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Influencers of the Institution: Millennial Women of Color on Leadership as Classified Professionals in California Community Colleges

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INFLUENCERS OF THE INSTITUTION: MILLENNIAL WOMEN OF COLOR ON LEADERSHIP AS CLASSIFIED PROFESSIONALS IN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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Marisol Quevedo

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ABSTRACT

INFLUENCERS OF THE INSTITUTION: MILLENNIAL WOMEN OF COLOR ON LEADERSHIP AS CLASSIFED PROFESSIONALS IN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

by Marisol Quevedo

This study centers Millennial Women of Color (MWOC) California Community College Professionals as institutional influencers by understanding how their leadership practices support the success of marginalized, minoritized, and historically underrepresented students and equity-advancing institutional change. In this study I use the term "influencer" to reflect the impact that MWOC, working as classified professionals at a CCC who are committed to serving as leaders beyond their job duties have on their students and within their institutions. The use of "influencer" in this study addresses three different areas that summarize the study's findings. First, the theme "Key-Makers not Gatekeepers" addresses the ways that the participants work to open doors for others, leveraging whatever power, privilege, and resources they have, to help others gain access to spaces and places both inside and outside of their institutions. Second, the theme "Influence over Power and Embodying the Intention of Leadership" addresses the way the participants have (re)imagined leadership by adopting collaborative, inclusive, and equity-minded practices to challenge traditional frameworks of leadership focused on a leader/follower binary. Third, the theme "Leadership as a Personal Ethic Not Just a Professional Skill" addresses the personal connection that participants have to their work as hyper-marginalized educators who hold a commitment to serving marginalized, minoritized and underrepresented students and aim to embody leadership practices that are racially conscious, socially just, and equity-minded.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BFE – Black Feminist Epistemology
CCC – California Community Colleges
CCW - Community Cultural Wealth
CFE – Chicana Feminist Epistemology
CUPA-HR – College and University Professional Association for Human Resources
DEI - diversity, equity, inclusion
MWOC - Millennial Women of Color

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

This research is inspired by my personal experience as a Millennial Woman of Color (MWOC) working in education for over a decade and stems from the work of Black and Chicana feminist scholars. My personal background and experiences have led me to this research work. Growing up in a small rural town in California's Central Valley, opportunities for educational advancement were limited. It is why I am deeply passionate about education and why I am committed to working to improve institutional effectiveness and educational outcomes for historically underrepresented students.

As I have advanced in my professional career, I have often felt marginalized, sometimes being one of the brownest, youngest people, and the one with the least social capital, in the room. It was in this feeling of "otherness" that I began to investigate what it meant to be an "effective" and "good" employee in a space that claimed to value diversity but did not seem ready for the change that came with it. Constantly feeling like "the other" motivated me to connect with like-minded colleagues, in hopes of working together for change by leveraging our skills, resources, and collective power within our spheres of influence.

Role of the Researcher and Positionality

My ethnicity, gender, class, and chosen profession have all contributed to my identity formation. The identities I occupy have shaped my lens as a critical educator and scholar-practitioner. I work at a community college and operate from a lens focused on increasing access, persistence, and completion for historically underrepresented students. I am intentional about operating from a social justice- and equity-based lens as a scholar-

practitioner and recognize that my positionality has a direct impact on how I show up in the world, how I navigate my position in society, and how I work as a researcher. This research is an exploration of how MWOC working as classified professionals at a community college have impacted and influenced their educational institutions through leadership.

Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Traditional leadership practices and structures are no longer sufficient in addressing the needs and challenges of the changing landscape of colleges and universities today (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Nevarez et al., 2013; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016). Current educational leaders must be equipped with the appropriate leadership strategies and frameworks to effectively address the persistent issues around equity, access, and completion in higher education (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016). The millennial generation (born between 1981 and 1996) is now the largest generation in the workforce (Fry, 2018). As such, it is important to understand how the leadership styles and values of the millennial generation working in higher education will shape its future and, thus, influence its outcomes.

Over the past two decades, the U.S. population has both grown increasingly diverse, ethnically and racially, and increasingly educated (Espinosa et al., 2019). Underrepresented student populations have gained access to college at increasing rates (Espinosa et al., 2019). However, despite the increased access to and participation in educational opportunities for racially and ethnically minoritized students, there continues to be "stagnant and low levels of secondary school completion, college participation, and educational attainment for many communities of color" (Espinosa et al., 2019, p.xiii).

Historically, schools have served as sites of social and cultural reproduction, perpetuating race- and class-based structural inequalities (Apple, 1981; Giroux, 1979; Tisdell, 1993). Over time, schools have propagated race-based discrimination in both formal and informal educational policy (Haper, 2012; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). As such, access to postsecondary education in the United States has been unequal for the racially and ethnically minoritized, as well as other marginalized communities (An, 2013; Fink et al., 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2012; Vargas, 2013). However, data and research indicate that community colleges, also known as two-year colleges, are often the most accessible higher education pathway for underrepresented student populations (Taylor, 2015). Yet data indicate that although underrepresented students access community college at higher rates than they access four-year institutions, they do not complete their educational goals at a proportionate rate to White, Asian, high-income, and continuing-generation college peers (Taylor, 2015).

Despite the diversification of the higher education student body in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status and more, educational leadership has remained largely unchanged (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017). Nationally, higher education leadership is not representative of its student population; the majority of higher education administrative leaders are White men (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017). However, research indicates that the diversification of educational leadership improves institutional effectiveness and student outcomes, and that educational leaders of color play an important role in the success of racially and ethnically minoritized student populations (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Hurtado, 2001; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Magdaleno, 2006; Moody, 2012; Shakeshaft, 1989).

The current higher education landscape requires new leadership skills and approaches, chief among them the principles of collaboration and shared leadership (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). An emerging demographic of leaders that has been shown to embrace principles of collaboration and shared leadership is the millennial generation (Barrington, 2019). Similar to the baby boomer generation, millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) have had a profound impact on the U.S. landscape, contributing to major societal shifts in politics, education, the economy, and more (Fry & Bialik, 2019). According to a study, millennials value teamwork and collaboration in the workplace, forgoing traditional hierarchical leadership structures for shared leadership and team problem-solving (Barrington, 2019).

However, one of the limitations of the current body of educational-leadership research is the exclusion of analysis of the experience and contributions of the millennial generation in higher education. Furthermore, there are even fewer research studies on the experiences of millennials working specifically within community colleges. This is a significant gap in educational-leadership research and theory, because the millennial generation accounts for 35% of the labor force, which is now the largest representation in the workforce of any generation in the United States (Fry, 2018). According to the Pew Research Center, "Millennials have brought more racial and ethnic diversity to U.S. society… and Millennial women, like Generation X women, are more likely to participate in the nation's workforce than prior generations" (Fry & Bialik, 2019).

As higher education institutions continue to diversify, it is imperative that the leaders reflect the populations they serve. As evidenced by the research, educational leaders from minoritized and marginalized communities, i.e., women, people of color, and women of

color, are highly effective and impactful leaders in their institutions (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Colon Gibson, 1992; Gardiner et al., 2000; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Hurtado, 2001; Ledesma, 2017; Magdaleno, 2006; Mendez-Morse, 1997; Moody, 2012). However, there is minimal research and literature that investigates how the rising demographic of MWOC working at California Community Colleges (CCCs) as classified professionals will impact higher education, ranging from potential shifts in institutional culture to institutional outcomes.

As research suggests, MWOC are the most diverse, educated, and employed subset of individuals of all generations (Brundage, 2017; Fry, 2018; Fry & Bialik, 2019) working at CCCs, the largest and most diverse educational system in the United States, (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.) as classified professionals, the most diverse and representative employment classification of the student body population at higher education institutions today (College and University Professional Association for Human Resources [CUPA-HR], 2018; Bichsel & McChesney, 2017; Espinosa et al., 2019). As more MWOC enter the higher education workforce, complete graduate degrees, and rise through the college administrative ranks, it is critical to investigate and understand the experiences and influence of these educational leaders.

Significance of the Problem

Educational institutions must work to improve educational outcomes for all students, but specifically students of color, low-income students, and first-generation college students, so that they have fair and just access to educational opportunities and economic advancement (An, 2013; Fink et al., 2017; Taylor, 2015). Racially and ethnically minoritized students and

students from low-income households are pushed out of high school and do not matriculate into college at the same rates as their White, Asian, and middle- and high-income peers (An, 2013; Fink et al., 2017; Taylor, 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2012; Vargas, 2013). Thus, these students are underrepresented in higher education and are underserved within educational institutions. The disproportionate educational outcomes for racial- and ethnic-minority students and students from low-income backgrounds in the United States has significant economic and societal ramifications for students and the nation (Rodriguez et al., 2012; Taylor, 2015).

Diversity is critical to the success of organizations, (Ledesma, 2017; Lorenzo & Reeves, 2018; Sherbin, 2013) and research shows that "diverse companies and teams are more productive and innovative" (Espinosa et al., 2019, p. 247). However, a majority of higher education administrators who hold formal leadership roles are White. In 2016, a study indicated that 86% of higher education administrators were White, and the American Council on Education (ACE) reported, "the percentage of college and university presidents who identified as a race or ethnicity other than White more than doubled between 1986 and 2016; however, fewer than one in five presidents identified as a person of color in 2016" (Espinosa et al., 2019, p. 248). When disaggregated by race and gender, (the limitations of this data include the exclusion of nonbinary individuals) women of color only represented 5% of all college and university presidents (Espinosa et al., 2019; Gagliardi et al., 2017).

Although improvements have been made in increasing diversity in college and university educational leadership; "despite decades of diversity initiatives, the gap in minority representation for leadership positions remains persistent" (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017,

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para. 7). As such, existing educational-leadership structures and practices are insufficient in effectively addressing the complex issues facing higher education today. Therefore, the research and advocacy of new leadership structures, practices, and types of leaders is needed.

Purpose of the Study

This study centers MWOC CCC professionals as institutional influencers by understanding how their leadership practices support the success of marginalized, minoritized, and historically underrepresented students and equity-advancing institutional change. The theoretical frameworks selected aim to center the work of Black and Chicana feminist scholars who have investigated how the unique experiences of women of color are impacted by—and have resisted—interlocking systems of oppressions, such as racism, patriarchy, sexism, and capitalism, all factors that persist and continue to affect the lives of MWOC (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 2000; Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks shaping this study are Black Feminist Epistemology (BFE) (Hill Collins, 2000) and Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE) (Delgado Bernal, 1998). With the focus of this study being how the intersectional identities of MWOC shape their experiences and inform their leadership styles in higher education, there is a need for critical, asset-based, and culturally sustaining types of framing. Over the course of several decades, scholars have critiqued the dominance of male-centric theory and research, both in educational research and other academic disciplines (Hill Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Existing scholarship and research in the field of education is insufficient for addressing the wide scope of experiences of educators and educational leaders working to address systemic issues of inequality in education (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). The theoretical frameworks selected aim to center the work of Black and Chicana feminist scholars who have investigated how the unique experiences of women of color are impacted by—and have resisted—interlocking systems of oppressions, such as racism, patriarchy, sexism, and capitalism, all factors that continue to affect the lives of MWOC (Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Hill Collins, 2000).

Black Feminist Epistemology and Black Feminist Thought

BFE stems from Black feminist thought, which centers and gives power to the lived experience of Black women in the United States. A key tenet of BFE is the exploration of the "intersecting oppressions shaping the U.S. matrix of domination" (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 327), which describes the ways in which Black women have historically existed as a subjugated and oppressed class in the United States. BFE focuses on the alternative ways that Black women have developed their own theories of knowledge that resist and challenge traditional scholarship that is largely White, male, and Western (Hill Collins, 1990).

Chicana Feminist Epistemology

CFE is an epistemological framework that centers the unique experiences of Chicanas in educational research, allowing them to "uncover and reclaim their own subjugated knowledge" (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 15). Historically, Chicanas and other women of color have existed at the margins of educational theory and research; CFE builds on existing literature to illustrate the importance of and critical need for understanding how Chicanas

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interact with and shape education and educational institutions. One of the important contributions of this framework examines Chicana student resistance and activism in education as part of the larger sociopolitical landscape of the United States, which underscores the ways in which higher education has excluded and marginalized women and racially and ethnically minoritized students. CFE decenters traditional paradigms of knowledge creation by placing the experiences of Chicanas at the center of research and theory to explore an entirely new way of thinking, knowing, and being.

Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of Millennial Women of Color (MWOC) who hold a personal commitment to addressing diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) issues in California Community Colleges (CCCs) by serving as leaders beyond their job duties?

2. How do the racialized, gendered, and generational experiences of 15 MWOC working as classified professionals within CCCs shape their leadership style and approach?

3. In what ways (if any) do MWOC (re)imagine leadership to support the growth and transformation of their institution to better serve marginalized, minoritized, and underrepresented students?

Definitions of Terms

- **classified professional:** Classified employees are non-teaching staff who perform a wide range of essential work in support of students, staff, and colleges. These positions can include roles related to clerical-technical, maintenance and operations,

building trades, non-academic supervisor, and professional, and also the role of classified administrator (Ventura County Community College District, n.d.).

- **hyper-marginalization:** Hyper-marginalization is the occurrence of one's identity contingencies and socioeconomic realities coalescing. "For example, low-socioeconomic-status students face marginalization; ethno-racially minoritized students face marginalization; LGBTQI+ students face marginalization. When these identity contingencies intersect with other extenuating circumstances, like poverty, the end result is hyper-marginalization" (Sims et al., 2020, p. 4).

- **influencer:** an individual who seeks to confirm or change the behavior of others; rooted in influencer marketing, which became popularized with the rise of social media; most understood to be those who have the power and platform to impact the purchasing decisions of large audiences of people (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023; Khamis et al., 2017).

- **influencer of the institution:** an individual who has influenced and, as a result, changed perceptions, processes, and policies of their institution to support the growth and transformation of their institution to better serve marginalized, minoritized, and underrepresented students.

- **leader:** an individual who possesses the skill or ability to influence, guide, and/or inspire other people, groups, and/or organizations to change their beliefs, behaviors, systems and/or systemic outcomes.

- **leadership:** the skill and/or an ability to influence, guide, and inspire individuals, groups, or organizations to change their beliefs, behaviors, systems, and/or systemic outcomes.

- **Millennial:** a term used to identify the specific generation of people born between 1981 and 1996; also known as Generation Y or Gen Y (Fry, 2018).

- **Millennial Woman of Color (MWOC):** an individual who identifies as a woman (inclusive of trans people) born within the millennial generation (also known as Gen Y) who is not ethnically White or of Anglo-European descent.

- **racially and ethnically minoritized:** a term that refers to the racial and ethnic demographics of people who are not ethnically White or of Anglo-European descent. In this study, the term *minoritized* replaces the commonly used word, "minority."

- **shared leadership:** a leadership approach that moves away from the leader/follow binary and capitalizes on the importance of leaders throughout the organization, not just those in positions of authority, to create an infrastructure where organizations can benefit from the leadership of multiple people (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017).

Significance of the Study

This study centers MWOC CCC professionals as institutional influencers by understanding how their leadership practices support the success of marginalized, minoritized, and historically underrepresented students, as well how they support equity-advancing institutional change. MWOC are a demographic of people who are well represented in student affairs professionals in the CCC system, yet their experience and influence at the institutional level and among students is not well researched. This research is

significant because it decenters traditional approaches to leadership and the overwhelming volume of research that is predominantly androcentric and racially monolithic, i.e., largely focused on the White male experience (Shakeshaft, 1989). Instead, this research moves MWOC from the margins to the center of higher education leadership discourse, aiming to understand how their experiences impact and influence institutional change and student outcomes.

As evidenced by the research, current educational leaders are not equipped with the appropriate leadership strategies and frameworks to adequately address the persistent issues around equity, access, and completion in higher education (Kezar & Holcombe 2017; Nevarez et al., 2013). The disproportionate educational outcomes for racially and ethnically minoritized students and students from low-income backgrounds in the United States indicates that leaders in higher education must work to strengthen educational pathways for students of color, low-income students, and first-generation college students so that they have fair and just access to educational opportunities and economic advancement (An, 2013; Fink 2017; Taylor, 2015).

As feminist research and theory proves (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Shakeshaft, 1989), women in leadership positions are more likely to engage in collective leadership practices that disrupt the status quo and focus on equity. Black, Indigenous, and Chicana/Latina scholars indicate that the diverse perspectives and unique experiences of women of color in educational leadership offer a greater and more nuanced understanding of the experiences, challenges, and strengths of racially and ethnically minoritized people (Ahnee-Benham, 2003; Blea, 1992; Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Delgado Bernal, 1998; hooks, 2000; Hurtado,

2001; Mendez-Morse, 2003). Additionally, emerging research focusing on the impact and influence of the millennial generation allows for a more nuanced research study and analysis of effective leadership strategies in higher education.

For decades, researchers have studied educational leadership hoping to identify the most effective types of leadership and the most effective types of leaders. And while there has been significant research and findings, limitations remain. As such, this research expands the scope of who can and should be studied to understand what leadership strategies are effective in addressing higher education issues today. This study is also significant because it is one of the few studies that focuses on exploring the experiences and influence of MWOC as leaders working as classified professionals at CCCs.

Site Selection and Sample

This qualitative study consisted of one set of one-hour-long interviews and three one-hour-long focus groups meeting, with 15 participants, held virtually via the Zoom platform. All of the participants identified as MWOC (born between 1981 and 1996) who are or have been employed as classified professionals in the CCC system. The CCC system is the largest and most diverse higher education system in the country, serving 2.1 million students (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.). Participants also identified as individuals committed to advancing support for historically underrepresented students through some form of DEI efforts in their work or at their campus. The recruitment of participants consisted of a snowball sample-selection process by identifying a mix of MWOC—familiar colleagues, acquaintances, and random participants who expressed interest in participating in the study and who meet the qualifications.

Scope and Considerations of the Study Scope

This study aimed to explore the experiences of MWOC working as classified professionals at CCCs to understand their influence on the institutions and students they serve. As such, the scope of the study focused on the experiences of a very narrow population and their personal experiences working in CCCs as classified professionals. However, existing educational-leadership research is limited in its analysis of the experiences of millennials and MWOC, the leadership practices of MWOC working in education, and the leadership practices of classified professionals working at CCCs. As such, this study expands the scope of research to investigate race/ethnicity, gender, age, leadership practice, and employment classifications in CCCs.

Considerations

Commonly referred to as limitations, this study instead positions these as considerations for the study. There are three considerations for this study.

