Yosso, 2005), the *funds of knowledge theory* (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), the *funds of identity theory,* (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014), and *familismo* (Marin & Marin, 1991), we explore the significance of family involvement in the transfer choice process. An asset-based approach for examining the impact of family involvement acknowledges the cultural wealth that Latino/a students leverage in navigating their college experience (Rendon, Nora, & Kanagala, 2014). In this study, we explore how that cultural wealth shapes students' decisions about transfer. Specifically, we ask: (a) How do Latino/a community college students perceive the role of families when considering transferring to a four-year institution? (b) In what ways does familismo influence the transfer choices of Latino/a community college students? We draw on in-depth interviews with 56 Latino/a students from two community college systems in Texas to explore how families, friends, and significant others support students in the choice-making process, focusing in particular on the role of family involvement for Latino/a college students.

We find that family involvement shaped community college students' *choice sets* (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), the bounded set of four-year institutions to which they considered transferring.

Families and friends played a complex role in the lives of community college students. They provided inspiration and emotional, informational, and financial supports. Latino/a students in our study were largely influenced by their immediate, extended, and other family networks, sometimes more generally, with guidance and support for college attendance overall, and sometimes more specifically, shaping their exact choices for transfer institutions. Our work has implications for leveraging family and friendship networks in aiding community college students as they seek to transfer to four-year institutions, and throughout the various pathways to higher education.

Next, we describe the literature and background for our study, as well as our conceptual framework. Then, we describe our sample, data, and methodology, before presenting our findings. Finally, we conclude with a discussion that includes recommendations for future research, policy, and practice.

Background

Parent influences in the college selection process are important for decisions about where to attend college and for matriculation (Flint, 1992). The college selection process can be thought of in stages: beginning with a predisposition phase, during which students decide whether to apply for college; a search phase, when students consider options and locate information on each alternative; and a choice phase, when students decide where to attend (Stage & Hossler, 1989). In addition to high school counselors and teachers, parental influences shape students' choice sets throughout this process; therefore, theories of the choice process, which often draw on economic ideas of consumer decision-making (Manski, 1993), can be elaborated by drawing on social and cultural capital theory (Beattie, 2002). Analyzing choices at the individual student level may miss the important role that family and friends play in the process, and can be color-blind and culturally blind. For example, values, preferences, and tastes inherited from parents and other cultural brokers like siblings may play an important role in shaping students' choice sets and where they ultimately decide to attend college, even unconsciously (Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977; Strayhorn, 2010). The selection of a higher educational institution is thus not solely an issue of choice, but is

also shaped by social dimensions of class and ethnic meanings, processes that can reproduce social class structures (Ball, Davies, David, & Reay, 2002; Bridge & Wilson, 2015).

Sociological perspectives have demonstrated the importance of close ties with family, friends, and significant others, and how they have an ongoing influence on children (Bean & Vesper, 1992). Families play a key role in students' ability to integrate into higher education contexts (Nora, 2001), wherein support and encouragement from significant others—family, friends, high school counselors—play a role in each *rite of passage* (Tinto, 1993) that students experience (Nora, 2001). Encouragement from these significant others can play a meaningful role in students' educational aspirations and ultimate educational attainment, including student persistence in higher education (Nora, 2001; Sewell & Hauser, 1980). In a climate where students' families are expected to fund a growing portion of college costs, parents' financial support is increasingly important (e.g., Turley & Desmond, 2011). However, other forms of non-financial assistance, such as encouragement, may also be important. Families also shape students' choice sets through their own preferences, such as whether they prefer that students stay at home or attend college away from home. Turley (2006) found that students with parents who wanted their children to remain at home for college were less likely to apply to college, even after controlling for students' test scores, race, and gender. However, as Turley (2006) notes, there is a need to unpack why parents desire that their children stay home for college so that high school and college counselors can address their concerns or develop policies to support students who move away from home. Furthermore, living at home may provide supports to students due to the proximity to family and support networks throughout the college process.

Some studies of community college students have found that the influence of peers and family are often the strongest influences for students and the most common sources of information (Miller & Goldrick-Rab, 2015; Somers et al., 2006). This is the case even though many community college students lack personal contacts, such as family members or friends, who have graduated from or attended college (Gardenhire-Crooks, Collado, & Ray, 2006). Latino/a students, who are

less likely to have college-educated parents to guide them directly during the choice process, may rely instead on what researchers have called "a 'chain of enrollment,' where friends and family members provide each other with information and support and ultimately follow one another to specific institutions" (Goldrick-Rab, 2010, p. 453). One qualitative study explored the transfer related experiences of Mexican community college students currently enrolled at the receiving institution and findings emphasized the importance of family in the transfer student process (Castro & Cortez, 2017). Without the guidance of a parent who has experienced higher education, students rely on a variety of actors within their network, following enrollment patterns that exist in their family and pulling important information from these varied sources. Therefore, it is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of the constellation of actors that comprise students' support networks, and the particular roles that families play in supporting students during the transfer process.

Friendship networks also play a role in students' decisions about higher education. Having college-oriented friends in high school increases the likelihood that students will apply to college (Alvarado & Lopez Turley, 2012), although these effects are weaker for Latino/a students. Friends are an important social force (Alvarado & Lopez Turley, 2012) not captured in traditional choice models that focus only on individual choices. In particular, friends may be especially important in the search stage when students are deciding whether and where to apply to college (Alvarado & Lopez Turley, 2012; Kim & Gasman, 2011), both initially and when transferring to a four-year institution from a community college.