First, the concept of race and ethnicity is highly debated. Often used synonymously, the two words have different meanings; and racial and ethnic identity are not as clearly delineated as we may believe, too often generalizing very different groups of people into one essentialist category. As such, individuals that identify as Latinx can also identify as any of the five racial identities established by the U.S. Census. I am mindful of the complexities of the tensions between race and ethnicity and of the ways in which colorism has impacted the experiences of racially and ethnically minoritized people in the United States. For the purposes of this study, participants will be required to self-identify as not ethnically White and not of Anglo-European descent.

Second, the COVID-19 pandemic has been ongoing throughout the duration of this study. Initially, there was concern that it may have impacted the data-collection process in a few ways: identifying participants who have the time and capacity to commit to a one-hour interview and one-hour focus group and also the potential for establishing and building rapport in a remote and virtual setting. However, these concerns did not significantly impact the ability to recruit participants with the time and capacity to participate in the study or create challenges in establishing and building rapport in a remote and virtual setting. It should be noted that some participants did become ill; however, it is unknown whether they contracted COVID-19. Still, it did impact their ability to participate in the focus group. This is also highlighted in the "Focus Group" section of this chapter.

Third, participants consisted of former colleagues that once I directly supervised in a managerial role at a community college. In order to account for participant/researcher bias, all participants that had been supervised by me and agreed to participate in the study were notified through the consent form and during the data-collection process that they were under no obligation to participate in the study and could elect to end the interview process at any time. Furthermore, all participants had complete authority to withdraw their participation in the study at any time.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Leadership for a Changing Higher Education Landscape

The landscape of higher education has significantly changed over time. Today's educational leaders are presented with a new set of challenges that they must overcome to best support student success and improve institutional effectiveness. Kezar and Holcombe (2017) state,

> Higher education leaders now face a very different set of challenges that necessitate new forms of leadership: for example, a volatile financial environment, the rise of global and international partnerships, greater accountability pressures around college completion and learning outcomes, the need for new business models, opportunities for innovation with technology, and changing demographics. (p. 1)

The challenges outlined in this quote are examples of pressing issues that are currently threatening the viability of higher education. However, it is important to note that the changing demographics of higher education is not a challenge to overcome; rather, the challenge is that higher education leaders must be equipped with new forms of leadership to ensure that educational systems are equitable for and accessible to all.

As indicated by Kezar and Holcombe (2017), the higher education environment has shifted significantly over time, exacerbating existing issues and surfacing new challenges that require new ways of leading. Historically, colleges have functioned with a "right to fail" approach, placing the onus on the student to successfully complete their educational goals without regard to or support for the various challenges students face in accessing, navigating, and completing college. Nevarez et al. (2013) state,

> The 'right to fail' is an outdated maxim; student success demands that leadership in every aspect of the student experience be hands-on intrusive. And as we rethink and reinvent curriculum, teaching methods and student support, we're also auditioning leadership for a new era in higher education. (p. xii)

As Nevarez et al. highlight, the "right to fail" approach is no longer an acceptable way to function for higher education institutions. As evidenced by the research, current educational leaders are inadequately equipped with the appropriate leadership strategies and frameworks to sufficiently address the persistent issues around equity, access, and completion in higher education (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Nevarez et al., 2013). Shifting racial, ethnic, and gender demographics in higher education requires leaders to embrace new perspectives and approaches in order to effectively address the disproportionate educational outcomes of historically underrepresented student populations, who are accessing college at increasing rates (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017).

Ultimately, some current educational leaders are inadequately equipped with the appropriate leadership strategies and frameworks needed to effectively address the new and existing challenges present in the higher education landscape. Historically, higher education leadership has predominantly existed in "top-down" structures, where decision-making and control are concentrated among a few at the top (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). However, "today's complex environments require new forms of collaborative or shared leadership to help campuses become nimbler and responsive to needed changes" (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017, p. 1). Current research suggests that educational leadership must shift and change in order to meet the demands and challenges present in today's higher education institutions (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Nevarez et al., 2013).

Kezar and Holcombe (2017) offer a new approach to educational leadership: "shared leadership," which is defined as "moving away from the leader/follower binary; capitalizing on the importance of leaders throughout the organization, not just those in positions of

authority; and creating an infrastructure so that organizations can benefit from the leadership of multiple people" (p. v). Shared leadership, as described by Kezar and Holcombe, is a departure from the traditional forms of leadership practiced in higher education.

Shifting Student Demographics and Persisting Equity Issues in Higher Education

Over the past two decades, the U.S. population has grown both increasingly diverse—ethnically and racially—and increasingly educated (Espinosa et al., 2019). Underrepresented student populations have gained access to college at increasing rates (Espinosa et al., 2019). Yet despite the increased access to, and participation in, educational opportunities for racially and ethnically minoritized students, there continues to be "stagnant and low levels of secondary school completion, college participation, and educational attainment for many communities of color" (Espinosa et al., 2019, p. xiii).

The Latinx population of the United States has continued to grow over time; similarly, other racially minoritized populations continue to grow as well, contributing to an increasingly diverse student population nationally. However, despite the increased access to, and participation in, educational opportunities for racially and ethnically minoritized students and students from low-income households, research indicates that these student populations are pushed out of high school and do not matriculate into college at the same rates as their White, Asian, and middle- and high-income peers (An, 2013; Fink et al., 2017; Taylor, 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2012; Vargas, 2013). Thus, these students are underrepresented in higher education and are underserved in educational institutions.

Studies show that low-income, first-generation, and racially and ethnically minoritized students face significant barriers to obtaining a high school diploma, graduating from college,

and ascending to living-wage jobs (An, 2013; Fink, 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2012; Taylor,

2015; Vargas, 2013). In the study "The Economic Payoff for Closing College-Readiness and

Completion Gaps: Why States Should Invest in Accelerating Low-Income Youth to and

Through Postsecondary Credentials," Vargas (2013) states,

> The low rates at which U.S. college students complete a degree and the amount of
> time they spend in remedial coursework are national problems. The situation is
> particularly acute for low-income and other underserved youth, including populations
> such as Hispanic students that are growing the fastest in the country and that have
> some of the lowest success rates in our K-12 and postsecondary education systems.
> (p. 1)

As highlighted by Vargas, U.S. college-degree completion is generally low, especially for

Latinx and other underserved populations. As indicated by Nevarez et al. (2013), higher

education institutions have traditionally functioned with a "right to fail" approach, failing to

effectively address low college-degree completion rates as a whole, and also failing to

adequately address the educational-equity gaps experienced by historically underrepresented

student populations.

These disproportionate rates at which minoritized students access and complete higher

education are national problems and have serious implications for both the students and the

nation (Vargas, 2013). Vargas, states,

> It is a problem not only for the students, and not only because our economy and
> democracy depend on well-educated citizens, but also because it represents an
> inefficient use of personal and public investments in education. Every student who
> falls short of the goal of earning a high school diploma and a college degree
> represents a financial investment that did not pay off in a credential of value in the
> labor market. (2013, p.1)

Vargas (2013) highlights a critical national issue that inextricably links the educational

success of historically underrepresented student populations to the overall vitality and

success of U.S. democracy and the country's economy. Vargas suggests that it is imperative that the United States address and remedy the inequitable access to postsecondary educational opportunities of marginalized students. Rodriguez et al. (2012) underscore the inequitable and disproportionate educational outcomes for Black and Latinx youth, asserting that students of color, particularly Black and Latinx students, do not advance to college at the same rates as their White and Asian peers.

Despite the progress that has been made in educational attainment in the United States, the disparities present among racially and ethnically minoritized communities persist. As evidenced by the research, individuals with a college education have higher rates of employment, earn higher wages, have greater access to upward social mobility, are more civically involved, are more likely to own homes, and are more likely to have healthier lifestyles (An, 2013; Fink et al., 2017; Rodriguez et al., 2012; Taylor, 2015; Vargas, 2013). As a result, "these disparities suggest that large groups of Americans are left out of opportunities to improve their lives and to maximize their contributions to society" (Espinosa et al., 2019 p. 3).

The systemic educational inequities for low-income, first-generation, and racially and ethnically minoritized students have crippling long-term economic and social consequences for both these students and the United States (Vargas, 2013). Alleviating existing barriers for historically underserved student populations can result in significant gains in their lives and for the public good (Vargas, 2013). As a result, educational institutions must work to improve educational outcomes for all students, but specifically students of color, low-income students, and first-generation college students so that they have fair and just access to

educational opportunities and economic advancement (An, 2013; Fink et al., 2017; Taylor, 2015).

Community College as Primary Access Point for Underrepresented Students

Access to postsecondary education in the United States has been unequal for the racially and ethnically minoritized, as well as other marginalized communities (An, 2013; Fink et al., 2017; Vargas, 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2012). Data and research indicate that community colleges, also known as two-year colleges, are often the most accessible higher education pathway for underrepresented student populations (Taylor, 2015). Community colleges, also known as junior colleges, are two-year, public higher education institutions, where students can earn associate's degrees, certificates, vocational training, and prerequisites for transfer to a four-year university (Fong et al, 2017). Over the past century, enrollment across community colleges has steadily expanded, increasing access to higher education opportunities to a wider population of people, especially historically underrepresented student populations (Fong et al., 2017; Nevarez et al., 2013).

The CCC system is the largest and most diverse higher education system in the country (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.). Currently, nearly half of college students nationwide are enrolled in community colleges, and the CCC system is the largest educational system in the country; 2.1 million students are enrolled in it (CCC Chancellors, 2021). Nevarez et al. (2013) assert that community colleges are often the primary access point, and sometimes the last opportunity, that many students have to access higher education; they state,

> Community colleges serve as the primary pathway, and often last opportunity, for an increasingly diverse student population, particularly students of color, low-income students, and first-generation college students. They also serve as an economic and workforce development engine for local communities. (p. xvii)

Yet data also indicate that although underrepresented students access community college at higher rates than they do four-year institutions, they do not complete their educational goals at a rate proportionate to that of White, Asian, high-income, and continuing-generation peers (Taylor, 2015).

As a result, community colleges have made significant efforts in addressing disproportionate educational opportunities and outcomes for historically underrepresented students (Fong et al., 2017). As with the outdated "right to fail" approach historically embraced by higher education institutions, community colleges are faced with shifting their approach in order to ensure greater success for all of their students. Nevarez et al. (2013) assert, "unequivocally, the community college profession has come to a juncture where moving forward with a 'business as usual' approach will not work. Internal and external forces are too great, demanding immediate transformation and change" (p. xvii).

Consequently, community colleges are working to implement equity-based initiatives (Guided Pathways, College Promise, and AB 705) aimed at increasing the enrollment, persistence, and success of racially and ethnically minoritized students, first-generation students, and other marginalized student groups (Felix, 2021).

Ultimately, community colleges serve as critical spaces for historically underrepresented and other marginalized student populations and are important sites for advancing equitable outcomes, diversity, and inclusion in all higher education institutions (Fong et al., 2017).

Deficit Schooling Practices, Spirit Murder, and the Importance of Community Cultural Wealth

Historically, schools have served as sites of social and cultural reproduction, perpetuating race- and class-based structural inequalities (Apple, 1981; Giroux, 1979; Tisdell, 1993). Over time, schools have propagated race-based discrimination in both formal and informal educational policy (Haper, 2012; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). First introducing the concept through a legal and criminal justice lens, Williams (1987) posited that that racism be reconceptualized as "spirit murder" after examining and witnessing the impacts of continued racialized violence against the Black community in the United States. Williams concluded that racism, enacted through various forms of prejudice, discrimination, and prosecution, be considered a crime, comparable to robbery and physical assault. Love (2016) furthers Williams' argument and situates spirit murder in the context of U.S. schooling; discussing the ways that systemic racism impacts the lives of Black children, she states,

> Race-centered violence kills Black children on a daily basis by either murdering them in the streets—taking their bodies, or murdering their spirits—taking their souls. Spirit murdering within a school context is the denial of inclusion, protection, safety, nurturance, and acceptance because of fixed, yet fluid and moldable, structures of racism. (p. 2)

Love discusses the lived realities of Black students, detailing the ways that the historical foundations and persistent legacy of systemic racism impacts the schooling experience for racialized communities today, especially for the Black community. Historically, the racially and ethnically minoritized have been viewed and treated through a racist and deficit lens in U.S. schooling. Yosso (2005) explains,

> Indeed one of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in U.S. schools is deficit thinking. Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter schools without

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the normative cultural knowledge and skills and (b) parent's neither value nor support their child's education. (p. 75)

As Yosso indicates, deficit thinking is a form of racism that places the blame on minoritized students and families for institutional failures that result in poor educational outcomes for marginalized students. It is no surprise, then, that as racially and ethnically minoritized students progress through school, they endure spirit murder (Love, 2016; Williams, 1987) and face significant barriers to achieving academic success, matriculating into college, earning a baccalaureate degree, and ascending into living-wage employment opportunities (An, 2013; Fink et al., 2017; Taylor, 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2012; Vargas, 2013).

However, Yosso (2005) challenges the assumption that students of color are "culturally deficient" and introduces the concept of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), an alternative to traditional interpretations of cultural capital theory. Yosso defines CCW as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77). CCW highlights that ethnically and racially minoritized people possess cultural knowledge and, although it doesn't mirror the normative cultural knowledge valued by dominant culture, it is still valuable and valid (Yosso, 2005).

Traditionally, the knowledge held and produced by communities of color has largely gone unseen, overlooked, or discounted (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Yosso, 2005). In this era of changing demographics in the higher education landscape, there is increased attention on understanding the types of leadership that is required to "guide campuses successfully, and a growing concern that existing approaches to leadership are ineffective" (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017, p. 2). As colleges become more ethnically and racially diverse, there is a growing

demand and need for educational leaders to become aware of and address the effects of

systemic racism in schooling in order to effectively meet the needs of students and ensure

students achieve the educational outcomes they aim for (Nevarez, 2021).

Lack of Diversity and Representation in Higher Education Leadership

Despite the diversification of the higher education student body in terms of race/ethnicity,

gender, socioeconomic status and more, educational leadership has remained largely

unchanged (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017). Nationally, higher education leadership is not

representative of the student population, and the majority of leaders are White men (Bichsel

& McChesney, 2017).

Often, conversations regarding diversity in higher education have solely focused on

student demographics, lacking substantive discussion and action regarding the unequal

gender and racial gaps present in higher education leadership (Espinosa et al., 2019, p. 247).

As research suggests, diversity is critical to the success of organizations; and research shows

that "diverse companies and teams are more productive and innovative" (Espinosa et al.,

2019, p. 247).

Data indicates that, in 2016, 86% of higher educational administrators were White, and

"despite decades of diversity initiatives, the gap in minority representation for leadership

positions remains persistent" (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017, para. 7). Beyond positions in the

leadership ranks, the ACE reported that,

> Nearly three-quarters of all full-time faculty in 2016 were White…Among full-time
> faculty across all types of institutions, larger shares of White and Asian faculty than
> of other groups were full professors. A larger share of American Indian or Alaska
> Native faculty, Hispanic faculty, Black faculty, and faculty of more than one race

were instructors, lecturers, and faculty with no academic rank than other groups. (Espinosa et al., 2019, p. 247)

As evidenced by data reported by CUPA-HR the majority of higher education administration who hold formal leadership roles are racially White (Espinosa et al., 2019). Additional research indicates that although there has been a significant increase in the number of higher education presidents that identify as a race or ethnicity other than White, the number still remains low; the ACE reported,

> The percentage of college and university presidents who identified as a race or ethnicity other than White more than doubled between 1986 and 2016; however, fewer than one in five presidents identified as a person of color in 2016. (Espinosa et al., 2019, p. 248)

When disaggregated by race and gender (the limitations of this data include the exclusion of nonbinary individuals), women of color only represented 5% of all college and university presidents (Espinosa et al., 2019; Gagliardi et al., 2017).

However, over the past few decades there has been some progress in the racial and ethnic diversification of the college and university president role (Espinosa et al., 2019). The ACE reported that "the percentage of college and university presidents who identified as a race or ethnicity other than White more than doubled between 1986 and 2016; however, fewer than one in five presidents identified as a person of color in 2016" (248). Per the American College President Study (2017) non-White presidents in 2016 were represented in the following way: "Blacks (7.9%), Hispanics (3.9%), Asians (2.3%), and individuals of more than one race (1.4%). American Indians or Alaska Natives (0.7%) and Middle Eastern or Arab Americans10 (0.6%) made up the smallest fraction of all college and university presidents" (Espinosa et al., 2019, p.266).

When disaggregated by gender, (the limitations of this data include the exclusion of nonbinary individuals) women represented 30.1% of all U.S. college and university presidents, with men representing nearly 70%. However, when examined further and disaggregated by gender and race, Women of color only represented 5% of all college and university presidents (Espinosa et al., 2019; Gagliardi et al., 2017).

The current higher education-leadership landscape is filled with new, complex issues that educational leaders have not had to address in the past. As such, research suggests (Wallin, 2010) that educational leaders (college and university administrators) must depart from leadership approaches that are top-down, where centralized power and concentrated decision-making is commonplace (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017).

Cultural Competence of Student Affairs Educators in Higher Education

As student populations become more diverse, so do higher education staff and faculty; although diversity is not nearly representative of the student body, gains have been made in the hiring of racially and ethnically minoritized people (Espinosa et al., 2019). According to the College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR) data, in 2017,

> Whites represented the majority of all administrative positions, although some positions had a larger percentage of people of color[1] than others. A smaller share of chief student affairs and student life officers than of other types of administrators were White (75.0 percent). About one-quarter of individuals in these positions identified as people of color (26.0 percent). (Bichsel et al., 2018, para. 1).

Regarding staff positions in higher education, the largest group are office and clerical staff. And among those roles, people of color represented a little over one quarter, at 25.9%, with the majority identifying as Black, at 7.4%; followed by Latinx, at 2.5%; and smaller

margins for other minoritized races and ethnicities. The largest representation of people of color are in positions in service and maintenance, at about 42%. Within student affairs, 26.5% of staff identified as people of color, and, for academic affairs, the percentage of people of color was 22.1% (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017; Espinosa et al., 2019).

In higher education, student affairs professionals play an integral role in advancing the mission of the colleges they serve. However, there is limited research and data regarding the overall classification of student affairs professionals (different than faculty and administration) the differences in the roles of higher education staff, which are often referred to as classified professionals in the community college context, and the overall racial and gender demographics of these employees. Overall, the role of student affairs professional is expansive and is critical in the function and success of higher education institutions (Plagman-Galvin, 2018). Per the College Student Educators International (ACPA) and Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) student affairs offices oversee student orientation, enrollment, residence life, health services, student programming, student conduct, diversity initiatives among other areas of student life, and college operations (Plagman-Galvin, 2018). As such, student affairs professionals are charged with developing institutional policies, creating student programming, addressing student conduct, and engaging with students in virtually every aspect of their college experience (Plagman-Galvin, 2018, p. 2).