To frame this study, we draw on asset-based approaches to the analysis of social and cultural capital (e.g., Yosso, 2005; Moll et al., 1992; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Asset-based frameworks focus on the wealth of knowledge, skills, and experiences that Latino/a students bring to their educational experiences. While students may not have gained these skills through formal education, they help to develop critical academic strengths and resiliency strategies (Rendon et al., 2014). Asset-based frameworks, such as funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth, serve to counter the cultural deficit model which places low-income children and families, including

communities of color, at a disadvantage (Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Cultural deficit perspectives in education have reinforced harmful stereotypes regarding Latino/a communities, such as the perception that Latinos do not value education or that Latinos' lack of educational achievement stems from their commitment to cultural and familial values that do not place a high value on education (Valencia & Black, 2002). As such, we focus on the *ventajas/assets* and *conocimientos/knowledge* that Latino/a students and families use to exist in predominantly white spaces (Rendon et al., 2014).

Specifically, we draw on the idea of *familial capital* (Yosso, 2005), which takes an asset-based approach to the analysis of cultural capital. In particular, students of color employ various forms of capital to traverse the educational pipeline, including aspirational, navigational, social, resistant, and familial modes of capital (Yosso, 2005). Familial capital refers to cultural knowledge nurtured among family and kin, knowledge that carries a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2002; Yosso, 2005). Familial capital "engages a commitment to community well being and expands the concept of family to include a more broad understanding of kinship" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). We also drew on the concept of familismo in Latino/a culture (Marin & Marin, 1991), which emphasizes a collectivistic worldview in which the family's needs are placed above the individual's needs, in part because of broader structural social and economic forces that require a greater reliance on family ties (Baca Zinn & Pok, 2001; Martinez, 2013). This approach highlights the ways in which Latino/a students leverage familial capital as they make decisions regarding the transfer choice process.

The concept of *pedagogies of the home* recognizes the practices of the home and family as sources of knowledge which students use to navigate educational systems (Delgado Bernal, 2010; 2002). In other words, students' learning takes place beyond the formal schooling structures. The pedagogies of the home framework has been used to legitimize the application of household knowledge across various contexts including college-going processes and participation (Elenes, Gonzalez, Delgado Bernal, & Villenas, 2001; Knight, Norton, Bentley, & Dixon, 2004; Mariella

Espinoza-Herold, 2007; Yamamura, Martinez, & Saenz, 2010; Martinez, 2013; Teniente Valderas, 2015), and across other phenomena in the P–20 educational pipeline (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Hayes, Montes, & Schroeder, 2013; Esposito, 2014). Furthermore, families provide validation and support to students throughout their educational trajectories. Rendon (1994) describes the concept of validation as "an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that fosters academic and personal development. Students benefit when others believe in them, and when they provide affirmation, support and encouragement" (p. 44). The out-of-class validating agents can include significant others, friends, family, college staff, and non-faculty institutional agents. As such, we use validation theory as part of our asset-based framework given that students credit interpersonal validation as a resilience and critical success strategy (Rendón, 2002; Pérez & Ceja, 2010).

Data and Methodology

To explore how families support students in the choice-making process, we draw on a subset of data from a larger study of over 100 community college students in Texas who sought to transfer to a four-year university, focusing on how students made decisions about where to transfer. For this analysis, we focus on a subset of 56 students, who identified as Latino/a.

Site Description

We focused on two community college systems that were within the same geographic region of Texas. Both were located in large urban areas. In Fall 2015, Community College A served over 43,000 students with a demographic breakdown of: 45.29% white, 30.36% Latino/a, 7.33% African American/Black, 4.79% Asian, and 3.40% international. In Fall 2015, we focused on two campuses at Community College B, and both were majority Latino/a: the first served 18,249 students whose demographic makeup was: 60% Latino/a, 26% white, 6% African American/Black, 3% Asian, and 5% were identified as "other." The other campus served 10,514 students and was 51% Latino/a, 29% white, 12% African American, 4% "other", 3% Asian, and 1% international. Both cities have public and private four-year universities. In the city where

Community College A is located, there are two large public universities, one with high selectivity, one in the city, and one less-selective university 30 miles away. There are also several private four-year universities, including a historically black university. In the city where Community College B is located, there are three less-selective public universities and several private universities. This site is also 50 miles to a large, less-selective public university.

Data Collection

In the fall of 2015, we targeted students who had already decided they wanted to transfer to a four-year institutions, and who had expressed that they intended to transfer within the next 12 months. At each community college system, we worked with staff to email students. At Community College A, a staff member emailed over 6,200 students who were intending to transfer. We also attended six transfer events to recruit participants that fall. At Community College B, a staff member emailed their student advising listserv, and we tabled at the student advising center twice a week for two months, handing out flyers and sign-up sheets. Our resulting sample included 104 students overall, with 56 self-identifying as Latino/a. Of the Latino/a students, 32% were male, 68% were female; 68% were the first in their immediate family to go to college; 62.5% identified as White, 9% as American Indian or Alaska Native, 3.5% as African-American, 1.5% as Asian, and 23.5% did not specify race. Of the group, 46% were from Community College A and 54% were from Community College B.

We conducted interviews with 99 students in person, usually at their campus or at another location convenient for them, and spoke with 5 students by phone. Interviews were semi-structured, lasting about 60 minutes each, and were audio-recorded and transcribed. For consistency across interviews, we used protocols based on Patton's (1990) framework, using informal, open-ended, and more formulated questions. (See appendix A for a subset of relevant questions asked.) We asked students about what schools they were considering and the process of decision making, including how they obtained information about transfer institutions, as well as how their school staff, family, and friends supported them in the process.

Data Analysis

As noted, this study focused on a subset of the participants from the larger study: interviews with 56 students who identified as Latino/a. We coded data in the qualitative software program Dedoose using a hybrid method (Miles & Huberman, 1994), where we first develop deductive codes from the literature on college choice and family involvement. Then, during a second round of coding, we created subcategories inductively, through a constant-comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Through dialogue between the data and literature, we modified deductive codes as necessary, replacing, removing, or expanding upon them.