As such, student affairs professionals are expected to possess a wide range of competencies in order to effectively do their jobs (Gansemer-Topf & Ryder, 2017). Those competencies include, but are not limited to: interpersonal skills, student development theory,

leadership, social justice, assessment, research, multicultural knowledge, advising, oral and written communication, management, budget skills, and technology (Gansemer-Topf & Ryder, 2017).

As the diversity of student populations in colleges increases, specific attention has been placed on addressing the cultural competency of administrators, faculty, and student affairs professionals (Hurtado & Guillermo-Wann, 2013; Plagman-Galvin, 2018). Historically, college campuses have been sites of political, social, and economic contention, often surfacing issues harming the increasingly diverse student body and underscoring the need for multiculturally competent educators in higher education (Plagman-Galvin, 2018).

According to Plagman-Galvin, "student affairs educators are integral to meet the needs of today's increasingly diverse student population, especially supporting the student success of underrepresented students and developing the multicultural competence of all students" (2018, p. 1). A critical component of effectively engaging in multicultural work is understanding how systemic oppression has impacted the lives of historically underrepresented students and how it persists through the structures and systems that make up the college experience (Plagman-Galvin, 2018).

The Need for Racial Justice-Oriented Educators of Color

In "Disrupting Whitestream Measures of Quality Teaching: The Community Cultural Wealth of Teachers of Color," Burciaga and Kohli (2018) discuss the importance of centering research that disrupts the "whitestream measures of quality teaching" in order to understand the important strengths and contributions that "racial justice-oriented teachers of color bring to the profession that go largely unnoticed" (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018, p. 5).

Burciaga and Kohli define racial justice-oriented teachers of color as "teachers who recognize structural racial inequities and strive for transformation" (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018, p. 6). As discussed by Shakeshaft (1989), existing research in the field of education is largely White and androcentric. Burciaga and Kohli suggest that because Whiteness, and "eurocentrism" is the norm in the field of education and in the teaching profession, there is a need for understanding the "counternarratives" and "oppositional stories":

> Told from the vantage point of the oppressed—of women of color educators to show how their positionalities as teachers of color, community members, and activists, provide insights to the experiences and needs of students that often go unrecognized. (p. 5)

As such, these counternarratives provide educational institutions and educational leaders with insight into the important, yet overlooked, experiences and pedagogical strategies of racial justice-oriented teachers of color in order to better serve students and improve institutional outcomes (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018.) Over time, research has demonstrated that educational opportunities and outcomes have been historically inequitable for students of color. Research indicates that students of color, when compared to their White counterparts, have fewer resources; have schools with high teacher and administrative turnover, larger class sizes, and classroom materials that center Eurocentric perspectives; and face harsher discipline and punishment—all characteristics that are directly linked to the school-to-prison pipeline (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). Additionally, students of color are more likely to encounter racial bias from their teachers, which both contributes to and perpetuates the pervasive and problematic deficit-based mindset that many educators have of ethnically and racially minoritized students (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018). Burciaga and Koli state,

There is a national awareness about the disparity in academic achievement between students of color and White students. However, these disparities are often reasoned as inherent deficiencies and presented as immutable facts. That is, communities of color have often been depicted as carrying inadequacies (e.g., lack motivation or value for education) that are attributed to race, poverty, culture, or inadequate socialization from home. In schools, these mindsets manifest in many ways including how educators have normalized labeling students of color "at risk" before they begin kindergarten and the continued categorization of poor schools as "underperforming" with little attention to the socio-historical factors that undergird these inequalities (2018, p. 6).

Burciaga and Koli underscore how racial bias and systemic racism contribute to the devaluation and dehumanization of students of color and emphasize the harmful effects present among these students. However, just as students of color face deficit-oriented perceptions and bias from their schools and teachers, educators of color are also faced with the same bias. Burciaga and Kohli state,

While educational research on deficit thinking has been primarily applied to analyses of students of color, teachers of color also describe being viewed by administrators and peers as having deficiencies. These experiences span from being questioned about their pedagogical approaches to being overlooked for leadership opportunities (pp. 6-7).

As such, it is paramount that educational institutions and leaders seek out, understand, and center the experiences of educators who recognize structural racial inequities and aim to transform these inequalities (Burciaga & Koli, 2018).

Race and Gender Conscious Diversification Practices in Higher Education Leadership

In "Leadership as Mission Critical: Latinas/os, the Military, and Affirmative Action in Higher Education," Ledesma (2017) explores the significance of the diversification of leadership in the U.S. military through race-conscious practices. As research indicates, ethnically and racially minoritized students are disproportionately impacted by racist and deficit-based educational systems that produce systemic barriers to completing high school,

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attending college, obtaining a college degree, and ultimately transitioning to living-wage job opportunities (An, 2013; Fink et al., 2017; Taylor, 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2012; Vargas, 2013). However, research has also indicated that ethnically and racially minoritized teachers, educators, and administrators of color have positive educational impacts on students and their institutions (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Hurtado, 2001; Magdaleno, 2006; Moody, 2012; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Shakeshaft, 1989; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017).

Ledesma (2017) examines the similarities between the organizational structures and leadership dynamics of higher education institutions and those of the U.S. military, while also drawing comparisons between their distinct functions as organizations. Ledesma states,

> I recognize that the military and higher education represent two very distinct organizations. However, I posit that there are also important similarities that allow for comparison. To begin with, both organizations operate under the auspices of predominantly White male leadership. Both the military and higher education are institutions that are relatively bottom heavy with respect to diversity—that is, diversity is most likely concentrated within "lower ranks" (e.g., students and soldiers). (p. 132)

As Ledesma asserts, and as evidenced by the data regarding higher education leadership demographics, ethnically and racially minoritized people are far less represented in the administrative ranks and in faculty and mid-level management roles in higher education (Espinosa et al., 2019). Conversely, data indicate that the roles in which people of color are most represented are positions predominately in service and maintenance, at about 42% (Espinosa et al., 2019). Ledesma explains that the move to increase diversity in the military was not simply done out of a willingness to empower their soldiers of color but, instead, out of a necessity to address the serious issues present for soldiers of color and posits that higher education should follow suit. Ledesma asserts,

just as the military justified their attention to leadership diversification because of the racial strife and physical and mortal danger in which soldiers found themselves as a result of a racially stratified leadership corps, so too should higher education attend to the corrosive and combustible campus cultures within which so many minoritized students find themselves. (p. 135)

Research suggests that educational institutions must work to strengthen educational pathways for all students, but specifically students of color, low-income students, and first-generation college students so that they have fair and just access to educational opportunities and economic advancement (An, 2013; Fink et al., 2017; Taylor, 2015). Ledesma (2017) suggests that intentional race-conscious policies aimed at diversifying higher education leadership could be a solution to addressing systemic issues that have long persisted in U.S. colleges and universities. Ledesma states,

> What I am suggesting is that for Latinas/os, as well as other historically minoritized populations, the continuance of race-conscious policies in higher education matters. After all, studies tell us that students who attend selective institutions, within which affirmative action policies are most commonly practiced, are more likely to persist toward graduation as well as more likely to pursue post baccalaureate study. (p. 125)

As Ledesma suggests, the commitment to diversifying higher education leadership through race-conscious policy could be a critical leadership strategy in beginning to holistically address the varying needs of an increasingly diverse student body.

Women in Leadership Roles are More Collaborative and Equity Minded

In "A New Way: Diverse Collective Leadership," Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) discuss how women in leadership positions are more likely to engage in collective leadership practices that disrupt the status quo and focus on equity. Grogan and Shakeshaft state, "Women's leadership has often been described as collaborative, creating a context that promotes shared meaning-making with a community of practice grappling with issues of

equity and diversity" (p. 111). In contrast to traditional forms of leadership, or executive style leadership, collective leadership invites all stakeholders to participate in the process of leadership and is focused on relationships rather than a singular individual with the authority and power to make decisions (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) illustrate how women's leadership styles depart from traditional forms of leadership, instead focusing on the distribution of leadership and power among a collective group for collective good. They state, "Collective leadership suggests that these connective opportunities produce the best and most workable ideas or plans for action" (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 120). As highlighted in the quote, collective action requires a departure from top-down, hierarchical structures of power and control, centering more divergent approaches of shared power and collaborative problem-solving.

As feminist research and theory suggests (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Shakeshaft, 1989), leadership strategies employed by women are effective in creating change. Additionally, the diverse perspectives and unique experience of women of color in educational leadership offer greater and more nuanced understanding of the experiences, challenges, and strengths of racially and ethnically minoritized people (Ahnee-Benham, 2003; Blea, 1992; hooks, 2000; Hurtado, 2001; Mendez-Morse, 2003).

Educational Theory and Research is Predominantly White and Male

In what has come to be a foundational text in the field of educational leadership, "The Gender Gap in Research in Educational Administration," Shakeshaft (1989) explores the history of educational-administration research. Shakeshaft posits that the predominant body of educational-leadership research and theory is androcentric and lacks diverse perspectives.

Shakeshaft explains that a major failure and consequence of androcentric bias in educational-leadership research and theory is that the findings become a universal reality (Shakeshaft, 1989). Shakeshaft states,

> for many reasons, some understandable and others less clear, research in educational administration has largely looked at the male experience. It is not new to say that women have been excluded from the production of knowledge. Science and science-making tend to reinforce and perpetuate dominant social values and conceptions of reality (p. 324).

Shakeshaft claims that because of the neglect of diverse perspectives participating in the production of knowledge within educational research, "the outcomes have become the standards and norms by which all experience is measured and valued, with women as but one of the nondominant groups that have remain underrepresented" (p. 324). Over the course of several decades' research, Shakeshaft has critiqued the dominance of male-centric theory and research, both in educational research and other academic disciplines.

Per Shakeshaft (1989), male-dominated scholarship, or research that is presented through a male lens, is insufficient in addressing the wide scope of experiences of educational leaders and is dismissive of the unique experiences that women face. Shakeshaft states that research and theory "solely from a male conscience may be irrelevant for the female experience and inadequate for explaining female behavior" (p. 324). To better understand the "dominance of the White male worldview in research and knowledge" (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 325) and its impact on scholarship in educational leadership, Shakeshaft uses the term *androcentric*. Shakeshaft defines androcentric as "the practice of viewing the world and shaping reality through a male lens" (p. 325).

Shakeshaft (1989) asserts that it is essential to understand the limitations of an androcentric worldview because "all research reflects a set of beliefs or values" (p. 325) and, if the research is confined to a singular worldview, "harm comes…from a claim that it is the only lens through which to understand human behavior" (p. 325). Shakeshaft states,

> Studying male behavior, and more particularly White male behavior is not in and of itself a problem. It becomes a problem when the results of studying male behavior are assumed appropriate for understanding all behavior. Of paramount importance in trusting and using research is the ability to recognize perspectives and to explain the methods and findings in ways that make it unmistakingly clear to the consumer just what the perspective is (p. 325).

Shakeshaft (1989) asserts that androcentric research and theory would not be problematic if all players in a school setting were White men; however, we know that this is not the reality of our education system. Shakeshaft states, "Because we now know that gender and race differences in behavior and perspectives do exist, it becomes important to examine theory and research for androcentrism and to expand theory and research to include the perspective of nondominant groups" (p. 325).

However, as evidenced by the data on women in administrative leadership roles in higher education, women hold only one third of college- and university-president positions; and, when disaggregated by race, Women of color hold only 5% of president roles (Espinosa et al., 2019; Gagliardi et al., 2017). A glaring limitation of research on women in educational-leadership positions is the omission of race. Studies show that White women are more likely to advance to managerial and administrative roles in education as compared to non-White women (Colon Gibson, 1992; Gardiner et al, 2000). Research indicates that ethnically and racially minoritized women have fewer mentorship and training opportunities to support career advancement. Additionally, women of color face higher rates of stereotyping and

racial bias, which ultimately impacts how they are perceived and which professional opportunities they have access to (Colon Gibson, 1992; Gardiner et al., 2000; Mendez-Morse, 1997).

Centering Marginalized Voices in Educational Research and Leadership Theory

Like the critiques of male-dominated research in the field of educational leadership, feminist scholars have argued that traditional feminist theory is rooted in the experiences of White populations and generalizations of the experiences of "women" create inaccurate depictions of women, perpetuate harmful stereotypes, force women of color into the margins, and/or erase the experiences of non-White women (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984; Ledesma, 2017; Mendez-Morse, 2003; Reinharz, 1992; Young, 2003). Similar to the critiques of androcentric research and theory, the body of research that exists to illustrate the experiences of WOC in educational leadership does not fully and accurately capture the reality WOC face. Young (2003) says,

> Contemporary theories of gender difference have also emphasized the shared experiences of women across the divisions of race, class, age, and other differences. In such theories, the diversity of women's lives and activities have often been lumped into the category 'women's experience,' presumably in an effort to provide a basis for a collective feminist subject, emancipatory theory, and identity politics. More recently, however, it is the differences among women (e.g. race, class, and sexual orientation) that have moved to the forefront of theoretical discussions. (p. 36)

In "Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center," hooks (1984) discusses how Black women have existed in the margins of society, excluded from the mainstream feminist movements and feminist theory. hooks details the ways in which Black women's stories and experiences have been largely missing and invisible in the discourse and scholarship of feminist research. hooks asserts,

Much feminist theory emerges from privileged women who live at the center, whose perspectives on reality rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of women and men who live in the margin. As a consequence, feminist theory lacks wholeness, lacks the broad analysis that could encompass a variety of human experiences. (p. x)

Similarly, Sylvia Mendez-Morse (2003) discusses the invisibility of the discussion of race and ethnicity in feminist educational discourse. In "Chicana Feminism and Educational Leadership," Mendez-Morse examines how Chicana feminist scholarship "offers an alternative epistemology not only to the discussion of gender, including its construction and its impact on the lives of women, but also to the continuing conversation on educational leadership" (p. 162). Mendez-Morse asserts that the lived experiences of Chicanas in educational-leadership research cannot be seen as simply synonymous with the experience of White women because Chicana's are faced with of the multiple oppressions caused by the "intersections of gender, class, race/ethnicity, religion, language, and sexual orientation" Chicanas face (p. 162).

Over time, racially and ethnically minoritized women scholars have explored the differences in the experiences of WOC as compared to White women in an effort to understand how systems of oppression, such as patriarchy, racism, and sexism, have shaped and impacted the experiences of WOC (hooks, 1984, Mendez-Morse, 2003; Reinharz, 1992; Young, 2003). Young (2003) says, "Albeit much of the early White feminist research made use of essentialized categories of gender, contemporary feminist researchers have increasingly recognized the importance of the differences that exist among women and the multiple sources of identity that affect individual women" (Young, 2003, p. 39).

As the literature indicates, the diverse experiences represented in the research centering WOC creates a rich context in which to situate discussions around systems of oppression,

feminism, and educational leadership. As research suggests, women's leadership styles

depart from the traditional "command and control" paradigm, shifting to often be more

collectivist, focused on the greater good, focused on creating change, and aimed at sharing

decision-making power to find the best solution to different problems (Grogan & Shakeshaft,

2011). However, there are also valid critiques of some of the existing research on

educational-leadership theory and practice. Over time, WOC scholars have problematized

commonly revered findings by exposing the limitations of and gaps present in these existing

bodies of literature. Blea (1992) explains,

> Minority women tend to have a more holistic view of the world because they
> recognize their lives have been shaped by a number of factors that do not affect other
> women...their experience has been different, even unique, since being a female is
> complicated by being a minority. (p. 164)

For decades, Black and Chicana feminist scholars have investigated how the unique

experiences of women of color are impacted by—and have resisted—interlocking systems of

oppression—such as racism, patriarchy, sexism, and capitalism (Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado

Bernal, 1998; Hill Collins, 2000). In "Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness,

and the Politics of Empowerment," Hill Collins (1990) centers the lived experience of Black

women and describes how Black women have historically existed as a subjugated and

oppressed class in the United States. Hill Collins offers the theory of BFE, which provides a

counternarrative detailing how Black women develop their own theories of knowledge that

resist and challenge traditional scholarship, which is largely White, male, and Western.

Similarly, Delgado Bernal (1998) offers CFE—an epistemological framework that

centers the unique experience of Chicanas in educational research—for allowing Chicanas to

"uncover and reclaim their own subjugated knowledge" (p. 15). Historically, Chicanas and

other women of color have existed at the margins of educational theory and research; CFE builds on the existing literature to illustrate the importance of and critical need for understanding how Chicanas interact with and shape education and educational institutions. One of the important contributions of this framework is an examination of Chicana student resistance and activism; the framework underscores the ways in which higher education has excluded and marginalized women and racially and ethnically minoritized students. CFE decenters traditional paradigms of knowledge creation by placing the experiences of Chicanas at the center of research and theory to explore an entirely new way of thinking, knowing, and being.

Other women scholars of color describe similar experiences; Mendez-Morse (2003) explains how Mexican and Mexican-American leaders are seen as leaders in their communities due to the various roles they hold in their family, roles that ultimately shape how they lead by supporting their capacity for a leadership that is centered around community care and social justice. Similarly, Horsford (2012) discusses how "bridge leadership" has been historically practiced by Black women leaders in the United States who are focusing on themes of DEI. Horsford states that bridge leadership's primary aim is to,

> demonstrate how the intersections of race and gender as experienced by the Black woman leader, has, in many instances, resulted in her serving as a bridge for others, to others, between others in multiple an often complicated contexts over time (p. 12).

As Horsford discusses, the intersections of race and gender play an important role in leadership practice. As such, Ahnee-Benham (2003) describes how Indigenous women's leadership practices are rooted in the context of their cultural worldview, similar to Méndez-Morse's assertion that Indigenous women occupy various roles in their communities.

Méndez-Morse (2003) states, "Thus as female scholars of color, we ask different questions, contribute a different perspective, and maintain that the factors of race/ethnicity, sexuality, class, religion, language *and* gender have a profound impact on our lives" (p. 166).

As a result, the lived experiences of non-White women inform and shape how they exist in the world and, ultimately, how they lead in educational settings (Ahnee-Benham, 2003; Blea, 1992; Hill Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Horsford, 2012; Mendez-Morse, 2003).

Positive Impacts of Diverse Representation in Educational Leadership

Research indicates that the diversification of educational leadership improves institutional effectiveness and student outcomes and that educational leaders of color play an important role in the success of racially and ethnically minoritized student populations (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Hurtado, 2001; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Magdaleno, 2006; Moody, 2012; Shakeshaft, 1989). When educational leaders reflect the diverse student populations they serve, educational outcomes for historically underrepresented student populations improve (Hagedorn, 2007; Hurtado, 2001; Magdaleno, 2006; Moody, 2012).

Administrators of color play a critical role in the success of racially and ethnically minoritized student populations (Magdaleno, 2006). Exposure to educational leaders of color in academic institutions positively impacts stereotyping and unconscious bias, phenomena that often have negative and harmful implications for communities of color (Hurtado, 2001). Educational administrators of color are more likely to build strong community ties and trust when they lead schools in communities of the same racial and ethnic group as them (Magdaleno, 2006). Educational administrators of color are more likely to understand the

nuanced experience of students of color and respond to educational challenges through a culturally competent lens (Hurtado, 2001; Magdaleno, 2006; Moody, 2012).

Overall, administrators of color play a crucial role in shaping a positive educational experience for historically marginalized students (Hurtado, 2001; Magdaleno, 2006; Moody, 2012). However, as the number of students of color has increased in the U.S. educational system, representation of administrators of color has not (Ortiz, 2001). Specifically, in higher education, administrators who hold formal leadership roles are predominately White; and, although improvements have been made in increasing diversity in college and university educational leadership, "despite decades of diversity initiatives, the gap in minority representation for leadership positions remains persistent" (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017, para. 4).

As evidenced by the research, students of color and students from low-income households are disproportionately impacted by systemic barriers to educational attainment and advancement (An, 2013; Fink et al., 2017; Taylor, 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2012; Vargas, 2013). Frequent exposure to educational leaders of color has significant benefits for students of color and for institutional outcomes. The sheer presence of these leaders often mitigates harmful and detrimental stereotypes and biases perpetuated in society and the media (Colon Gibson, 1992; Gardiner et al., 2000; Mendez-Morse, 1997). Additionally, research indicates a positive correlation between the number of faculty and administrators of color and the persistence of students of color (Hagedorn et al., 2007).

Research suggests that diverse leadership in education matters because the diversification of educational leadership improves student outcomes and institutional effectiveness

(Hurtado, 2001; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Magdaleno, 2006; Moody, 2012; Shakeshaft, 1989). Yet studies show that higher education leadership is not representative of the national student population. Nationwide, colleges and universities are led by predominantly White men (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017). As illuminated by feminist scholars of color, varying identity markers, such as race/ethnicity, class, gender, language, sexuality, and religion, play a role in the way people of color exist in the United States (Ahnee-Benham, 2003; Blea, 1992; hooks, 1991; Mendez-Morse, 1997). Additionally, the existing interlocking systems of oppression in U.S. society and the U.S. educational context play a significant role in which opportunities people of color have access to (Ahnee-Benham, 2003; Blea, 1992; Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado Bernal 1998; Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984; Mendez-Morse, 1997).

Millennials As Emerging Leaders with Values of Collaboration and Shared Leadership

An emerging demographic of leaders that has been shown to embrace principles of collaboration and shared leadership is the millennial generation (Barrington, 2019). The millennial generation (born between 1981 and 1996) is now the largest generation in the workforce (Fry, 2018). As such, it is important to understand how their leadership styles and values will shape the future of higher education.

Similar to the baby boomer generation, millennials (born between 1981 and 1996; ages 40 to 25, respectively, in 2021) have had a profound impact on the U.S. landscape, contributing to major societal shifts in politics, education, the economy, and more (Fry & Bialik, 2019). According to a study, millennials value teamwork and collaboration in the

workplace, forgoing traditional hierarchical leadership structures for shared leadership and team problem-solving (Barrington, 2019).

Millennials account for 35% of the U.S. workforce (Fry, 2018). Current projections estimate that by 2028, millennials will surpass the boomer population (ages 57–75), making them the largest living adult generation (Fry, 2020). According to the Pew Research Center, "Millennials have brought more racial and ethnic diversity to American society. And Millennial women, like Generation X women, are more likely to participate in the nation's workforce than prior generations" (Fry & Bialik, 2019). As the second-largest eligible voting population after the baby boomers, millennials have, and continue to, shape U.S. politics, predominantly identifying with the Democratic party or affiliating with Democratic values and ideals (Fry & Bialik, 2019).

Research indicates that millennials' social and political values have an emphasis on social justice issues, such as racial discrimination, immigration policy, foreign policy, climate justice, and the government (Fry & Bialik, 2019). According to the Pew Research Center, approximately four in 10 (39%) millennials hold a bachelor's degree or higher, a number that is significantly higher than Generation X, with 29%, and baby boomers, with 25% (Fry & Bialik, 2019). Like Generation X (born between the mid-1960s and early 1980s), millennial women out-earn men in bachelor's degree attainment. In 2018, 43% of millennial women had earned at least a bachelor's degree, as compared to 36% of millennial men (Fry & Bialik, 2019).

As research indicates, educational leaders from minoritized and marginalized communities, i.e., women, people of color, and women of color, are highly effective and

impactful leaders in their institutions (Colon Gibson, 1992; Gardiner et al., 2000; Grogan &

Shakeshaft, 2011; Hurtado, 2001; Magdaleno, 2006; Mendez-Morse, 1997; Moody, 2012).

However, similar to literature on Women of Color in educational-leadership research, there is

a gap in the literature in addressing the experiences of millennial leaders in educational

leadership. More specifically, there is minimal research and literature that investigates how

the rising demographic of MWOC working in education will impact higher education,

ranging from potential shifts in institutional culture to institutional outcomes.

In the article "Diversity Defines the Millennial Generation," Fry indicates that racial

diversity is a defining characteristic of the millennial generation and details the impact it has

had, and will continue to have, on U.S. society (Frey, 2016). Frey (2016) states,

> The emerging political division associated with the racial generation gap represents
> just one area where members of the diverse millennial generation are on the front
> lines of change...As they move from young adulthood to middle age, millennials will
> serve as a demographic bridge between older, whiter generations and subsequent,
> more diverse generations. Their ability to assimilate, advocate, and become accepted
> will be key to the successful transition to a more racially diverse nation. Yes,
> millennials are worthy of attention. They are smart. They are creative. They are
> passionate about many issues. But the most defining characteristic of the members of
> this unique generation, as the country evolves demographically, is their racial
> diversity. (para. 13-14)

Frey's statement underscores the importance of understanding how the changing

demographics of the United States will impact the country; but, more importantly, Frey

highlights the role millennials will play in facilitating changes in a country that has

historically been led by a White racial minority.

As higher education institutions continue to diversify, it is imperative that the leaders

reflect the populations they serve. A study by the Pew Research Center found that Generation

Z, the generation succeeding millennials,

is on track to be the nation's most diverse and best-educated generation yet. Nearly half (48%) are racial or ethnic minorities. And while most are still in K-12 schools, the oldest Gen Zers are enrolling in college at a higher rate than even Millennials were at their age. (Fry & Bialik, 2019, para. 32)

Additionally, early research indicates that Generation Z's political values and views are similar to those of the millennial generation (Fry & Bialik, 2019).

In *Leading the Millennial Way*, Barrington discusses his research focused on millennial leaders; it indicates that millennial leadership styles are dynamic, diverse, and predominantly relational (Barrington, 2019). Barrington (2019) interviewed a number of millennial leaders across the business sector and found that participants viewed and approached leadership in distinct ways, challenging the traditional models and structures adopted by all generations. One participant stated,

> I think that millennials by nature care a lot less about structure and traditional hierarchies and look for much more informal and relational ways of doing things. We also care a little less about traditional roles, titles and status, which means that it's easier for millennials to lead in the position they are in rather than feeling they have to be anointed to lead. I think that's often where some of the most innovative work comes from. (Barrington, 2019, p. 4)

As highlighted throughout this quote, research also indicates that millennials value teamwork and collaboration in the workplace, forgoing traditional hierarchical leadership structures for shared leadership and team problem-solving. Barrington (2019) found that 90% of research participants reported that the value and practice of collaboration were "important or extremely important" in their work environments. Barrington states, "Millennial leaders have also shown a tendency for teamwork, collaboration and less hierarchical structure" (p. 17).

When describing which types of leaders millennials prefer, Barrington (2019) found that "Millennials desire people-centric leaders who work collaboratively with less regard to boundaries as opposed to previous, more hierarchical structures" (p. 18). Research by Kezar and Holcombe (2017) indicate that a move away from traditional leadership structures, as described in Barrington's research on millennial leaders, to systems that encompass shared leadership will be most the effective strategy to address the current challenges present for higher education leaders and institutions. As research suggests, educational leaders must depart from leadership approaches that are top-down, in which centralized power and concentrated decision-making is commonplace (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Wallin, 2010).

As higher education institutions continue to diversify, it is imperative that the leaders reflect the populations they serve. As evidenced by the research, educational leaders from minoritized and marginalized communities, i.e., women, people of color, and women of color, are highly effective and impactful leaders in their institutions (Colon Gibson, 1992; Gardiner et al., 2000; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Hurtado, 2001; Magdaleno, 2006; Mendez-Morse, 1997; Moody, 2012).

Potential of Millennial Women of Color as Leaders for Changing Higher Ed Landscape

Existing educational-leadership structures and practices are insufficient in effectively addressing the complex issues facing higher education today (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Wallin, 2010). Therefore, research of and advocacy for new leadership structures, practices, and types of leaders are needed.

There is minimal research and literature that investigates how the rising demographic of MWOC working in education will impact higher education, ranging from potential shifts in

institutional culture to institutional outcomes. However, research also indicates that in the past few decades more women of color are completing college degrees and entering the education workforce (Ortiz, 2001). Per the U.S. Bureau Of Labor Statistics (2017) women are more educated, earning at least a bachelor's degree at a higher percentage than men. When disaggregated by race, Women of color (aged 25 and up) earn bachelor's degrees at higher rates than their male counterparts (in data on the gender, those who identify as nonbinary were not provided by the data) (Brundage, 2017).

One of the limitations of the current body of educational-leadership research is the inclusion and analysis of the experiences and contributions of the millennial generation in higher education. Furthermore, there are even fewer studies on the experience of millennials working in higher education, specifically community colleges. This is a significant gap in educational-leadership research and theory because the millennial generation accounts for 35% of the labor force, now making it the largest representation of any generation in the U.S. (Fry, 2018). MWOC are a demographic of people that is well represented as student affairs professionals in community colleges in California, yet their experiences and influence at the institutional level and among students is not well researched.

As the U.S. population continues to diversify and as more students from historically underrepresented communities enter the higher education workforce, complete graduate degrees, and rise through the ranks of the higher education workforce, it is critical that educational institutions understand which leadership styles will be effective in creating substantial change to the educational inequities and disproportionate representation of people

of color in staff, faculty, and leadership roles in higher education (Kezar & Holcombe 2017;

Wallin, 2010).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter includes discussions of the following: (a) restatement of the purpose of the study; (b) setting of the study; (c) participants; (d) recruitment and sampling process; (e) research design: pre-interview intake survey, interviews, methodological framing, and interview methodology, focus groups, field notes, coding; and (f) positionality.

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

This study centers MWOC CCC professionals as institutional influencers by understanding how their leadership practices support the success of marginalized, minoritized, and historically underrepresented students and equity-advancing institutional change. The theoretical frameworks selected aim to center the work of Black and Chicana feminist scholars who have investigated how the unique experiences of women of color are impacted by—and have resisted—interlocking systems of oppression, such as racism, patriarchy, sexism, and capitalism, all factors that persist and continue to affect the lives of MWOC (Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Hill Collins, 2000).

Setting of the Study

The setting of the study spanned California, where participants are or have been employed by the public CCC system. All participant interviews and focus groups were held exclusively online via the Zoom platform. The Zoom platform is a familiar platform that most (if not all) CCC educators/employees have access to. As the threat of COVID-19 pandemic increased, CCCs moved to a fully virtual/remote campus where instruction and student services were held virtually. The CCC Chancellor's Office supported the use of the Zoom platform as the primary tool for conducting business (virtual classes, meetings, one-

on-one appointments, workshops, etc.). Participants were asked to select a physical location for the virtual interview and focus group that prioritized their comfort and privacy and allowed them to feel at ease so that they could provide authentic responses during the interview.

Methodological Framing and Interview Methodology

The framework for the study's methodology centered on the shared power of meaning-making between the researcher and participant, a process known as testimonio (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Contrary to traditional approaches to qualitative data collection, testimonio methodology (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012) de-centers the researcher/subject binary, which places the power of meaning-making solely in the hands of the researcher; "testimonio in academia disrupts silence, invites connection, and entices collectivity—it is social justice scholarship in education" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 369). As described by Delgado Bernal et al.,

> Testimonio is and continues to be an approach that incorporates political, social, historical, and cultural histories that accompany one's life experiences as a means to bring about change through consciousness-raising. In bridging individuals with collective histories of oppression, a story of marginalization is re-centered to elicit social change. (p. 364).

Utilizing testimonio as a research methodology in 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" (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 369). As Delgado Bernal et al. (2012) state, "Our academic training insists that we work in solitude, yet the work of testimonio calls us back to reclaim solidarity with one another" (p. 370); as such, it was critical that the research process reflect the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study.

Participants

The participants identified as MWOC who are or have been employed as classified professionals in the CCC system for at least one year and have worked in a leadership capacity on their campus/worksite as a supervisor, manager, committee member, student club advisor, or any other related role. For the purposes of this study, the definition of MWOC is an individual who identifies as a woman (inclusive of trans people) born within the millennial generation (between 1981 and 1996), who is not ethnically White/Caucasian or of Anglo-European descent.

Participants also identified as individuals committed to supporting and advancing support for historically underrepresented students through some form of DEI effort in their work or at their campus. All but one of the participants are first-generation college-going students. All of the participants in the study have earned graduate degrees (a master's degree or higher), and, of the 15 participants, six hold Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degrees; one participant is working toward her Ed.D. A table of the participants (Table 1) has been provided here and can also be found in Appendix F. This table includes the pseudonyms of the participants, a general title describing their role at their institution, their chosen racial and ethnic identity, their education level, and the general region of California in which they work.

As I journeyed through this research process and listened to the participants testimonios, I kept coming back to a quote that has been used in various social movements over time and widely used by Mexican activists, "they tried to bury us, they didn't know we were seeds," which for me symbolizes the way that oppressed people persist and persevere in the face of forces that are intent on erasing them. For me these participants are not only seeds of change,

but also flowers that are representative of the growth and transformation that their presence

has caused and continues to cause in their students, their institutions, and in this study.

Therefore, all of the participants' pseudonyms are names inspired by flowers and are

reflective of the cultural backgrounds of each of the participants. The pseudonyms were

either selected by the participants selected by me.

Table 1

Participant Table

Participant Name	Role	Racial/Ethnic Identity	Education Level	Location
Dahlia	Program Coordinator	Mexican-American	First-Generation Student M.Ed.	Bay Area
Daisy	Student Support Services Supervisor	Mexican	First-Generation Student M.Ed.	Southern California
Flor	Program Coordinator	Latina	First-Generation Student M.Ed.	Bay Area
Heilala	Former Student Affairs Practitioner	Tongan and Samoan	First-Generation Student Ed.D.	Bay Area
Irene	Program Coordinator	Mexican	First-Generation Student Ed.D.	South Bay Area
Iris	Student Services Specialist	Xicana	First-Generation Student Ed.D.	Southern California
Jade	Program Coordinator	Black	First-Generation Student M.A. Student	Bay Area
Jasmine	Program Support Specialist	Indian	First-Generation Student M.A.	Bay Area
Leilani	Student Affairs Program Manager	Mixed Race	First-Generation Student Ed.D.	Bay Area
Lily	Program Manager	Salvadorian	M.A.	Bay Area
Maya	Director	Black	First-Generation Student Ed.D.	Bay Area
Nalini	Program Coordinator	Indo-Fijian American	First-Generation Student Ed.D.	South Bay Area
Teuila	Program Manager	Pacific Islander American	First-Generation Student Ed.D.	Bay Area
Violeta	Project Director	Latinx-Palestinian	First-Generation Student Ed.D. Student	Bay Area
Xóchitl	Program Coordinator	Chicana	First-Generation Student M.A.	South Bay Area

Recruitment and Sampling Process

This study includes the experiences of 15 participants. The recruitment and sampling of participants for the study consisted of a snowball sample method. As someone who has worked at various community colleges, I began by inviting former colleagues and acquaintances to participate in this study. The sample population included a mix of MWOC who are familiar colleagues and acquaintances, as well as participants who had been recommended by other participants. All participants identified as MWOC and are either currently working in or have worked in the community college system in various capacities, including classified professional supervisory roles, classified professional non-supervisory roles, and roles in student affairs and instruction similar to those I have worked in.

The recruitment process began with identifying three colleagues and acquaintances who met the criteria of the study. I invited them via email to participate in the study (see Appendix A for email script). The recruited colleagues and acquaintances were then asked whether they would like to recommend other classified professionals who fit the demographic requirements of the study. All interested participants were sent an electronic consent form via DocuSign to review and were allowed to ask questions before signing. On a few occasions, I met with interested participants to discuss the study before they agreed to participate. Once the participants agreed to participate in the study, they were sent the consent form (see Appendix B) and asked to schedule their interview via the scheduling software Calendly. When a participant elected to recommend a colleague or peer, they sent me the names of the individuals and their emails. I sent the individuals a brief introduction email letting them know they were recommended for the study.

Research Design

Pre-Interview Intake Survey

Prior to the interview, participants completed a pre-interview intake survey that consisted of questions intended to capture general details, including name, age, gender identity/pronouns, racial and ethnic identity, job title, and brief scope of job/role. The pre-interview intake survey was a digital form developed using the software Qualtrics (see Appendix C).

Interviews

Following completion of the pre-interview survey, each participant engaged in a one-hour-long interview. Interviews were semi-structured, and I provided the participants with a copy of the interview questions a week before the scheduled interview (see Appendix D for interview protocol). Participants were asked to select a physical location for the virtual interview that would prioritize their comfort and allow them to feel at ease so that they could provide authentic responses during the interview. The interviews were recorded via the Zoom platform. Both the interview recordings and the auto-generated captions were password-protected via the Zoom cloud and only accessible by me, the researcher, and the participant, upon request. At the completion of the interviews, I reviewed and edited the auto-generated transcripts to ensure accuracy.

Upon completion of the transcription for each interview, I provided each participant with a copy of their interview transcript. Participants were invited to review the interview transcript and allowed to omit or clarify any part of their interview. The participants were given two weeks to review and submit requests for omission of pieces of the interview and/or

clarify parts of the interview. The transcript-review portion of the research process was not a requirement of the study. However, one participant provided clarification to parts of her interview that were spoken in a language other than English. No participants elected to withdraw as a participant from the study or requested to omit any pieces of their interview.

Focus Groups

Participants were invited to participate in one of three virtual semi-structured focus group sessions via the Zoom platform. I scheduled three focus groups, which were initially intended to accommodate five participants per focus group. The original intention of the division of the 15 participants into three focus groups was to allow for a smaller, intimate setting where participants could feel more comfortable sharing freely and have more time to engage with the interview prompts. As the participant interviews took place, I asked all participants to sign up for one focus group to participate in. Ultimately, due to scheduling conflicts and illness, three of the participants were unable to participate in the focus group. Overall, 12 of the 15 participants participated in one of the three focus groups. The study's research questions served as interview question prompts (see Appendix E).