Two members of the research team coded all transcripts for broad categories (e.g., "Family" or "Information") after achieving 80% agreement on a small sample of interview transcripts. We developed subcodes pertaining to "family," including "Family-Parents," "Family-Siblings," "Family-Extended," "Family-Partner," and "Family-Friends." After two team members read through all excerpts coded for these broad buckets, we inductively developed analytic codes to capture themes in the data (e.g., "Family Networks," "Respect for Hardship"), drawing on our knowledge of the literature, but allowing themes to emerge from the data. To do this, we separately identified salient themes and patterns, then met to discuss, and went back to code the data using the themes in an iterative process. We wrote memos and met to discuss emerging findings. We then developed matrices to systematically explore the major codes and relationships between codes, as well as the prevalence of each finding. We sought disconfirming evidence (Miles & Huberman, 2002) to ensure our findings were consistent across all of the data.

Findings

We found that Latino/a students in our study were influenced by their immediate, extended, and other family networks in two ways: (1) families generally shaped their decisions by transferring cultural values, beliefs, validating experiences, and advice, and (2) through direct and indirect informational supports, such as sharing knowledge about particular institutions.

General Support from Families

Families influenced and supported students in diverse ways. Families, particularly parents, contributed by instilling specific values such as work ethic and personal responsibility. Through shared knowledge regarding personal hardships, students and families developed a mutual understanding and respect for the each other's experiences. As such, students sought to achieve greater educational attainment, as a way to honor the sacrifices of their parents and/or to seek reprieve from unfavorable socioeconomic conditions. Students also received specific advice regarding college and career choices from their families throughout the transfer process.

Support through validation and "pep talks." Almost all, (52 of 54), Latino/a students spoke about the impact of their family's support in the form of words of encouragement and motivation to persist as they navigated the community college and planned for the transfer process. One student described his family's role:

> They were my other motivation when I wanted to be lazy or procrastinate. Those mornings where you are extra tired and you don't want to fight the sleepiness, so you let the sleepiness take over. My grandma was always there to wake me up with a good morning song or just bother me until I get upset and I make myself get up. That was my second most motivational feature in my household, it was her.

Therefore, this student provides an example of how his family's encouragement and motivation helped him to feel supported on his educational journey. Another student described how his family did not say much about his educational career, but did say "échale ganas," or "give it your all," to encourage him during the process. While words of encouragement were often delivered by parents or other elders, some students received encouragement from their own children, such as one student who stated that her daughter was "very supportive," even giving her "pep talks" when she [the student] had days when she felt too exhausted to continue studying.

Students also described validating experiences where a family member supported, motivated, or encouraged their decision to complete the transfer process. Some of the students who

discussed validation as a form of support also identified as first-generation college students. These students described the impact of familial encouragement and motivation as they made decisions regarding the transfer process. For instance, one student spoke about a parent validating and supporting the student's capacity to "get out...to see the world" and to "do their own things." Family members further supported students by instilling in them a "can do" and "don't quit" attitude which allowed them to aspire for greater educational attainment. Validation from out-of-class agents, such as family members, for underrepresented students, including Latino/a and first-generation students, can serve to instill greater confidence and self-worth, and reassurance in the transfer process (Rendon, 2002; Rendon, 1994).

Support through transference of cultural values and beliefs. Families further influenced the transfer choice process by promoting cultural values and beliefs that students drew from when making decisions. Some students discussed the common belief that attaining a degree was not an option, rather an imperative. Other students talked about their families helping them to develop a sense of personal responsibility, which allowed them to make individual decisions in their educational pathways. One student said he was raised in a place where "you do your own thing." This student explained that he was prepared to be responsible for his own decisions and credited his upbringing for this ability. Another student echoed this belief explaining that while her parents would continue to be supportive and encouraging, she understood that she was ultimately responsible for future choices. Responsibility for self also came from a place of trust, where parents had sufficient trust in the student and felt confident in their decision-making abilities. Students also mentioned being driven to obtain higher education based on the value and emphasis that their parents placed on educational attainment.

Students described how the value their families placed on education influenced their own educational pathways. First-generation college students (11 of 16) were influenced by their family members' strong work-ethic and personal sacrifices; therefore, students felt a heightened sense of commitment to honor their families' hardship and sacrifice. Several students mentioned respect

for family, which drove their educational goals. One student commented that her family was a "a big part" of why she was enrolled, further stating that if it were up to her she would have likely dropped out. This student demonstrates some of the extrinsic motivation provided by family in the transfer process. First-generation Latino/a students particularly, described a sense of honor and pride in having educational opportunity beyond what their parents had. For instance, Latino/a first-generation college students spoke extensively about being motivated and inspired by their parents' stories of hardship, adversity, and viewed college completion as a way to honor those hardships. As one student explained: "My whole life I've seen them work. I see them now. My dad gets home, he's tired. I see him go to work sick just to have money at the house. I just have to." Like many other first-generation college students in our study, this student was driven by his parents' personal struggles and sacrifices. This finding supports the relevance of families' lived experiences or pedagogies of the home as an indirect support strategy for Latino first-generation college students (Ceja, 2004).

Similarly, some first-generation college students who were also parents described a dedication to ensuring that their children have a better standard of life than they did. One student stated: "I don't know how much me being in college has motivated my kids but they're my motivation to keep going." Another student, also a parent, noted that earning a bachelor's degree would be the "endgame" to something she started 20 years ago, thus, showing her daughter that it can be done. Students, as children and as students who were parents, demonstrated a mutual respect and inspiration to successfully transfer to a university based on their recognition of family hardship and adversity. Latino/a students' access to familial capital is evidenced through their ability to recognize and use cultural values and beliefs as a success strategy (Yosso, 2005).