Field Notes

I took field notes throughout the interview process. Upon completion of the individual interviews and focus groups, I reserved half an hour to write down notes from each interview and focus group session.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, I first created a participant table, which included the pseudonyms of the participants, a general title describing their role at the institution in which they work or

worked, their chosen racial and ethnic identity, their education level, and the general region of California in which they work. The participant table can be found in Appendix F.

I engaged in the coding process by first reviewing the auto-generated transcripts made available by using the embedded audio-transcription feature in Zoom. All interviews and focus groups were conducted via Zoom. I reviewed the auto-generated transcripts for accuracy and to ensure that all identifiable information was removed (Taylor et al., 2015).

I then reviewed all interview and focus group transcripts, as well as field notes, to open-code recurring themes and patterns that emerged in the data (Taylor et al., 2015). The coded themes were based on the participants' interviews, the focus groups, and the field notes, as well as themes appearing in the research literature (Taylor et al., 2015). The recurring themes and patterns were then organized and developed into emerging themes and sub-categories, which highlighted the overall experiences and feelings of the participants in this study, as well as the overarching theoretical frameworks underpinning the study.

Once the interviews, focus groups, and transcripts had been reviewed for accuracy, I provided copies of the transcripts to the participants. All participants were given the option to add to, clarify, or omit any portion of their interviews that they wanted. One participant responded with further clarification of their interview that provided a richer understanding of a cultural tradition spoken in Tongan that was not fully articulated in their individual interview.

For the data-analysis process, emerging themes, such as bridge leadership (Horsford, 2012), shared leadership (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017), spirit murder(ing) (Love, 2016; Williams, 1987), and reciprocity, were further developed into the findings of the study. These

emerging themes were further conceptualized into more generalizable findings that highlighted the overall experiences of the participants and helped best address the research questions.

The theoretical frameworks shaping this study are BFE (Hill Collins, 2000) and CFE (Delgado Bernal, 1998), with the focus of this study centering the intersectional identities of MWOC as classified professional and how their identities and experiences inform their leadership styles working in CCCs; it was critical that the data-analysis process embodied these frameworks.

BFE and CFE describe the ways in which Black and Chicana women and other women of color have historically existed as a subjugated and oppressed class in the United States; and this research process aimed to move the participants from the margins of educational-leadership discourse to the center of it (Hill Collins, 1989; Delgado Bernal, 1998). Therefore, it was critical to utilize a lens of BFE and CFE in the data-analysis process—deliberately centering the racialized, gendered, and generational identities of the participants, as well as their roles working as classified professionals at community colleges, which in many ways forces them to occupy the identity of various subordinate groups in society and in the field of higher education.

Black Feminist Epistemology

Traditionally, research methods require the researcher to distance themselves from their "object" of study or enter the data-analysis process as being "subjective" and withholding emotions from the process (Hill Collins, 1989). However, as Black feminist thought argues, these criteria require Black women—and, for purposes of this study, Chicana and other

women of color— to "objectify ourselves, devalue our emotional life, displace our motivations for furthering knowledge about women of color, and confront in an adversarial relationship those with more social, economic, and professional power" (Hill Collins, 1989, pp. 754-755).

A key tenet of Black feminist thought, one that is foundational to BFE, is the exploration of "intersecting oppressions shaping the U.S. matrix of domination" (Hill Collins, 1990, p. 327), which describes the ways in which Black women have historically existed as a subjugated and oppressed class in the United States. BFE focuses on the alternative way that Black women have developed their own theories of knowledge that resist and challenge traditional scholarship, which is largely White, male, and Western (Hill Collins, 1990). This research explores how the racialized, gendered, and generational experiences of MWOC shape their leadership and practice as classified professionals who hold a personal commitment to addressing DEI issues in support of marginalized, minoritized, and historically underrepresented students. BFE underscores the connections among oppression, knowledge production, and power relations specifically for Black women (Hill Collins, 2000). Furthermore, Hill Collins (2000) discusses the links among Black feminism, social justice, and activism. Although I do not identify racially and ethnically as Black or African American, the tenets of BFE play a significant role in the data-analysis process for this study. The themes of oppression, knowledge production, power relations, and feminist frameworks that do not center Whiteness, as well as social justice are key concepts that were centered in the data-analysis process.

Chicana Feminist Epistemology

In conducting the data-analysis process, my cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) as a MWOC, specifically identifying as Chicana, was an important part of the analytical process, including the open-coding process, development of emerging themes, and ultimately shaping of the study's findings. Delgado Bernal (1998) states that one of the sources of a researcher's cultural intuition is their personal experience, "derived from the background that we each bring to the research situation—as many feminists contend, the research is a subject in her research and her personal history is part of the analytical process" (p. 564). In my positionality statement, I discuss how my identity and background shape my experience as a scholar-practitioner and researcher conducting this study, which is deeply personal and, in many ways, a reflection of my own professional experiences.

As Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain, professional experience is a second source of cultural intuition, one that highlights how years of practice and experience in a particular field provides insight into how things may work in that field. Like the participants of this study, I am also a classified professional working at a CCC who holds a personal commitment to supporting the success of marginalized, minoritized, and underrepresented students. Over the past six years, I have worked at two different community colleges in three different classified professional roles. As such, my professional experience gives me unique insight into the data-analysis process and allows me to understand the data in a way that someone who does not have these experiences would not be able to (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Another source of cultural intuition is the analytical-research process, which Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe as a process in which "insight and understanding about a

phenomenon increase as you interact with your data" (p. 43). Delgado Bernal (1998) expands

this concept and states,

> This comes from making comparisons, asking additional questions, thinking about what you are hearing and seeing, sorting data, developing a coding scheme, and engaging in concept formation. As one idea leads to another, we are able to look more closely at the data and bring meaning to the research (p. 566).

As Delgado Bernal discusses, as I engaged in the analytical research process, I was in

constant reflection on and conversation with the participant testimonios and field notes that,

over time, facilitated the emergence of clear themes and patterns. The themes and patterns

that emerged were eventually developed into concepts that brought meaning to the data and

the overall significance of the study.

Chapter 4: Findings

This study centers MWOC CCC professionals as institutional influencers by understanding how their leadership practices support the success of marginalized, minoritized, and historically underrepresented students and equity-advancing institutional change.

The study was completed by conducting surveys, interviews, and three focus groups with 15 participants. The data collected are presented as a narrative, detailing the findings of the study. The findings are divided into three major sections, which directly correspond with the study's research questions' findings. The study's findings will be organized in the following way:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the experiences of Millennial Women of Color (MWOC) who hold a personal commitment to addressing diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) issues in California Community Colleges (CCCs) by serving as leaders beyond their job duties?

- **Research Question 2:** How do the racialized, gendered, and generational experiences of 15 MWOC working as classified professionals within CCCs shape their leadership style and approach?

- **Research Question 3:** In what ways (if any) do MWOC (re)imagine leadership to support the growth and transformation of their institution to better serve marginalized, minoritized, and underrepresented students?

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was developed to understand how holding a personal commitment to DEI-centered service and values impacts MWOC working as classified professionals in a community college.

The findings of this section detail the findings related to the first research question, "What are the experiences of MWOC who hold a personal commitment to addressing DEI issues in CCCs by serving as leaders beyond their job duties?" There were two themes that arose: (a) participants are committed to supporting the personal and academic success of students that they see themselves reflected in, and (b) participants are motivated to make the college experience better than they experienced it, doing DEI work before they had the language for it.

Participants Are Committed to Supporting the Personal and Academic Success of Students that They See Themselves Reflected in

Many of the participants explained that their personal commitment to serving as leaders beyond their job duties and working to address DEI issues came from a personal place that was connected to their own experiences as racially and ethnically minoritized people who were also marginalized and underrepresented at their colleges. Participants discussed how their early experiences existing as minoritized and marginalized people in the world made their commitment to others like them unavoidable, as if it were part of who they have always been and ultimately who they were meant to become.

Maya, who identifies as a Black first-generation student, holds a doctorate in education, and is a college programs and grants director, discussed how her commitment to supporting

Black students on their higher education journey was intrinsic and rooted in her experience as a Black person who faced several challenges throughout her college experience; she shared, "It was mostly just intrinsic in that I was like, 'Well, I'm a Black person. I'm here.' and 'Hey, you Black kid. I see you. What are your plans? What are you doing? Let's make sure you're okay.'"

In this quote, Maya articulates the connection that many other participants felt when seeing students at their institutions who they saw themselves reflected in; they felt a sense of intrinsic motivation to seek out, connect with, and offer support to these students so that the students will not have to face the same barriers and challenges they did. Participants explained that the students they saw themselves reflected in were not limited to those that looked like them racially and ethnically; some were students of other marginalized identities—first-generation college-going, immigrant, queer, or poor or working-class, as well as other identity markers.

Many participants discussed the challenges of navigating higher education as first-generation students and felt called to help students better navigate the higher education system or work to eliminate educational and systemic barriers institutionally. Maya continued,

> I definitely think that being a Black woman and a first-generation college student are definitely forefront in my approach to my work. In thinking about the challenges of navigating the educational system, and higher ed specifically, in trying to remove those barriers for students that may or may not look like me but might have similar navigational deficits, not to their fault, but just because that's how the system is set up and trying to utilize the strengths and the spaces and the opportunities that they have been able to thrive in, and apply those within the higher education setting, and help my colleagues to do the same, I think, is really how I approach the work.

As Maya shared, she became aware of the challenges and barriers Black, first-generation, and other minoritized student populations had while moving through college. That experience helped shape how she approaches her work, which is centered on serving minoritized, marginalized, and historically underrepresented students through an equity lens.

Similarly, Jade, who identifies as Black and is a first-generation master's student and a program coordinator working with students from "disadvantaged backgrounds," discussed how her racial identity played a key role in her personal and professional development. She discussed that society's perception of her, going as far back as being a young Black girl, had a significant impact on her. It specifically shaped how she moved through her formal schooling, ultimately impacting the course of her professional journey working in higher education and working in service of Students of Color. Jade stated,

> So first… these pieces of my identity shaped my personal self before my professional self, and so I am noting how, because of the circumstances of my parents, and also just things that they experienced, society had a really big impact on me. And that's where I learned about my worth. And so letting American society determine a Black girl's worth meant that I was a servant. Like the purpose of me was to give. And so I definitely worked in customer service, my entire career. Those things, however, did very much help me. Those skill-sets supported me in my journey in getting into working in education…I definitely have an affinity for supporting students of color, and I'm separating White from all other groups on purpose. Because I understand that…the treatment [of non-White students] is different; how we're viewed is different. The way that we're gate-kept is different...So, I put extra emphasis on it.

In this quote Jade highlighted how her racialized and gendered experience is inextricably linked to her work and role as an educator and thus her approaches as a leader. Like Maya, her lived experience inspired her to serve her students of color. She mentions that there is a difference between the way that White students and non-White students are treated in society

and ultimately education, so she ensures that her service to students in her role is reflective of that disparity.

Dahlia, who identifies as Mexican-American and is a first-generation college student who holds a master's degree and is a program coordinator working with first-time and first-generation students, discussed similar experiences to Maya and Jade. Dahlia discussed how as a "first-gen" Mexican-American, she struggled to navigate higher education, which is ultimately the reason that she does the work she does. She shared,

> My goal is always to serve students, especially students who come from minoritized backgrounds, and it really hits close to home because, as a minoritized student myself, in undergrad, I really struggled to find community in my institution... And it was difficult for me to navigate college because I was the first generation in my family to attend a four-year university. I think in going through and navigating college, it ultimately led me to my profession and career in higher education. And I didn't know it at the time; it kind of just evolved and it led me there…I'm very passionate about this work, and I'm just happy that I'm doing work that I believe in.

In this quote, Dahlia discussed how she, like many of the participants, struggled navigating college and this, as a result, inspired her decision to work in higher education and ultimately work to support students like her—minoritized, marginalized, and historically underrepresented.

Similarly, Flor, who identifies as Latina and is a first-generation college student who holds a master's degree and is program coordinator, discussed how her intersecting identities as a bilingual queer Woman of Color shaped her values and created the circumstances that made her feel a responsibility to support other people like her. She shared,

> I think as a queer woman of color, in particular, I think I'm a walking DEI experience…I don't think I get to not think about these things because they impact me and my loved ones and the people that I'm around all the time…It's not being drawn into this work. I'm not a White person that's like, "Oh, this is fun. Let me go and support these people." It's just like, no, I have to do this because the people that I love

and care about depend not on me; but this needs to happen. I think it's just values I've held for my whole life. As a young child, you're advocating for your parents and translating legal documents and whatever in Spanish, and you're like, "What?" This is not, and you want that shit to change. If there's any way you can make that not suck, and not have people experience those shitty-ass microaggressions, you're going to do it.

In this quote, Flor discussed being a "walking DEI" experience, the idea that over the course of her life, she faced various systemic barriers existing as someone with intersecting identities that forced her to exist at the margins of society. Flor mentioned translating legal documents from Spanish to English as a young child and having to serve as an advocate for her parents, a heavy burden to carry for her and her family. Overall, she discussed feeling a sense of duty to help change circumstances for her loved ones and those that she was in community with. She shared the idea of making things "not suck" or "less shitty" for those who have to exist like her.

Participants Are Motivated to Make the College Experience Better Than They Experienced it; Doing DEI Work Before They Had the Language for it

Throughout their experience working at community colleges, all participants identified as serving in a "leadership capacity" outside of their job duties, aimed at supporting historically underrepresented student populations through DEI efforts at their institution. Leadership capacity, for the purposes of this study, is described as a role taken on in the institution that either exists outside of typical job duties, is part of the job duties of a position focused on supporting the work of others (students, other classified professionals, or faculty), or supports the work of the institution through some form of shard governance or committee work.

Many of the participants shared that have dedicated years to serving as student club advisors, committee members, committee chairs, student mentors, supervisors, and managers, with the specific goal of supporting students by making the college experience better than it was when they experienced it. When discussing the topic of DEI work, many participants explained that they believe that they were doing and leading DEI-type work even before they had the formalized or institutional language for it.

Daisy, who identifies as Mexican-American and is a first generation college student who holds a master's degree and is student support services supervisor, discussed not having the language for the work that she found herself drawn to; however, she knew that as a hyper-marginalized person (Sims et al., 2020) she was motivated to make the circumstances of the students that came after her better than what had she experienced. Daisy shared,

> I never really knew the work that I was doing until somebody again defined it for me. I just knew for myself. I was a student of color, low income, a woman, just all these different labels…So I didn't necessarily think I was doing anything other than just getting a job. But as I transitioned throughout the years and did different roles, and then just participated in different campus events…I would just reflect on my own personal academic journey…I wanted to continue supporting students like myself…wanting to continue doing that work for that specific student population, the marginalized students…it just stemmed from myself because of my academic journey and the things that I didn't know at the time and the things that I wish I would've known at the time.

In this quote, Daisy talks about how over time the awareness of her intersecting identities as a woman and a student of color coming from a low-income community, while also being first-generation college-going, culminated in a desire to serve students like her. She mentioned, upon reflecting on her academic journey, that she was called to ensure that students had the knowledge that she wished she would have had, and this is why she is inspired to do the work that she does.

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Like Daisy, many of the participants viewed their DEI work as part of their personal

commitment to supporting students who looked like them and thus an extension of their

personal values. Iris, who identifies as Xicana and is first-generation student who holds a

doctorate in education and a student services specialist, identified her motivation to support

marginalized students and make their college experience better than what she had

experienced as part of her "heart's work."

> I didn't know I was doing DEI work. You get what I'm saying? It became popular, and then everybody started talking about it, and then I was like, "Damn, I've been doing this forever, 'cause it's my heart's work"...because I went through it and I didn't have support. I didn't see people in spaces like me, especially showing up into a college environment looking like a chola. I was asked so many times if I needed to be escorted off campus...and if I was a student. So, for me...It's personal.

In this quote, Iris discussed her heart's work as a personal calling to work in service of

students like her so they wouldn't be unrepresented or unwelcome in educational spaces they

had a right to exist in.

Similarly, when discussing her connection to DEI work, Heilala, who identifies as

Tongan and Samoan and is a first-generation college student who holds a master's degree

and a former student affairs practitioner, said that as far back as she can remember she was

surrounded by values and principles centered in what is now considered educational DEI

work. Heilala shared,

> When I think about DEI work, what I've noticed is, yes, it is formalized in our institutions in this way. But often women of color, like me, for example, [were] born into that work...where it might not have been called diversity, equity, inclusion, but those are values that for me growing up … have always been important things … It was funny when this became institutionalized, and we received mad money for equity [work] … I can remember being around other women of color…like, "Whoa. Oh, that's what we're calling these terms now,"…It was kind of like, "Yes, finally the institution needs to catch up with what we've been talking about."

As Daisy, Iris, and Heilala mentioned, and as all the other participants in the study did as well, their personal connection to going beyond their job duties to serve their students, community, and institution is foundational to who they are as racially and ethnically minoritized women who come from communities that value supporting and uplifting one another. Heilala discussed that as a Samoan and Tongan woman it is part of her Tongan cultural heritage to be concerned with the care and nurturing of relationships between her people and those in her community. She shared,

> We talk about this calling. I feel I don't have a choice. And so when I think about what draws me to the work, I feel like, well, to me, there's no other option, so it feels mandatory. And then if I think about the word "work," I can really replace that word with "responsibility," because it just feels, again, my value of tauhi vā, is I have a responsibility that I desire, but one that I need to fulfill for the freedom…for our communities that are most marginalized to experience quality…education; and that just feels like the minimum.

In this quote, Heilala articulates a sentiment that many other participants shared when discussing their experiences—holding a personal commitment to DEI issues in community colleges by serving as leaders beyond their job duties. As Heilala shared, the responsibility that she feels is a desire—to ensure that people in her community, and those who come after her, are supported, feel represented, and have access to the quality of education that she didn't have. At the core of Daisy's, Iris's, Heilala's, and the other participants' motivation is the feeling that they have a personal responsibility to make the educational and personal experiences of students like them better than what they had; and, so, DEI is something that they have always had a commitment to.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was designed to understand how leadership practices, approaches, and philosophies are shaped by the experiences of a unique subset of individuals—millennial women who identify as Black, Latina, Asian, Indigenous, and/or Bi-racial (non-White), identified in the study as "Women of Color"—who work or have worked as classified professionals in the CCC system who have a commitment to supporting DEI-centered work and historically minoritized, marginalized, and historically underrepresented student populations.