Support through college to career advising. We found that families supported students in the transfer choice process by providing advice related to college, major, and career choice. While students described familial advice regarding the transfer choice process, the difference in information received between first-generation and continuing generation students is considerable.

Some continuing-generation college students benefited from more specific and targeted familial advising such as advice on which courses to take, major to career pathways, and advice on which colleges to include in their choice sets. Other continuing generation students benefited from parents joining them on college campus tours and assisting them with figuring out which questions to ask. As one student noted "They help me with my decisions about what classes to take, what I should take, what college I should apply to." Conversely, first-generation college students reported advice regarding school loans and career advice which placed financial incentive/potential earnings above student interests. For example one student explained a discussion with her mother in which the mother advised her to go a university in order to get a job, while the student perceived going to a university as a means to personal enrichment. Although some students benefited from familial advising regarding college to career pathways and choice, we found differences between the advice received by first-generation students and continuing-generation college students.

      Support through implicit and silent cues. We found that some students also spoke about a different type of support, what we are calling a "silent mode." A silent mode of support manifests through a lack of action rather than deliberately spoken or obvious supports. On the role of the parents, one student noted that:

      As far as playing a role, I don't think they really have...They know not to bother me if I am

      doing homework. "Okay, call me when you are done." They don't get in the way of it.

This student provides an example of the implicit support received from family members. Even when parents were not explicitly supportive or validating, their willingness to "not get in the way" was support in itself. Another student recognized a similar mode of support noting that his spouse was supportive. As he recounted, "My wife, she always says, 'If I can't help you, I won't interfere on your education'...she is always supporting me." Furthermore, some students also described unspoken, but obvious moral supports from family members. One student explained that even though his parents did not show it, they were ultimately proud of him. Another student described her father as the "silent type." Although the silent type father did not vocalize support, in contrast

to the student's mother, his support was evident in that he consistently provided the student with transportation to and from school.

While family support was evident to some students, other students described a discernable lack of support whether implicit or explicit. First-generation college students especially sensed a lack of familial support or the belief that higher education was not important to their families. Students noted that their parents did not understand "what was taking them so long" and therefore offered little to no support or guidance in the transfer process. While relatively few students described this lack of support, given that those who did were usually first-generation students, we believe that it was either due to a lack of information about higher education, making it difficult to provide concrete information, or, perhaps, a more pressing need for students to provide income to their family from work.

Financial Support from Families

Latino/a students described a more tangible form of support through direct and in-kind financial assistance. Fewer students described direct financial assistance, such as tuition payment, than students who described in-kind financial assistance such as childcare, housing, and transportation. First-generation college students acknowledged indirect or direct forms of support more so than did continuing generation students.

Direct financial assistance. Some students who noted direct financial assistance spoke generally about the financial support received. For instance, one student explained that her parents were "very supportive" financially. Another student explained that her father was "taking care of everything" in the first two years of college. These students credited this financial assistance as part of the support structure necessary to transfer to a university. Some parents also provided financial assistance in the form of offering to take out loans to help the student. One student bounded her college choice set based on "cheaper" institutions to avoid large parent debt. This implies that the parents had the intention to provide direct financial assistance once she transferred to a four-year institution. Even when parents alone could not afford college costs, other family

members offered to help. As one student described, his father and other family members offered to pool money together if necessary.

In-kind supports. Although some students described the direct modes of financial assistance received from family members, most students spoke to other forms of financial support, which consisted of in-kind supports. In-kind supports are defined as the goods and services gifted instead of cash or monetary donations. For students, in-kind supports were valued and appreciated just as much as their monetary equivalents. Several students mentioned that family members provided childcare. One student noted that her mother "kept the kids out of the room" while the student completed homework. Other students described family members buying them essential materials such as laptops and textbooks. In other instances, family members allowed students to live "rent-free" either in their primary home or a rental property. One student stated that living "rent-free" was helpful because he could focus on school rather than working so much that his schooling would suffer. Another student described living with his parents as a "blessing" because he did not have to worry about rent, bills, or food. The in-kind "rent-free" support generally allowed students to focus on their studies and/or reduce the need to have a job while in school. Other students also described transportation as an in-kind support. One student noted that her father was providing transportation to colleges and universities of interest, providing a critical support in the transfer choice process. One student summed up her decision to seek transfer in her current region based on the diverse in-kind supports. As she describes:

> The only reason I would choose GSU [Grand State University][1] is because financial stability. I live in the house that [my dad] has over here, so I am pretty much rent-free. I don't have to pay any of the bills... The only thing I pay for is like groceries and things for my son, so that helps a lot. Whereas if I were to go somewhere like out of the city it's going to be more expensive … the daycare, the prices, can also go up.

[1] All university names are pseudonyms. See Appendix B for a list of schools and their general characteristics.

The direct and indirect financial assistance thus demonstrate another dimension of familial support which made students feel supported through the transfer choice process.

Prioritizing Family

Next, we found that Latino/a students significantly prioritized their family's needs. This was evidenced by students' bounding of their college choice sets based on geographical distance and/or the student taking time off to manage personal family matters and commitments.

Geography. We found that students' choice sets were, in part, influenced by a discernable commitment to family. Students in the study mentioned proximity to family as a factor which influenced their college choice set. We found that Latino/a students bound their college choice sets according to the proximity to family members either because they served as caretakers for siblings or they benefit from their parents serving as their caretakers. For instance, one student mentioned a preference for staying in the region because his family lived in Mexico and he wanted to remain within a close driving proximity. Another student described familial obligations as a reason for forgoing a scholarship opportunity out-of-state.

While both male and female Latino/a students in our study demonstrated a strong commitment and loyalty to family consistent with familismo, in terms of geographic proximity to family, Latina students were more influenced than were Latino males (Martinez, 2013). Of the 19 students who mentioned proximity to family as an important factor, 15 were Latinas. For instance one Latina student stated noted: "Since my mom has two babies, I have to help babysit. So if I go to Pine Lake [Pine Lake University] or RRU [Running River University], if my mom ever needs me to come in for a weekend, I can have access to that." Another Latina student was her elderly mother's caretaker and therefore did not want to "be too far away from her." Another Latina student expressed a desire to attend her dream school, an out-of-state university, but noted that her parents would not allow her this option. This finding coincides with existing research which indicates that Latinas are often tasked with "prescribed cultural scripts" in which they either assume or intend to assume the role of caretakers as wives and mothers (Harklau; 2013; Flores,

Hinton, Barker, Franz, & Velasquez, 2009). However, we found that Latina students and their families in the study also renegotiated prescribed gender roles and sought to explore opportunities not "limited to the home environment" (Harklau, 2013, pg 6). One Latina student stated that both her mother and uncle encouraged her to go away for school in order to learn to be on her own. While this student did not yet feel comfortable leaving home, the support of her family members made this a future possibility, thus defying cultural gender norms.

Managing familial matters. Some students took some time away from their post-secondary studies to manage personal family matters. Events such as a death in the family and other family issues, influenced students to either take a semester off or lighten their course loads. Several students mentioned a family members' illness or passing as a reason for taking one or more semesters off from school. One student described how the death of her father made her so distraught that she took a year off from school. However, she also explained that she returned to school because she was inspired to honor his legacy by educating herself. Similarly, another student returned home after her mother was diagnosed with cancer. While some students were compelled to take time away from their studies to manage family matters, students redirected themselves by leveraging familial support structures. One student stated:

> I've also thought of dropping out because of family issues. Last semester I had several different family crises and I had to drop one class because I missed an entire month. So, there are situations where I have thought about dropping but, again, I have a plan and my plan does involve a degree and I know, not just because my friends have told me, but because I've seen other friends do it, that if you leave school, you never come back. I've seen that happen way too many times.

This student demonstrates the act of prioritizing family above scholastic goals, but also shows how students were able to persist by leveraging familial points of reference, in this case, friends.

Our findings confirm existing research that indicates that Latino/a students bound college choice sets on the proximity of the institution from home due to their desire to maintain strong

familial ties and support while in college and have access to parents for guidance and support (e.g., Martinez, 2013).

Family Networks and Knowledge

We found that Latino/a students in our study, including those who were first-generation college students, had a rich network of supports and information. They or their families leveraged their networks strategically, often drawing on knowledge of extended family members, friends, or others when they did not have direct experience with higher education themselves. This type of information passed through networks may not be captured in existing surveys or quantitative analyses where students are usually only asked about their parents' educational level, not their siblings or cousins or aunts and uncles. Thirty-seven of the fifty-four students in our sample noted using this type of family or friendship network—drawing on the experiences of people in their family, often not their parents—who went to college.

Extended family networks. Several students noted having extended family networks of support through the college and transfer process, even if they were the first in their immediate families to go to college (12 of the 19 were first-generation college students). Aunts and uncles, cousins, family friends, and, in some cases, grandparents or foster care parents, stepped in to guide students in the college process. Often, students noted, there was not someone in their immediate family who had experience with higher education, but they often had someone in their extended family network to talk to about these issues. Parents, when they did not have direct experience with college, strategically brought in other actors to provide the necessary support or information to their children. For some students, aunts and uncles provided academic support, transfer advice, and encouragement. One student described how her aunt played a major role in guiding her decision-making. The student said her aunt helped her because:

> She had kind of a rough experience with her college. She came to [this community college], too, but she didn't have any guidance. She just finished her degree program. I think she didn't want me to feel lost at all, because she didn't really have anyone to help her either.

She is really very supportive and always asks how my classes are and if I am talking to the right people...She is like my mini advisor."

Other students described extended family members who were currently in or had gone to college. One student said that, on her grandmother's side, she had several cousins who were all doctors. As a pre-med student, she would call them to ask about their career paths and satisfaction. Other times, extended family gave specific advice regarding transfer. This student's uncle gave her the following advice:

Start at [the community college]. Do your two years and transfer, because that is going to help out and it is a lot less expensive. Then, once you head over to the big universities, you have experience that you know what you are doing.

Another student credited both her mother and her uncle for providing transfer advice and motivation to "always do better." This student's uncle guided her search for information on different schools:

After he got his information on transferring, we went to his house that afternoon and spent some time looking at different schools. Then, we had the transfer fair. …. He is the one who is pushing me to stay in school.

This information conduit, coupled with other information networks, motivated this particular student's academic pursuits, beyond an associate's degree.

Cousins also played a major role in shaping students' transfer pathways. One student described how she and her cousin, who was two years older, had a long-time plan "to always move to Austin, go to RRU [Running River University], and that was it." Through her cousin, she was able to expand her network. Another student was considering Seaside University because her cousin lived there and the cousin's friend that went to the school: "I always liked Seaside because they live up there…I go visit it." In this way, students' family networks provided access to additional schooling options for transfer. In another case, a student was considering Greater Lakes University because "I have family out here...they always talked about the school… Me and my cousin, actually, want

to go to Ohio. So, we might be going there together." Places that were further away geographically became options because of family ties or connections. Additionally, some students' information network emphasized a transnational connection with extended family. Speaking in regard to a university in Mexico, one student received information from cousins and uncles who attended the Mexican university:

> They have a good architecture program and I know that [TIM] is really recognized over here in the United States. My cousin, she graduated from the architecture program there in [TIM] .... I talked to a couple people that work for my uncle who's an architect here in town, and he has hired interns from [TIM]

Another student indicated his aspiration was to "be like my distant family who lives all the way in Mexico. They have degrees, they have successful lives, they're businesspeople."