This section details the findings related to the second research question, "How do the racialized, gendered, and generational experiences of 15 MWOC working as classified professionals in CCCs shape their leadership style and approach?" There were two themes that arose: (a) participants' leadership practices are shaped by their racialized, gendered, and generational experiences, and (b) working at a CCCs as a classified professional means being a champion of student success.

Participants' Leadership Practices Are Shaped by Their Racialized, Gendered, and Generational Experiences

When discussing how participants' racialized, gendered, and/or generational experiences shape their leadership style, participants said that it is foundational to their work and how they approach their work, and it ultimately frames how they show up and lead.

Similar to the relationship that the participants had with their personal commitment to serving as leaders beyond their job duties and working to address DEI issues at their institutions, participants also discussed that their leadership practices are connected to their

racialized, gendered, and generational experiences. Participants discussed how their intersecting identities as Black, Latina, Asian, Indigenous, Bi-racial women who are also part of the millennial generation helped shape the context in which they saw and experienced the world; and, therefore, they felt compelled to create and influence change where they could.

Xóchitl, who identifies as Chicana, is a first-generation college student, holds a master's degree, and is a program coordinator, discussed how being marginalized as a MWOC shaped her view and approach concerning leadership. She discussed how the millennial generation grew up with a much more limited representation of ethnically and racially minoritized people, specifically women, in schools and in the workplace. However, as the millennial generation has aged and are now in the workforce, she feels that MWOC are shifting the culture, making it more open-minded, and are committed to creating positive change for the generations that come after them. She shared,

> There's many words that come to my head when I think of the term *Millennial Women of Color*; words like "power," "transformation," "advocates," "visionaries," and "leaders." ...Millennials like myself grew up in a place where we didn't see much representation in schools. The workplace, our surroundings, were not diverse. So, I feel as a Millennial Women of Color, we are changing that. We're asking people to step up and help build the community—a special community of inclusion…I feel I'm contributing to the change. When I go to work, everything I do is with a mindset or perspective to make a positive impact for our generations to come.

In this quote, Xóchitl discussed how she felt that the millennial generation grew up with more diversity and change and, as result, she felt that millennials were more open-minded than previous generations and that this impacted their leadership style to make it more inclusive.

Similarly, Nalini, who identifies as Indo-Fijian American, is first-generation student who holds a doctorate in education, and is a program coordinator working with students on

academic and progress probation and dismissal, discussed how MWOC are using their voice

to advance revolutionary change in the education system through their presence and

communication style. Nalini shared,

> Whenever I think about Millennial Women of Color in education, I think about revolutionizing and changing our education system; having a voice, a louder voice; and, in addition to that, really changing the demographics of workspaces. And not only workspaces but being present. We've always been present—we, meaning Women of Color, People of Color, have been present. But I feel like in the last, maybe, 30 years, we have started utilizing our voices even more. And that is because of those who have come before us. We are able to take things to the next level, having more open conversations or demanding space to have those conversations, because oftentimes we're still not able to be in spaces where we're represented. So, I think in those ways, communication has also expanded, and we are able to utilize social media in a very different platform, in terms of really being able to use voice, be present, be visible, and creating our own platforms.

In this quote, Nalini explained that the presence of ethnically minoritized and racialized

people, and women, has always existed. However, because of the work of the generations

that came before, which paved the way and were the first to demand space in society, the

millennial generation can now be more vocal about their needs and push for more progress.

Like Xóchitl and Nalini, Heilala also discussed how she felt that the millennial generation

aims to be more inclusive than generations prior, being intentional with taking others'

feelings into account and being mindful of their boundaries. She discussed the overall feeling

that millennials want to ensure that people feel safe to show up and be comfortable in spaces

where they are leading or existing. She shared,

> It's in this generation where I feel super encouraged without any judgment or without anything like that. They're like, "Hey, are folks okay with this? If not, what are some options?" And because everyone's trying to understand everyone's boundaries and where they're at and in certain friend groups, and then even in the professional setting within the community—in our community college campuses that we're at. And I think that goes a lot to show with what we're doing is different from what, maybe, our previous generations didn't give us: the autonomy or the space to even share the

safety of, "I'm not comfortable when A, B, C, I would like for A, B, C, and to advocate and all that stuff."

In this quote, Heilala explained that being conscious of others' feelings and caring about others' needs is a core component to their leadership style, something that has been shaped by being a millennial.

Iris discussed how, generationally, she felt that millennials growing up were not taught to see their self-worth and that this shaped how she viewed herself as a Xicana from a working-class background; but it also motivated her to support others like her, encouraging them to not settle for less and to see themselves as worthy—leadership that is more concerned with mentorship and working with those who have "heart;" a leadership that is less concerned with focusing on positions with titles. She shared,

> I think growing up in a generation where we didn't see our self-worth, where we weren't taught to see ourselves as worthy—that's something that I integrate in how I work with students and how I serve them… I think my generational identity, I think plays a big role in that because I see a lot of people from my generation that I click with very well because we see heart, we see beyond these position titles. We see beyond all that; we see the heart of people. So, I think it influences all of what I do.

In this quote, Iris highlighted how her experience of not being taught how to see her self-worth shaped her approach to leadership, emphasizing a value that is foundational to how she serves students—to ensure that they see their value and worth. Similarly, Xóchitl discussed that her experience as a Latina woman shaped her desire to be more conscious of her presence and how she makes others feel because, for her, it comes back to how she has been treated as a student and an employee. She said,

> What I experienced…working around just White people and feeling like I was left out, or working around men and feeling like they talked over me, or going to college and there aren't people that look like me and I felt like I wasn't smart enough—I never

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want anyone to feel the way I did. So, I feel like, for myself, I have to make sure that I check myself or that I don't do that.

Ultimately, like Xóchitl, many of the participants shared how their racialized, gendered, and generational experiences shape their leadership style to one that is more conscious of others' feelings and presence, more open-minded, and more inclusive. They shared that they believe MWOC are pushing boundaries by making their presence known and using their voice to advance greater progress around DEI, not just for students, but for themselves and others, at their institutions. All these beliefs are shaped by reflection on their experiences—ones of being marginalized by a single identity or the many that are compounded to create oppressive experiences—ones that they aim to never reproduce for the people they interact with and the people who come after them.

Working at a California Community Colleges as a Classified Professionals Means Being a Champion of Student Success

Participants discussed how being a classified professional extends beyond a job classification for them; and, for many, being a classified professional at a community college means being a champion for the most marginalized students and their success. The explained that working at a community college meant that they were often serving mostly first-generation students, racially and ethnically minoritized students, working students, and students with high financial need, as well as other marginalized communities. They discussed how they felt both a privilege and responsibility to serve these students and ensure their success on campus.

When asked, "What does it mean to you, to be a classified professional working at a community college?" Leilani, who identifies as mixed-race Asian, is a first-generation student who holds a doctorate in education, and is a student affairs program manager, shared,

> It means I have an incredible privilege to work in the most diverse educational system in the world. So much coming out [of the] California Community Colleges, serving 2.5 million students…we are serving a very diverse, and oftentimes high-need, population.

As Leilani shared, the CCC system serves a lot of students—the majority of college-going students in California. As she shared, and as others discussed, these students are often the most diverse and systemically and economically disadvantaged students attending college in the state.

Like Leilani and other participants, Maya expressed that being a classified professional working at a community college is a "privilege" that allows them to positively influence the college experience and lives of students every day. Maya shared,

> To me, being a classified professional, it's always been a privilege because it feels like it's a place and a space where students can have a little bit more trust. The hierarchy of power is different than it is in the classroom and [classified professionals are] a face on campus where students see you working in a place, and they will ask you a question. And you can provide that opportunity to really propel their trajectory and experiences of higher education. So, you can be nasty and mean to them, and they might never come back. Just because they asked you where the bathroom was or where an office was. Or you can be super supportive and nice, and now they know that they have a champion on campus. And those are split-second interactions…And so I think that there's a lot of opportunity within our classified professionals to really think about our impact for students on campus.

In this quote, Maya discussed the weight of responsibility and opportunity that classified professionals carry in their day-to-day work. Like many of the other participants, Maya highlights the varying levels of influence that classified professionals hold, influence that can either positively or negatively impact students and their college experience.

As discussed, classified professionals, often referred to as "classified staff" or "staff," is an employment classification that exists in the CCC system, and it encompasses a wide variety of job types and roles. The services and resources that classified professionals provide vary, encompassing student recruitment, enrollment support, financial aid guidance, student engagement programming and services, and studying and tutoring services just, to name a few areas.

Participants also emphasized that being a classified professional working with community college students came with a certain amount of responsibility, one that required them to respond to these students' needs with urgency and care. Jasmine, who identifies as Indian, is a first-generation student who holds a master's degree, and is a program support specialist, shared that when working with students, it is important to understand their perspective as students who are first-generation college-going and ethnically and racially minoritized. She shared,

> Understanding that when students are coming to you in that first-gen lens, in that being a person of color on campus, what was the journey it took for them to even be on that campus that day?

Jasmine posed a thoughtful question that invites others to think about the unique challenges and barriers that marginalized students must overcome to even step foot on campus. It is a question on which she centers in her daily interactions with students.

When asked what it meant to her to be a classified professional at a community college, Xóchitl, a Latina program coordinator, shared,

> So, to me, a classified professional is extremely important...we provide students with the services, the resources they need to be successful in their educational journey. So, I think it's just as important as being a faculty member, yet the faculty member helps

teach the material. But we keep the school running. We're the ones that contribute to their quality of education. So, I think that's just as important.

In this quote, Xóchitl discussed the important role that classified professionals hold outside of the classroom, one that is just as important as what happens inside the classroom for many students.

Like other participants, Irene, who identifies as Mexican, is a first-generation student who holds a doctorate in education, and is a program coordinator, discussed the conflicting feelings around the perceptions of who classified professionals are and what they do. She, like many other participants, discussed the commonly held belief that there is a hierarchy in the community college employment classifications, one where faculty are seen as more important to the institution than classified professionals. Irene shared,

> As a classified professional, I learned, kind of, the—what should I call it? The being considered less than to faculty, which is a trip to me. I just don't understand where that's coming from. I thought we were all here to do this together and help students. And I've been asked, "Have you ever thought about teaching?" And I did. I reflected a lot. Should I be in the classroom? But honestly, no. I think something that I have really appreciated about being classified is the spectrum of impact that I could have outside of the classroom. And there's just so many components of being in college that are outside of the classroom that I thought everyone could recognize because we've all been to college.

Similarly, Flor expressed that being a classified professional was an intentional career choice and not a second option, even though many feel that classified professionals are in their roles because they cannot become, or are not qualified to be, employed as faculty. Flor shared,

> There is a hierarchy in the community college for what these roles mean and how much power they have. I would say that, obviously, the people at the bottom are maintenance staff…so I think it's hard because also, I chose this. I don't want to be faculty intentionally, even though I have a master's degree. A lot of the classified

professionals have PhDs and really high-level degrees, but sometimes it's just a choice to be in this work.

Flor discussed the commonly held belief that classified professionals and people in student-affairs-type roles are not equal, or do not carry the same amount of respect within colleges, because they are seen not as qualified, due to their credentials. However, it is now not uncommon for many classified professionals working in community colleges to hold graduate degrees, and those graduate degrees come with specialized knowledge and skills that enhance their effectiveness as higher education and student services practitioners.

Ultimately, when discussing their experiences as classified professionals working at community colleges, the participants expressed a wide range of feelings regarding their roles, work, influence, and impact in their institutions. Participants discussed how working at a community college meant serving students and helping them to be successful in college. Whereas many of the first-generation participants discussed their personal experiences attending four-year universities as challenging and isolating, when speaking about working at community colleges, they expressed feelings of hope and possibility. Xóchitl shared,

> Now that I work in community college or I work with students with similar backgrounds, I feel I have to help them out. You're doing this for you; you're doing this for the next generation. And I think that has shaped me—definitely has shaped me to where I am now.

Like Xóchitl, many of the participants explained that working at a community college meant championing student success and that their roles as classified professionals are an important part of facilitating that opportunity of hope and possibility for all students, especially the most marginalized.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was designed to understand how the lived experiences of MWOC help them understand and define leadership in their roles and, if possible, (re)imagine leadership to better meet the needs of marginalized, minoritized, and underrepresented students and to support the growth and transformation of their institutions.

This section details the findings related to the second research question, "In what ways (if any) do MWOC (re)imagine leadership to support the growth and transformation of their institution to better serve marginalized, minoritized, and underrepresented students?" There were the themes that arose: (a) participants (re)imagined leadership practices that focused on creating change in partnership with others, and (b) participants leveraged their influence to develop new programming and initiatives that positively impacted student experience, their institutions, and beyond.

Participants (Re)Imagined Leadership Practices that Focused on Creating Change in Partnership with Others

When participants discussed leadership as a practice, many of them challenged its definition, function, and role in affecting and creating change. Much of the conversation around leadership as a practice at their institutions centered around the thought that in the community college system, the word "leader" is often synonymous with "administrator," and how many felt that these should not, or could not, be used authentically as interchangeable terms.

When discussing the typical leadership styles practiced at their institutions, participants provided various examples of professional bullying, exclusion of others' ideas or

participation, microaggressions, and more. Leilani shared an experience she had with a supervisor that displayed these typical leadership practices—practices she hopes to challenge in her day-to-day work as a leader on her campus. She shared,

> There's one specific supervisor I feel like was really challenging, and they had their own agenda; it didn't matter what anybody else on the team needed or wanted, and students were never put into the conversation. And there was a lot of, really, bullying happening. And so, I don't know why that person felt like they needed to publicly bully anyone or bully anyone in front of students, but I hope that my leadership approach challenges this top-down, "I'm your boss; I'm in charge; this is what we need to do" type of style.

Like Leilani, many participants discussed that they aimed to counter or challenge many of the leadership styles and practices modeled at their institution by aiming to be more conscious of their actions towards and impacts on others, to be more inclusive, to be collectivists, and to use their power, privilege, and influence to affect change.

Heilala discussed how her racialized, gendered, and generational experiences made her more conscious of her presence in the workplace. She discussed her process of becoming more socially conscious and how she felt a responsibility to be congruent in her values and her actions. She shared,

> I have to practice what I preach; when I have an audience of zero people and I decide to make these decisions and practices at home…I'm trying to practice this on a daily basis outside of my working hours and…I find myself being more familiar with it, more open, more quicker to catch my behaviors that might be problematic or that might be selfish, whether intentional or not. And it also opens me to correction and being open to correction.

In this quote, Heilala discussed how being self-reflective and conscious is an important part of her work and leadership style. She also explained that it was just as important to be open to correction and change when needed, acknowledging that if she engages in problematic or selfish behavior, it is up to her to correct the behavior.

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Dahlia, Lily, and Jasmine explained that leadership should be collectivist, with an aim of making others feel included in the process of change-making, so that they feel safe contributing and making things happen. Dahlia shared that leadership is "collective work to accomplish a goal together… I think it's democratic, it's not just one person. It takes everyone to be on the same page to make things happen." Similarly, Lily, who identifies as Salvadorian, has a master's degree, and is a program manager, shared, "I want to be mindful of others in the room. I want to make sure that they're included. I want to make sure that everyone feels safe in this environment." Jasmine shared,

> I define leadership as creating change; I think creating change in an effective way that allows people to feel, like, that it's a community of people making that change, bringing strengths, and from folks who might have different strengths and different ideas and having them all come to the table.

As articulated by their quotes, Dahlia, Lily, and Jasmine view leadership as an opportunity to influence positive working environments where others feel not only welcomed but encouraged to contribute and participate in processes that have direct impacts on them and their work.

Maya also shared that leadership is about impacting change, but she added that it is important that others leverage their power, privilege, and influence in order to do so. Maya shared,

> I think leadership is being intentional about your power, privilege, and influence and utilizing it in order to make substantial change. The type of change, and all of that—I think that is connected to different types of leadership. There's transformative leadership, and social justice-impacted leadership, and all of these other things, and the theories. But at the end of the day, leadership is really being able to use your power, privilege, and influence to impact change.

Like Maya, many of the participants discussed how they use the privilege of their identities and experiences, the power in their roles as classified professionals or as leaders in other capacities outside of their roles, and their influence among the communities they operate in as ways to advance substantive change in their institutions. Additionally, they discussed how this consciousness of their own social positions as professionals with graduate degrees and commitments to social justice and equity also informs why and how they push back on systems of oppression in their leadership practices.

Both Leilani and Violeta discussed how they are intentional about embodying leadership practices that push back against white supremacy culture, aiming to center strategies that are inclusive, collaborative, and open to collective growth and action. Lelani shared,

> A leader is someone who is working side by side with people; who listens; who's transparent; who's aware; who takes action towards justice; who also challenges tropes of white supremacy, colonization, patriarchy, capitalism, all the isms, and is just making sure that folks are being heard and are able to also be uplifted to be what they want to be...or who they could be and that be up to them.

In this quote, Leilani discussed common themes, ones that were also highlighted by other participants. As Lelani articulated, systems of domination and oppression, such as white supremacy, colonization, patriarchy, and capitalism, have all have an impact on shaping traditional leadership practices.

Violeta, who identifies as Latinx-Palestinian, is a first-generation student who is a doctoral student, and is project director, shared similar sentiments; she also discussed challenging white supremacist culture and language in her work and in her leadership practices. She discussed how her focus is more on creating a culture and environment in her

workplace that centers students and that she aims to create the conditions necessary for others

to be happy in their work. Violeta shared,

> It's been a learning process in developing my leadership style…I'm still learning. I'm
> also trying to stay away from white supremacy culture and language, where I'm trying
> to not be like, "Oh, I'm perfect," or "I'm trying to aim for perfection." So, as long as I
> know that we're all keeping happy, we all have the goal that we're serving our
> students, being mindful of creating a space and environment in the work that we're
> happy with and is for everyone.

Ultimately, all the participants discussed how their experiences facing different forms of

oppression from a very young age, due to their minoritized and marginalized identities, are

centered in their leadership style and approach. As such, participants (re)image leadership by

aiming to be collectivists; reflective; open to change; and willing to be corrected, in an effort

to not reproduce harmful beliefs and actions; as well as to be advocates for themselves and

others, with the goal to change systems for the better and to be more progressive.

Participants Leveraged Their Influence to Develop New Programming and Initiatives that Positively Impacted Student Experience, Their Institutions, and Beyond

When asked, "Do you believe you have influenced the community college experience for

marginalized, minoritized, and underrepresented students at your institution? Why or why

not?" all participants answered "Yes." In speaking about their work as classified professional

working a community college and serving as leaders both within and outside of their job

duties, they shared examples of service that have had, and continue to have, immeasurable

impact across their campuses and in the lives of students. As previously stated, the

participants view their jobs as service that is a personal calling with a commitment to

advancing more racially and ethnically conscious spaces, equity-minded programming and

policies, and more inclusive and humanizing practices, both in their individual interactions and throughout their institutions.

Each participant shared examples of work that they've done as classified professionals that demonstrate the influence and impact that they have had on their students and institutions. The following section details just a few of the examples provided by the participants. These examples detail the range of work that these participants have advanced to better serve marginalized, minoritized, and underrepresented students, as well as to support the growth and transformation of their institution.

Xóchitl discussed how she helped redesign the Student Ambassador Program at her institution after being approached by the Vice President of Student Services. She said,

> What I feel that I'm great at is, I look at something and I say, "How could this be better? How can we change this up?" And I shared my ideas with her that I wanted to do an Ambassador's Program to be a paid position.

Prior to Xochitl's work, the Student Ambassador Program was a service to help new and existing students and was "staffed" by a group of volunteer students. One of the first things Xochitl suggested was to shift from a volunteer opportunity to a student employment opportunity.

> So, what I said is, "I want to hire students—paid positions. I want to put them throughout the college so they can work at different departments; and that way when a student comes to an office, they're always working with a peer first." And she loved the ideas. We did a presentation for our school administration. And they said, "Okay, we're going to give you this amount of money to do a budget."

She put together a proposal to place student ambassadors in different departments throughout the college and was initially granted $14,000 to pilot the program. With the most financially high-need students in mind, she decided to prioritize students who were eligible for Federal

Work-Study—a program that allows students with financial need to work part-time jobs by being employed in work related to their course of study—when staffing the pilot program. Xochitl was mindful of emphasizing training and leadership development. In discussing the impact of this model on the students, she shared, "They were getting job experience, they were getting paid, we were keeping them in school so they wouldn't leave the campus…So by helping their peers, now we're engaging them, retaining them on campus."

Xóchitl shared that the program was so successful that the following year, the Student Ambassador Program was granted $220,000 and was able to staff 55 student employees, many of whom were students of color. Throughout the development and deployment of this work, the CCC State Chancellor's Office got word of what the institution was doing with their Student Ambassador Program and asked that they present their work. As a result, the Chancellor's Office adopted the Student Ambassador Program model, and it is not implemented in all of the CCCs. Xóchitl said, "Now it's not my ambassador program, but it's our community ambassador program that we built, that now is implemented through all California [community] colleges." Under Xochitl's leadership, significant changes were made to the student experience and institutional programming, and the effects of this were felt throughout the CCC system.

In a similar fashion, Teuila, who identifies as Pacific Islander-American, is a first-generation student who holds a doctorate in education, and is a program manager, led the development of an entirely new learning community named MANA at her institution. MANA is defined as the following:

> It is word/belief that is rooted in the Pacific as a belief of supernatural power that could manifest itself in a miracle. It is a force that may be ascribed to persons, spirits,

or inanimate objects. Today, in the Oceania community, our Mana is often manifested and nurtured through Faith, Culture, and Community (College of San Mateo, n.d.)

MANA is a learning community with a focus on supporting Oceania students and Pacific Studies. As someone part of the Oceania community, Teuila felt called to better serve the underrepresented and underserved student population at the college in her Admission and Records Assistant III position. Working in what is typically viewed as an entry-level position, Teuila was able to influence student programming, student enrollment, student retention, and instruction, which mostly exist outside of the scope of her assigned duties. Teuila shared,

> I think that my strategy of bringing in family, bringing in community—I think that my strategy has helped…my people, for Pacific Islanders to be able to come [to college]. As a classified professional… I really identify myself as an Admissions and Records Assistant. I was there for the first five years of my life. I was there even when I had my master's. And even when MANA was being built, I was building it as an Admissions and Records III…How to get into college was so fun for me because it was so new and something that is so new to Pacific Islander people; we tend to get everyone on it.

What started as the development as a learning community evolved over time into the establishment of a specialized curriculum where students could earn a Critical Pacific Studies & Oceania Certificate at her college. The MANA learning community expanded to three other community colleges, and there are now multiple publications focusing on the establishment of MANA and its impact. She discussed how she finds a lot of commonalities in her lived experience and that of her students. Teuila shared,

> When I think of a student when they come into the college, I don't think of them as a student. I think of them as a whole being, as in someone who may have a kid, may have issues with money like I do. I always feel like people who are coming in are having issues like I am…I feel like that's the reason why…students have really found me as a really good support…And the responses that I've received are overwhelming, as you know. As the first Pacific Studies Learning Community in California, I've

received a lot of praise and a lot of critiques, and a lot of, just, opportunities...I've published...two co-written articles...they've been written in journals for Tongan teachers in Tonga, and one in New Zealand.

Teuila demonstrated her commitment to her family, her community, and the students at her institution by (re)imagining what was possible and re(defined) leadership. Her work demonstrates how one person who is willing to push boundaries for the betterment of students can support the growth and transformation of educational systems where everyone can benefit. While some participants shared the impacts they had in large-scale ways, in their campuses and in the overall community college system, other participants shared how they saw their influence demonstrated in everyday actions while supporting students. Dahlia discussed how she was able to work in her role to help advocate for a student; she helped remove a financial hold from a student's account so the student could continue to register for classes. She shared,

> I remember a student who had an outstanding fee…saying, "Hey, I really can't afford this," and also a mother advocating for the student. And I really was listening and I'm like, "Okay, there's something we could do here." And long story short, we were able to withhold and waive that fee, which was, like, $90. That might not seem a lot for others, but to the student it was.

Her advocacy for the student resulted in the student's mother reaching out to Dahlia, sending an email expressing their gratitude. She shared,

> Her mother sent a very heartwarming email, and I've talked to her multiple times. She actually always calls me, and it's really sweet and affirming because she literally said, "It feels like I'm speaking to a family member." And I think that was so powerful. And those just, like, nuggets of gratitude just really makes this work so rewarding. And it's seldom when we have those affirming moments where we're feeling that love and appreciation, and when you hear it coming from a parent who literally sees you as like a family member, is just so touching and it's like, okay, that just feels so good.

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Dahlia discussed how these moments of gratitude keep her motivated to continue doing work that matters. In Dahlia's own words,

> Ultimately, the student and the parent, they just wanted someone to hear them out and they wanted to be treated with respect. And I was happy to be able to make that happen for them…That's just a little example that I always like to think of when I need that boost of motivation.

In this quote, Dahlia discussed how she has established a relationship with students and their families, and how, as a Latina and first-generation college student, she understands the importance of having someone to go to when you need support navigating higher education. She demonstrated how she is leveraging her position to go beyond her job duties so that students and families can view her differently and feel comfortable coming to her for support in areas that may otherwise not be negotiable, such as waiving outstanding student fees.

Iris discussed how leveraging her experience and network helped her co-develop an event that focused on the representation of Chicano culture in her community for Latinx students. She shared,

> One of the events that I helped put together, I collaborated with my homegirl, who I love dearly. She's a Puente counselor and coordinator. I served as a Puente mentor for four years… We did a zoot suit fashion show, and we had a plática with the Puentistas about history and this culture of resistance that zoot suits brought, and we taught them about it.

Iris explained that during this event, students were taught about the historical and cultural significance of Chicano culture and the Zoot Suit Riots, which, for the first time, made some community members feel seen and represented, inspiring possibilities that hadn't been thought of before. She shared,

> We taught them, "You're not putting on costumes, you're embodying culture and you're acknowledging history." So, it started with those conversations and this student, she chose the 1960s pachuco from the Zoot Suit Riots. And she borrowed her

tia's zoot suit to wear to the show… She said, today at this event, she is honoring her history and her legacy of resistance coming from the barrio Carlsbad that has been gentrified.... That student came up to me after the event, and she was in tears. She was like, "Thank you for letting me honor my tia, who was fucking smart and could have came fucking here [college] and could have gone to college here. But because this school has even made me feel like I don't belong here, has no visual representation of me belonging here. You created an opportunity for us to belong at this college today."

Iris said that in this moment of connecting with this student, she had tears in her eyes; and she reflected, "Damn, this is what I want to do. This is how I want to empower students." In creating this space for students to reflect and celebrate the contributions and presence of Chicano culture in Carlsbad, Iris provided a space where students could see their history reflected and elevated in ways that hadn't been done before. In holding this fashion show, students were able to connect to their familiar roots and honor their family in ways that may not have been possible in generations prior.

In summary, across all three of the findings of the study, participants detailed experiences of what Black feminist scholars and others have described as spirit murder, or spirit murdering (Love, 2013; Love, 2016; Williams, 1987; Wilson, 2021). As all of the participants discussed, their experience as ethnically and racially minoritized people had an impact on their educational journey. Many of the participants shared the ways in which their K–12 and/or higher education experience left them feeling spirit murdered, often speaking to the feelings of exclusion, unbelonging, lack of protection, or lack of acceptance in schools, and sometimes at the hands of those in positions of power.

Like many of participants described, higher education was a challenging and isolating experience for them, one where their lived experiences and cultures were not represented. Wilson (2021) describes this as spirit murder (2021); they state,

Students often enter into, and navigate through, learning experiences that are void of their cultures, communities, and families. Classes rarely challenge students to investigate their lives and experiences in the world. Spirit murdering in community colleges is the absence of learning contextualized to your experience and culture. (p. 55)

As Wilson discussed in the quote, participants also expressed that the lack of representation of their cultures and communities, as well as a lack of learning experiences that contextualized their lived experience in school, impacted them; they expressed that this lack shaped part of their motivation to support marginalized, minoritized, and historically underrepresented students—students who they saw themselves reflected in.

However, as Wilson (2021) also discussed, and as the participants describe, CCCs are also places of hope and possibility; and as classified professionals, the participants see themselves as facilitators of that hope and possibility. Ultimately, all of the participants explained that reciprocity is about leveraging their influence as classified professionals working at community colleges, their identities, their experiences, and their networks to influence the development, advancement, and sustainability of programing, initiatives, and practices that center the humanity and well-being of marginalized, minoritized, and underrepresented students at their institutions and beyond—shifting culture and changing systems as a result.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

Over the course of the past three years, the length of this doctoral degree process, I have grappled with many questions involving my identity, my professional journey, and leadership. However, the questions that I have been grappling with for the past three years have been with me for as long as I can remember. There are many parts of my identity, and this research is a part of that exploration. My cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998) helped to guide and lead this work, grounding my research methodology in Black and Chicana feminist epistemologies—a result of 15 one-on-one interviews, three focus groups, and countless emails, which have helped define this work.

This chapter is divided into the following sections: (a) influencers of the institution; (b) discussion, as a letter to the participants; (c) recommendations for further practice; and (d) overall study conclusions: the importance of understanding the impact of MWOC as community college classified professionals.

Influencers of the Institution

As I considered the title for this study, a number of things came to mind. I wanted to ensure that the title was representative of the experiences and truth of my participants. I wanted to ensure that I captured the essence of who my participants were as we contended with these questions regarding the significance of MWOC, being a classified professional, working at a community college, and working to address DEI issues; as well as how leadership fit into this experience.

The choice to use the term *influencer* in my title stems from two places. The first is a very basic understanding of the term *influence*. As Álvarez-Monzoncillo (2023) states,

> In western culture, the concept of influence has been linked from the very beginning to the power of persuasion. Influence seeks to confirm or change the behaviour of others, either to prevent other coercive methods or to justify their use. (p. 6)

Alvarez-Monzoncillo discussed the origins and concept of influence and highlighted one of the most salient findings of my research: that participants view their roles as MWOC, MWOC-classified professionals, people working at community colleges, and people committed to the work of supporting marginalized, minoritized, and underrepresented students as change agents. The study's findings center around the belief that the participants feel responsible for making the environments in which they enter better than how they found them, an act of reciprocity. They are committed to changing systems and structures to be better, more accessible, more inclusive, and more racially just for those that walk beside them and those who come after.

The second reason the term influencer is used in the title is directly connected to the experience of the millennial generation, "the first generation to adopt social media as a primary form of communication" (Pengue, 2021, para. 1). The term influencer in this way signals the newer, more contemporary, understanding of the term, which is rooted in influencer marketing and became popularized with the rise of social media (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023; Khamis et al., 2017). In the context of influencer marketing, influencers are most commonly understood as those who have the power and platform to impact the purchasing decisions of large audiences of people (Álvarez-Monzoncillo, 2023; Khamis et al. 2017).

However, as social media has evolved, so has the definition of influencer. More recently, the impact of influencers has extended beyond one's ability to influence others' purchasing decisions. Today, influencers can be anyone, anywhere, who has the ability to capture an audience and share their experiences, thoughts, opinions, and ideas in the hopes of shifting others' perspectives or actions in a variety of ways. In this way, today's influencers are not bound by the same power structures that have existed in the past; and, as we have witnessed, almost anyone with a cell phone, the internet, and a social media account can be an influencer. Simply put, as Markos et al. (2011) discuss, an influencer can be explained as someone who reflects their personal brand.

In this study, I use the term influencer to reflect the impact that MWOC working as classified professionals at a community college who are committed to serving as leaders beyond their job duties have on their students and at their institutions. In this study, an influencer of the institution can be understood to be an individual who has influenced and, as a result, changed perceptions, processes, and policies at their institution to support the growth and transformation of their institution to better serve marginalized, minoritized, and underrepresented students.

Discussion

The use of influencer in this study addresses three different areas. First, the theme "Key-makers not gatekeepers," discussed by Ledesma as *keyholders* (M. Ledesma, personal communication, March 15, 2022), addresses the ways that the participants work to open doors for others, leveraging whatever power, privilege, and resources they have to help others gain access to different spaces both inside and outside of their institutions. The term

key-maker is a play on the concept *gatekeeper*, a term more figuratively known that is

defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as "a person who controls access" (2023). In this

way, the term key-maker describes those who help others gain access to spaces and get

through the "gate." Second, the theme "influence over power and embodying the intention of

leadership" addresses the way the participants have (re)imagined leadership by adopting

collaborative, inclusive, and equity-minded practices in an effort to challenge traditional

frameworks of leadership, which are focused on the leader/follower binary, exercising power

over others, and maintaining power among a select few (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017). Third,

the theme "leadership as a personal ethic, not just a professional skill" addresses the personal

connection that participants have to their work as hyper-marginalized (Sims et al., 2020)

educators who hold a commitment to serving marginalized, minoritized, and

underrepresented students; as well as their aim to embody leadership practices that are

racially conscious, socially just, and equity-minded.

The discussion portion of this chapter is written in the form of a letter to my participants

and is my testimonio for this research process, disrupting traditional scholarship methods and

centering new approaches of knowledge production (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). As

Delgado Bernal et al. (2012) states, utilizing testimonio as a research methodology in 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" (p. 369). In reflecting upon

my positional power in my institution, and higher education in general, as a Chicana

classified professional, approaching the discussion of this study as a letter to participants—

my testimonio—is my way of challenging the status quo of academia and centering my

experience and those of my participants at the center of knowledge production and intellect; this centering removes us from the margins—pushing back against the power structures that we are aiming to change.

As Delgado Bernal et al. (2012) share, "Our academic training insists that we work in solitude, yet the work of testimonio calls us back to reclaim solidarity with one another" (pp. 370-371). This research is my attempt reclaim solidarity with the revolutionary spirit and work of the generations that came before me, leaders and path-makers that have allowed this work to exist, as well as to be in solidarity with those in the present who are advancing their work and paving the way for new ways of leading and being.

Letter to Participants

Dear Participants,

You are Key-Makers not Gatekeepers. As you shared, throughout your lives, your journey through education and to your careers has been riddled with struggle, challenges, and doubt. You discussed feelings of imposter syndrome, feelings of inadequacy, feeling like you and your work was never enough. You bravely shared stories of the spirit murdering you endured as students and employees in academia (Love, 2016; Williams, 1987). There were times when people turned you away, questioned your place as a student on your college campus, questioned your place as an employee in a committee meeting and in the hallways of your college.

And yet, I was humbled, but not surprised, with your capacity to see others and work to make sure that they had access to the spaces and places that were so hard for you to gain access to, stay in, and succeed in. And you discussed how opening doors and supporting one

another was not foreign to you because it was modeled by others in your life—by your mothers, tias, aunties, fathers, peers, mentors, old bosses, coworkers, and teachers. And so, for you it was instinctual that you would be key-makers for others; helping those that look like you, struggled like you, and fought like you so that each step they took toward a brighter future would be a little lighter, a little freer, a little less difficult. But I know it was not always easy; as you shared, you took risks in finding ways to move around the system to help students and advocate for their needs. As you discussed, some of you risked your jobs, risked promotions, shrunk yourself down to be less visible, battled with burn-out and had to take time away from work to deal with your mental health—all risks that came with heavy consequences, financial instability, and fear of what was to come.

As you shared, you have come across many gatekeepers in your life—those who monitored and decided whether you should have access to certain spaces, and at what cost; those who were intent on making you prove yourselves, who questioned your worthiness and qualifications. And I was in awe of how steadfast you were in your beliefs, values, and commitment to serving students; that you did so with the care and love that, at times, others did not afford to you.

Like me, you see your roles as classified professionals working at a community college as an opportunity to advance hope and possibility for others. As first-generation college-going MWOC, you are not only key-makers; you are dream-makers, too; you are possibility-models for what could be. You are pushing the boundaries of what others thought possible and bringing along others as you climb; you are bridge leaders (Horsford, 2012). You are

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leveraging your influence to develop culturally sustaining programs and initiatives, challenge antiquated policies, and advance equity-minded practices in every space you enter.

Your influence will span lifetimes and will have life-changing benefits for those you serve—because we know how important education is. We know that students who complete high school, attend college, and graduate are more likely to be upwardly mobile, earning living wages and changing the trajectory of their lives and those of their families. You are influencers in all of the ways that challenge oppressive systems, and you help promote changes in institutional structures that have excluded ethnically and racially minoritized groups, the poor and working class, and other marginalized people.

Your presence as African American, Black, Chicana, Latina, Latinx-Palestinian, Mexican-American, mixed race, Salvadoran, Asian, Indian, Indo-Fijian, Samoan, and Tongan millennial women is changing the landscape of higher education; and as you continue to grow in your roles, advance into administrative positions, and, one day, lead our colleges, I know that you will continue to make spaces and places accessible to those who most need them and continue to be key-makers.

Influence over Power and Embodying the Intention of Leadership

When I conceptualized this research and designed the research questions, I wanted to understand how leadership practices, approaches, and philosophies were shaped by the experiences of people that I often found were in my community while working as a classified professional at a community college. Having worked in education for just over 10 years and working at two community colleges for almost six years, I wasn't surprised what the literature on educational leadership highlighted. As you all shared, and as is indicated in the

research, new leadership approaches are needed to address the changing higher education landscape. You provided similar and differing experiences as to why and how your institutions could improve in their systems, processes, and policies to better achieve their mission and goals. All of you highlighted how your institutions, and higher education in general, could do better, especially for marginalized, minoritized, and historically underrepresented students. As a majority of you are first-generation college-going students, you have both been participants in, and have witnessed, the changing demographics of the student population accessing higher education, especially in community college; and your responses to how leadership should change reflected that. In your reflections, you shared about your racialized, gendered, and generational experiences from a deeply personal level and articulated how the influence of others helped shape your path, be it positive or negative.