Even when there were few people in students' extended family networks that attended institutions of higher education, the few that did proved to be important sources of inspiration and support. According to one student:

> Even in my extended family, there are very few that went on to college and got degrees. I have one cousin that motivated me when I was in high school that was at Pine Lakes [Pine Lake University] and graduated in '79. I was trying to follow his lead. He took two years at [the community college] and then transferred over to Pine Lakes.

In addition to extended family, family friends also played a role. In some cases, students' parents strategically drew on other actors -- colleagues, neighbors, and friends -- to help with college information and decisions. One student said:

> My mom has a good friend that works at Upper State [Upper State University]. She's a music professor there. She told me a little bit about the campus. She told me how the students were like and all the programs that the school offers, and she told me that the psychology program there is really, really good.

Similarly, another student had family friends who provided transfer advice regarding the admissions process:

> 'Because family friends have done this process to get into [Central State University]. I did not apply to [Central State University] because it is hard to get accepted the first semester. They told me that it was a lot better to start at [community college campus] and then transfer to [Central State University]. It is easier and they have done it. ...'All of my friends are in a four year university.

Because this information came from a trusted family friend, it was weighted differently. As she student said: "I just talked to people I know 'cause you can read a bunch online but people that have real life experiences have a lot more to say." Similarly, another student noted that he went to his family over the community college advisers:

> My parents are my number one source. Family members come after that. I have a lot of cousins that have already graduated school who I talk to. I don't feel very comfortable with the academic advisors at [community college campus] because I always get told something different. It's never unanimous.

In these ways students sought knowledge of institutions and supports through their extended family members and other networks--sometimes to gather knowledge that they found more trustworthy or consistent than what they could access through their colleges. This echoes findings from Miller and Goldrick-Rab's (2015) study of community college student transfer processes, where they find that few students feel comfortable interacting with administrative staff at the college (e.g., advisers, counselors), and instead relied more heavily on families and friends as the key influencers in their transfer decisions.

In addition to providing general support and guidance during the decision-making process, families also influenced students' particular choices of institutions (e.g., direct experience with an institution). Students thus gained a wealth of information from various sources, but sometimes the

information could seem ad hoc. There is a need to supplement this with targeted information for the particular student's major and interests and constraints.

First-generation students had networks that were less dense and wide than second-generation students. The seven students who had immediate family members who had attended college often had wider networks of extended family members who had gone to college, and even obtained graduate degrees. For example, one student said that on his grandmother's side, "they are all doctors." Another student had "a lot of cousins that have already graduated" to consult. On the other hand, the 12 first-generation students, while noting family members who served as important sources of information about the transfer process, primarily named one or two people who had gone to college in their extended families -- an aunt or an uncle, a cousin, but they were the minority in their family networks. As one first-generation student noted, he had one cousin who went to college, but otherwise "very few" in his extended family went on to college. Therefore, while all students relied on family networks and ties for information, second-generation students had a denser network with more family members who had direct experience with various forms of higher education.

Siblings as key source of support. Siblings, in particular, played a major role in supporting students' decisions about transfer and transfer institutions. This may be because siblings often had the most recent or accessible experiences with higher education. Siblings provided advice on whether or how much to take out in loans and shared information about transfer institutions from their own or their friends' experiences. Sometimes they were the only ones in their family with direct experience in higher education. For example one student said:

> My sister's the only one that can help, and it is in guidance. She tells me what things she already did. What was her outcome with those things. She doesn't really understand much of my field at all, actually. But, she knows procedures, who to talk with. So, she helps me with those things.

In this way students drew on their siblings knowledge of the process and "procedures" to help navigate the transfer process. For example, one student had a sister who went to college locally, and said that she "saw her go through it," which helped her understand the four-year context. Others noted that their siblings put pressure on them to go to college, especially when they had completed it themselves. One student said, for example:

> With my older sisters, there's been a lot of pressure with going to college since both of my older sisters already have Master's. My third one is already working on it... So it's scary, a lot of stress, but really exciting because all my sisters talk about is how much they love being at a university versus being at a community college.

Siblings were therefore a critical source of information, encouragement, and support. However, the student also noted that she sometimes wanted to do things differently than her sisters: "They were always just kind of like, well this is what I did... I'm like okay, I know, I get it. But it's not what I'm planning on doing, or I'm just doing it differently." Another student similarly reported feeling pressure from siblings: "And my older sister, because when she went to college, she was like you have to go, there's no ifs, ands, or buts." Some students, therefore, felt they were pressured to follow their siblings' paths, even when they might have different goals or strategies.

Students also drew on information about particular institutions provided by their siblings or siblings' friends. Some recommended particular institutions. For example, one student said "My sister wants me to go to Craig [Craig University]." Others expanded their pool of school choices based on information received, adding a "Plan B option" as a result. As one student said: "We were at a restaurant and my sister was talking to her friend. She said, 'In Central State [Central State University], all you need is a 2.5 GPA.' ...Just in case, that is my plan B." Similarly, two other students described getting information about colleges such as St. Anthony's [St. Anthony's University] and the Running River University because of their siblings. In fact, one student lived with her sister, who attended the Running River University, in a dorm-style housing residence near campus. As the student said: "I live with my sister, so it's dorm style. I'm really getting the college

experience." The student also wanted to attend Running River University, particularly after having direct experience with college life at Running River University. In these ways, siblings provided information based on their own experiences with higher education and, in some cases, pushed students to persist in their plans to transfer.

Indeed, research has found that siblings' choices of institutions are strongly predictive of high school students' choices of four-year students (Goodwin, Hurwitz, Smith & Fox, 2014). Our findings suggest that siblings may also play an important role in shaping the choices of community college transfer students. Therefore, as noted in the literature, family networks comprised of significant others (Nora, 2001) significantly shaped students' access to information and social capital, providing them with access to resources through siblings and even beyond their immediate families that helped to influence their decisions about where to transfer.

Friendship networks and information transfer. Almost all students described friendship networks as being important to them generally, but several students specifically mentioned that they drew on information from friends and peers that have gone through the process or were at particular colleges to aid them in the transfer process. In particular, friends who were already attending four-year institutions were a huge draw for students deciding where to transfer, often encouraging the community college students to go to their school, and they often provided valuable information on the experiences at these different universities. For example, students described how friends encouraged them to go to their schools: "I have one specific friend that goes to Central State University right now and she is really rooting for me to go up there with her." Students also gained knowledge about institutions that were out of state or further away from their peers, including, for example, West Coast University and Central Southwest University.

The information they received from students firsthand was valuable to them, particularly if the student had a similar background. For example, one student said that her friend just graduated from Pine Lake University, and her friend's husband went to the same community college as her: "They're kind of in the same boat as me...We talk about what happens, what's going on, all of that.

To see if she's experienced the same stuff." Another student described how her friends from South Texas shared their experiences of attending four-year institutions:

> If you don't keep up with the class work, keep up with their teaching no matter what it is, she said you can fall really far behind. And a lot of my friends, they've always studied their butts off, and even entering RRU [Running River University], they were so frightened by how coming from the area I'm from in South Texas, we weren't as advanced as some of these students.

Friends, particularly high school friends, thus provided helpful information about what it took to succeed at a particular institution. Indeed, researchers have found that when applying to college in Texas, minorities prefer campuses where same-race students from their high school have been successful in the past (Black, Cortes, & Lincove, 2015).

Students asked their peers specific questions about the schools, including things like: "What is the environment like? Is there anything to do around the campus?" Similarly, another student described relying on her friend when she couldn't find information "easily online," asking them: "What is going on here? How do I do this? Who can I talk to?" One student attended an orientation at Central State University with her friend, and another received assistance with her RRU college application essay. Students thus leveraged their friendship networks for important information about application deadlines, characteristics and experiences of schools, sometimes visiting their friends on campus. This was especially true for students who did not have family members who were familiar with higher education contexts. As one student said of her friend from high school who was also applying to RRU: "He is probably the person that helps me out more than the others. More than my family." Another student echoed this when describing who she went to for support: "Some peers, usually that have transferred, and they're going through the same process, but not really my family, just peers in school." Overall, friends thus played a key role in supporting community college students with the transfer process.

Conclusions and Implications

We find that families and significant others (Nora, 2001) play a major role in Latino/a students' educational trajectories. Previous research has found that significant others play an important role in the high school to college decision (Ceja 2004; Ceja 2006; Desmond & Turley, 2009, Martinez, 2013), and our work extends these patterns to explore the role of significant others (in particular, family and friends) in the choice of transfer institution for current community college students. In particular, we find that families still matter for the post-secondary context, even though most discussions of "family engagement" focus on the K−12 contexts. We also find that families are "involved" in students' educational pursuits in ways that often are not recognized, such as providing in kind support (e.g., childcare), or supporting students' goals through implicit or silent cues.

Our research also helps to explain the finding in the literature (e.g., Black et al., 2015) that Latino/a students are more sensitive to distance. We also find that students' choice sets are bounded by proximity to parents and family supports. Where higher educational institutions are located in relation to where students live is important for access to high-quality institutions and when considering students' choice sets (Turley, 2009; Hillman & Weichman, 2016), particularly because students often choose to live close to family. While none of our sites would be considered education deserts (Hillman & Weichman, 2016), studies of transfer students' choices and decision making don't always consider the localized nature of these choices, which might point a need for programs and policies that are more targeted and place-based. In other words, as colleges and universities expand, and as two-year colleges begin offering baccalaureate degrees, these institutions should consider and target such sites to places that are less dense with higher educational opportunities. Alternatively, policies that provide financial support for students seeking to return home to visit during holidays and breaks, such as Lanzate!, a Southwest Airlines/Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities program offering free airfare to Latino/a students attending schools beyond a 200-mile radius from their hometown, may also help students to consider schools that are further away without losing access to face-to-face familial

support. Financial aid, for example, could include funding for low-income students to travel home a few times per year (Turley, 2006).

Our study also demonstrates the importance of using asset-based approaches to explore how and why students' ties to family and commitments to family values shape their decisions. In our study, familismo was a contributing factor in students' desire to successfully transfer to a 4-year institution. Our study confirmed previous studies that emphasize the pivotal role of familismo in college choice (Martinez, 2013; Desmond & Turley, 2009). Our study found that students leverage diverse modes of familial supports and influences as they bound their college choice sets. This study points to a critical implication for institutions and policy makers that Latino/a students do not make individualistic choices. Most conceptions of college choice, drawing on market-based models, foreground individual choice and are constructed through color-blind and culturally blind lenses, often ignoring the role of race, cultural assets, sociological influences, and structural inequities. For example, these approaches often assume rational, individual actors, who make decisions in order to maximize their utility—students as 'adolescent econometricians' (Manski, 1993). Our paper works to problematize this assertion and address the ways that these policies are impacting the largest growing population in the U.S.

To the college choice process, Latino/a students bring their family's needs, priorities, and sometimes, limitations. Inherently, however, Latino/a students also bring their family inspired values, beliefs, and supports--assets that serve to inform and drive their transfer choice sets. Indeed, by leveraging the assets or cultural wealth that students have--rather than viewing them through a deficit lens--institutions and policymakers can design better policies to increase transfer success. While we explore the family support of Latino students in their transfer choice decisions through a familismo lens, among others, we would be remiss to ignore its potential paradoxical nature (Castro & Cortez, 2017). The transfer experiences of Latino students in this study are indeed influenced by family units in a variety of ways; however, the impact of familial influences should

not be assumed for all Latino students. Indeed, family roles are fluid and varied, particularly when we consider the intersectional lives and experiences of Latino students.

Next, asset-based frameworks pay homage to diverse ways of knowing and leverage student assets that are often ignored in mainstream discourse. However, given the influence of familial supports and constraints in the transfer student choice set, it is important to address the complexity of the Latino student experience. Although Latino students leverage familial capital to navigate the transfer choice process, we found instances where family obligations geographically anchored students, particularly Latina students; thus, limiting their transfer choice set. In this study, Latina students' transfer decisions were largely influenced by their obligations and commitments to family, yet family forces also motivated and supported their academic and professional pursuits. The paradoxical nature of Latino familial influences creates a dynamic landscape for higher education institutions to consider. Considering this, institutions should avoid viewing the family as a burden. Rather, institutions should guide students and their families to recognize the diverse direct and indirect contributions that families provide in support of transfer student success. In addition, future research should explore the intersection of race, gender, and class on the Latino student's transfer process.

Furthermore, as other researchers have argued (e.g., Bers & Galowich, 2002; Gaitan, 2012; Martinez, Cortez, & Saenz, 2013; Martinez, 2013; Castro & Cortez, 2017), policymakers seeking to increase Latino/a student college attendance and transfer rates might consider investing in policies and programs that engage families or provide more targeted information. In particular, community colleges, perhaps because of the diverse demographic they serve, which includes students at many different stages of their educational and professional careers, have not always engaged parents and families who want to be involved but find the community college system to be difficult to navigate (e.g., Bers & Galowich, 2002). Community colleges could support students and families through events that bring families onto campus. Invitations to orientations and transfer fairs could be expanded to included students' family members in an effort to broaden information

outreach. Additionally, community college campuses have abundant resources of human capital within their current student bodies. Events opened to newer students and their families could be hosted by current students who are further along their educational and career pathways either through student-run panels or classroom visits.   In light of the different findings that first generation students' families suggested careers that prioritized financial gains over personal interest while continuing generation students received advice directed more towards college and class selection, current community college advisors may better serve students' needs by probing first generation students about their career choices and the ways in which these align with their personal interests.

Finally, community colleges and universities could better leverage the existing networks of students, identifying who the key influencers are in their decisions in order to pass along information and involve families of first-generation students in particular through, for example, siblings and family members who are alumni, or through friendship networks. Four-year institutions, too, might find that leveraging current students' friendship networks, particularly those who are transfer students themselves, may prove to be an effective way of encouraging community college students to apply. In our study, for example, students benefited a great deal from visiting their friends who were already on a four-year college campus and were able to get a deeper sense of whether the institution was a good fit by doing so.

This is a qualitative research study in a limited geographic area. While it helps to identify processes and potential mechanisms by which family and friends influence the transfer decisions of community college students, further research should test this on a larger scale, perhaps by using social network surveys or, if possible in existing datasets, linking families to see how siblings and cousins, for example, influence students' choices. Researchers could use courses students take together in high school as proxies for friendship networks to see how friends' decisions influence one another. Further qualitative research might examine how those friendship networks support students once they arrive on campus after transferring, and explore more deeply the information

shared within those networks, as well as their racial and social class compositions. Additionally, researchers could extend interviews and data collection to the entire family as a unit to understand how significant others perceive their role in the community college student's transfer decision.

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Appendix A: Selected Questions from Interview Protocol

I'm going to start by asking you about your educational and family background.
Tell me about your experience growing up. [Probe: siblings, parents/caregivers, children/dependents]
What were your educational experiences like up to college?

Now I'll ask you more about your experience here at this college.
How did you end up here at Community College A/B?
    a. How did you hear about it? [Probe: any people helpful in making that decision]
Do you want to transfer to a four-year university?
    a. Where do you go for information on transfer issues?

Now I'll ask you more questions about how you're thinking about transfer and where you'd like to apply.
Why do you want to transfer to a four-year university?
Why do you think a college education is important? [probe: benefit to you personally]
What types of schools do you expect to apply to? [probe: geography]
When do you plan to apply?

Now I'm going to ask you about what you do outside of school, and your friends and family members.
What do you do when you're not in school?
How has your family played a role or supported your attending college?
How have your friends played a role or supported your attending college?
    a. How many of your friends are enrolled in college? Where? Local, further away?

Appendix B. *Institutional characteristics*

Institution	Type	Selectivity	Total enrollment	Location
Central State University	Public	Selective	37,979	Texas
Craig University	Private	More selective	16,787	Texas
Grand State University	Public	Selective	28727	Texas
Greater Lakes University	Public	More selective	58,663	Ohio
Pine Lake University	Public	More selective	63,429	Texas
Running River University	Public	More selective	50,950	Texas
Seaside University	Public	Less selective	11,661	Texas
Southwest University	Public	More selective	32,775	Colorado

St. Anthony's University	Private	Selective	3,625	Texas
TIM*	Private	Less selective	55,015	Mexico
Upper State University	Public	Selective	37,175	Texas
West Coast University	Public	Selective	29,686	Washington

("The Best Colleges in America, Ranked," n.d.), *("The Princeton Review, " n.d.)