For many of you, defining leadership or identifying whether you are "leader" on your campus came with hesitation, qualifiers, and/or pushback concerning current conceptions of leadership's definition and purpose. Much of your reflections focused on a desire to reframe the conversation around what a leader should be rather than engaging with what you have seen practiced and upheld around you, at the institutions where you work. What was clear is that much of your hesitation to identify as a leader and define it centered around the thought that in higher education and the community college system, the word leader is often synonymous with administrator, and many of you did not agree with this definition.

Many of you discussed how leadership is less about power and more about influence. To you, leadership is not just about holding power—power over others or power to dictate decisions at an institutional level—but more about creating change with the power, privilege,

and influence one might possess. You reflected that when leadership is only centered around wielding and maintaining power, harm can be done; and that harm can impact individuals at a personal level, as well as systemically. But not only did all of you express awareness that a leadership focused only on power can create harm, many of you shared how you have personally and professionally experienced harm in your roles as classified professionals. And in your cases, you were deeply aware of the damage that could be done; and many of you shared that you never wanted to be in the position of reproducing the harm that was been caused to you among your peers and in your institutions. Over the course of our conversations, it was clear that your (re)imagining of leadership was aimed at affecting change to help disrupt and dismantle White-supremacist patriarchal systems of domination and hierarchy, all systems that have deeply impacted you as hyper-marginalized women of color (Sims et al., 2020 p. 36)

As you shared, one doesn't always need a theoretical framework or technical definition to start leading; when you are committed to serving the people, you can affect change. In discussing your work as leaders—as influencers—working within your spheres of influence, looking for others doing similar work to collaborate and connect with in hopes of advancing culturally sustaining, equity-minded, and social justice-centered change, you provided clear examples of humanizing ways to lead. In institutions where leadership, or administrative leadership, has historically been predominantly White and male, you all are culture disruptors, thinking about and practicing leadership in ways that exist on the margins of educational-leadership discourse and literature. You are influencing work that has us (re)define, (re)imagine, and (re)envision what is possible in institutions that are at the tipping

point of significant change. You are expanding the perceptions of the term leader—which has often felt too narrow and self-centered, serving in the interest of the self and not that of the collective. And in your work, I can see that the growth and transformation of the institution is a byproduct of your commitment to being of service to students first.

In this work, you have taught me that you do not need a formal administrative leadership role to create change and that from any role or position on your campus you can influence change. You have underscored my belief that you do not need to be in a formalized leadership role to make things better for students and your institution and that you do not need to be in a leadership role to make a difference. All you must do is care to be better and to do better, every day, even when situations present you with difficult decisions. When you center the most marginalized students, everyone benefits.

Ultimately, as you shared, your dedication and commitment to your work is a form of reciprocity—a choice—where you treat your roles and students with care and authenticity, every day, in the places where you leverage your power and privilege in your spheres of influence. They have created worlds of difference for marginalized, minoritized, and historically underrepresented students daily and in the day-to-day operations of your colleges, in the overall institutional systems, and those for generations to come.

Leadership as a Personal Ethic Not Just a Professional Skill

One thing that struck me as I journeyed through this research process with you all was that when you reflected on your work, your leadership, and your "why," it all came back to your personal ethics—your values and beliefs. You shared that your values and beliefs have ultimately been shaped by the various and compounded experiences you've had based on the

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identities you hold. It was clear throughout our interviews and focus groups that you all felt a desire and duty to serve marginalized, minoritized, and underrepresented students; students who are like you. What I found most beautiful and impactful is that you view these students as an extension of you, from a holistic lens; and, in working to support and serve them, you are not just helping them but, perhaps, also healing younger versions of yourselves—younger versions of yourself who may not have felt seen, valued, or worthy or who were lost. In your work your personal ethics drive your leadership, moving away from the corporate, business, and professional understandings of what leadership is; a professional skill that one adopts to perform professionality.

As we know, the term *the work* has become more commonly used in educational spaces; it generally means work that aims to shift systems, cultures, beliefs, and practices to be more inclusive, equitable, fair, and just. When describing your job or employment as classified professionals working at community colleges, you often discussed your "work" and "the work" as one in the same. This was also evident when you also discussed your "leadership practice;" it was often synonymous with your work, which was focused on "the work."

In all your testimonios, you demonstrated how your experiences existing as racialized, gendered, and generational individuals were at the forefront in the shaping of your leadership practice. In listening to your testimonios, it was clear that you feel deeply motivated to make the college experience better for students than it was for you—that your work to advance DEI initiatives is deeply tied to your personal ethic and not an opportunity for professional visibility.

For many, leadership is an important professional skill or strategy. You shared the different leadership types and frameworks that you could relate to: servant leadership, transformative leadership, social justice leadership, and transformational leadership, to name a few. But to you, leadership was much more than what could be theoretically conceptualized; it was more about how individuals practice those leadership frameworks and approaches. Because to you, leadership is not just about how well you perform or practice it but whether you embody the intention of leadership, how you operationalize it in the real world. You articulated so clearly for me that you all view leadership as part of your personal ethics and an act of service, as opposed to a professional skill that you can perform when needed. To you, leadership is something you are. Leadership is how you want to be engaged with and how you aim to engage others; it is about caring about others, especially when the day-to-day work gets messy. We know that leadership is political and can be oppressive, and you helped teach me that (re)imagining leadership means that we need to revisit what makes us human—that we must first know ourselves and reflect on our positions as individuals in society; and it requires us to understand that in the moments when we are challenged or confused, we have a moral compass and guiding principles that tell us to do right by those who need our leadership the most.

Recommendations for Further Practice

This research suggests that in order to create and advance substantive and equity-minded change in community colleges, there needs to be a paradigm shift in how the system recognizes, cultivates, and fosters leadership. Ultimately, radical change and new frameworks for operating are needed in order to reach the new goals the institution has set

out to accomplish (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Nevarez et al., 2013; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016; Sims et. al, 2020).

Perception of Leaders Must Be Re(defined)

One of the most striking findings of this study is that although all of the participants were functioning in a leadership-type role at their institution, many of them were hesitant to name themselves as leaders on their campus. When they discussed leadership as a practice, many of them first challenged its definition, function, and role in affecting or creating change. For many of the participants, the word leader was either synonymous with or too closely connected to the role of an administrator. The participants did not feel that those two terms could be used authentically as interchangeable terms.

When asked how they have impacted the community college for students on their campus, many of the participants shared examples of the transformative work they were doing daily to support the success of all students, especially marginalized, minoritized, and historically underrepresented students. Participants discussed the different ways that they were working to counter or challenge many of the leadership styles and practices modeled at their institution by aiming to be more conscious of their actions and impacts on others. They (re)imagined leadership styles and practices that aimed to be collectivist, more inclusive, and ones in which they use their power, privilege, and influence to affect change.

As evidenced by the data, participants demonstrated levels of service that have had, and continue to have, immeasurable impacts, across their campuses and in the lives of students. Xóchitl discussed how she helped redesign the Student Ambassadors Program at her institution, a program that was eventually adopted by the CCC State Chancellor's Office and

implemented across all CCCs. Teuila led the development of an entirely new learning community, MANA, with a focus on supporting the underrepresented and underserved Oceania student population and establishing Pacific Studies at her institution. This work led to the establishment of a specialized curriculum, where students could earn a Critical Pacific Studies & Oceania Certificate at her college. In addition, MANA was adopted by three other community colleges and yielded multiple publications focusing on the establishment of MANA and its impact.

And while many participants shared the impacts they had in large-scale ways across their campuses and the overall community college system, other participants shared how they saw their leadership demonstrated in everyday actions while supporting students. Dahlia discussed how she was able to work in her role to help advocate for a first-generation student with high financial need to have a financial hold removed from their account so that they could continue to register for classes. Iris discussed how leveraging her experience and network helped her co-develop an event that focused on the representation of Chicano culture in her community for Latinx students. Iris provided a space where students could see their history elevated in ways that hadn't been done before. In holding a fashion show, she created a space where students were able to connect to their family roots and honor their family in ways that may not have been possible in generations prior.

However, despite all of the impactful work that these participants led, advanced, and institutionalized, many of them discussed the feeling that they could not claim being leaders because others on their campus would not recognize or acknowledge their value and contributions to the campus or the lives of students. Participants expressed that they were

often made to feel minimized at their institutions because they were only seen as classified professionals, staff who were not seen as being in positions of power or holding the authority required to be a leader. Participants discussed also feeling that they were often viewed as "young," or less senior; therefore, they could not be viewed as seasoned or experienced enough to be qualified to speak with authority or on certain matters, and they were viewed as not having enough professional experience to be a leader. Participants discussed that in the media, millennials are constantly critiqued and viewed through a negative lens, often scapegoated as the reason for the many issues in society today and often labeled as lazy, entitled, and spoiled. This research suggests otherwise. As research suggests, women of color are historically viewed as having less authority, and their leadership practices are questioned as being too emotional or ineffective (Colon Gibson, 1992; Gardiner et al., 2000; Mendez-Morse, 1997). This research suggests otherwise.

Therefore, it is critical that the perceptions of who is and can be a leader is (re)defined, on an individual and institutional level, in community colleges—but specifically in higher education. Individuals and institutions must contend with the leadership bias that constricts us, preventing us from seeing potential in Women of Color, millennials, MWOC, classified professionals, and those working in community colleges as leaders.

Leadership Must be Re(imagined) to Meet Pressing Challenges of Educational Inequity at Community Colleges

This research is significant because it decenters traditional approaches to leadership and the overwhelming volume of research, which is predominantly androcentric and racially monolithic, largely focused on the White male experience (Hill Collins, 2000; Shakeshaft,

1989). Instead, this research moves MWOC from the margins into the center of higher education leadership discourse, aiming to understand how their contributions as classified professionals influence student experience and institutional change.

Historically, colleges have functioned with a right to fail approach to college completion, placing the onus on the student to successfully complete their educational goals, without regard to or support for the various challenges students face in accessing, navigating, and completing college (Nevarez et al., 2013). Over time it has become clear that the right to fail approach to college completion is not only exclusionary, but also, ultimately, outdated. As such, community colleges are working to implement equity-based initiatives aimed at addressing equity, enrollment, and completion for minoritized students, first-generation students, and other marginalized student groups (Felix, 2021; Fong et al., 2017; Nevarez et al., 2013).

However, higher education leadership has traditionally existed as top-down structure, where decision-making and control are concentrated among a few at the top; and today's complex environment requires new forms of collaborative, or shared, leadership to help campuses become more responsive to needed changes (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Nevarez et al., 2013; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016).

As evidenced by the research, current educational leaders are not equipped with the appropriate leadership strategies and frameworks to adequately address the persistent issues around equity, access, and completion in higher education (Kezar & Holcombe 2017; Nevarez et al., 2013). As feminist research and theory proves, and as is demonstrated in these findings, Women of Color are more likely to engage in collective leadership practices that

disrupt the status quo and focus on equity. Black, Indigenous, and Chicana/Latina scholars indicate that the diverse perspectives and unique experiences of women of color in educational leadership offer a greater and more nuanced understanding of the experiences, challenges, and strengths of racially and ethnically minoritized people (Ahnee-Benham, 2003; Blea, 1992; Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Delgado Bernal, 1998; hooks, 2000; Hurtado, 2001; Mendez-Morse, 2003).

The findings of this study indicate that participants view their jobs as service, a personal calling, with a commitment to advancing more racially and ethnically conscious spaces, equity-minded programming and policies, and more inclusive and humanizing practices in their individual interactions and throughout their institutions. As such, participants have (re)imaged leadership by aiming to be collectivists, reflective, and open to change, as well as being willing to be corrected, so they do not reproduce harmful beliefs and actions; they are also open to being advocates for themselves and others, with the goal to change systems for the better and be more progressive. As a result, these participants, and others like them, have leveraged their power as classified professionals working at a community college. Additionally, participants have leveraged their identities, their experience, and their networks to influence the development, advancement, and sustainability of programing, initiatives, and practices that center the humanity and well-being of marginalized, minoritized, and underrepresented students at their institutions and beyond, shifting culture and changing systems.

This recommendation calls for a (re)imagining of leadership in community colleges that de-centers the top-down and leader/follower binary and embraces more collective and

collaborative practices (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Nevarez et al., 2013; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016). It also calls for leadership frameworks and practices that are race- and gender-conscious so that institutions can begin to confront, dismantle, and address the historical legacy of racism and oppression in educational systems, a legacy that has devalued and dehumanized marginalized, minoritized, and historically underrepresented students (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Hill Collins, 2000; Ledesma, 2017).

Overall Study Conclusions: The Importance of Understanding the Impact of Millennial Women of Color as Community College Classified Professionals

This study centers MWOC CCC professionals as institutional influencers by understanding how their leadership practices support the success of marginalized, minoritized, and historically underrepresented students and equity-advancing institutional change. The findings of this study underscore what was discussed in the literature review.

Research indicates that higher education institutions must improve educational outcomes for all students, but specifically students of color, low-income students, and first-generation college students (An, 2013; Fink et al., 2017; Taylor, 2015). In order to do so, current educational leaders must be equipped with the appropriate leadership strategies and frameworks to effectively address the persistent issues around equity, access, and completion in higher education (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016). Research indicates that traditional leadership practices and structures are no longer sufficient in addressing the needs and challenges of the changing landscape of colleges and universities today (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Nevarez et al., 2013; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016).

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Over the past two decades, the U.S. population has both grown increasingly diverse, ethnically and racially, and educated (Espinosa et al., 2019). Over time, underrepresented student populations have gained access to college at increasing rates (Espinosa et al., 2019). However, despite the diversification of the higher education student population—by race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and more—educational leadership has remained largely unchanged and has remained mostly White and male (Bichsel & McChesney, 2017). Fortunately, research indicates that the diversification of educational leaders and their leadership practices improves institutional effectiveness and student outcomes (Hurtado, 2001; Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Magdaleno, 2006; Moody, 2012; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Research indicates that the higher education landscape requires new leadership skills and approaches, chief among them being the principles of collaboration and shared leadership (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2016). As the literature, and this study, indicates, the millennial generation (born between 1981 and 1996) (Fry, 2018), is an emerging demographic of leaders that have been shown to embrace principles of collaboration and shared leadership (Barrington, 2019). Additionally, as the literature and this study indicate, educational leaders from minoritized and marginalized communities, i.e., women, people of color, and women of color, are highly effective and impactful leaders in their institutions (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018; Colon Gibson, 1992; Gardiner et al., 2000; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Hurtado, 2001; Ledesma, 2017; Magdaleno, 2006; Mendez-Morse, 1997; Moody, 2012).

However, one of the limitations of the current body of educational-leadership literature is the exclusion of analysis of the experience and contributions of millennial women in higher education, especially community colleges. This study aims to fill the gap in research that has excluded MWOC, the most diverse, educated, and employed subset of individuals in a generation (Brundage, 2017; Fry, 2018; Fry & Bialik, 2019) working at CCCs, the most diverse educational system in the United States (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d.), and classified professionals, the most diverse and representative employment classification of the student body population at higher education institutions today (Pritchard & McChesney, 2018; CUPA-HR, 2018; Espinosa et al., 2019).

Therefore, this study helps to understand how the leadership styles and values of a unique subset of individuals (millennial women who identify as Black, Latina, Asian, Indigenous, Mixed-race [non-White]—identified in the study as Women of Color—who work or have worked as classified professionals in the CCC system and who have a commitment to supporting historically minoritized, marginalized, and underrepresented student populations and DEI-centered work) are shaped, developed, and operationalized. This research will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how the current landscape of higher education and the CCC system is shifting and how, over time, this population of leaders will shape its future. My hope is that this research provides a greater understanding of why it is critical to investigate and understand the experiences and influence of this generation of classified professional leaders, a generation who are currently working in the system, completing graduate degrees, rising in the community college administrative ranks, and leading the change that the system so desperately needs.

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Appendix A

Invitation to Participate in Study

Dear _,

I am conducting a research study on the impacts and influence of Millennial Women of Color (MWOC) in community college leadership by investigating how the intersections of race, gender, and age shape leadership practice aimed at supporting the success of historically underrepresented student populations and equity-advancing institutional change. Participation will take approximately two and a half hours, over the course of a brief survey, a one-hour interview, and a one-hour focus group.

If you are interested in participating, please reply to this email expressing your interest and I will send more information about the study and a consent form. Once your questions have been answered and you have expressed interest in participating by signing the consent form, I will send a link to schedule your first interview. I will then follow up with an email to confirm the date of the interview and provide you with a pre-intake survey. There is no compensation offered for participation in this study. There are no known risks involved in this research.

If so inclined, I invite you to recommend 1-2 colleagues or peers that may be interested in participating in this study.

Thank you,

Marisol Quevedo

Ed.D. Leadership Program Student

marisol.quevedo@sjsu.edu

IRB Standard Consent Form

REQUEST FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Millennial Women of Color Leadership in Higher Education

Marisol Quevedo, San José State University graduate student, Faculty Advisor: Rebeca Burciaga, PhD.

PURPOSE

The aim of this study is to explore how the intersection of race, gender, and age shapes leadership practice within higher education to better understand how Millennial Women of Color (MWOC) can and have supported the success of historically underrepresented student populations and advanced institutional effectiveness in higher education. For purposes of this study MWOC is defined as an individual who identifies as a woman (inclusive of trans people), born within the Millennial generation (born between 1981 and 1996) who is not ethnically white/Caucasian or of Anglo-European descent. Participants should also identify as individuals committed to supporting and advancing support for historically underrepresented students through some form of diversity, equity, and/or inclusion efforts in their work or at their campus.

PROCEDURES

Participants will be asked to complete a brief survey, participate in two one-hour interviews, and a one-hour focus group. The participant interviews will be held virtually on the Zoom platform and will be recorded using the record to cloud feature on Zoom. Participants will be asked to select a physical location for the virtual interview or focus groups that prioritizes their comfort and privacy and will allow them to feel at ease so that they can feel able to provide authentic responses during the interview and focus groups.

POTENTIAL RISKS

In order to account for participant/researcher bias, if a participant has been supervised by the researcher, the researcher will inform the participant that they are under no obligation to participate in the interview, can end the interview process at any time and will have complete authority to withdraw their participation in the study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Participants may benefit from reflecting upon their experiences working in education, meeting other like-minded MWOC in the focus group, and may develop a new or different understanding of their leadership practice. Participants will be contributing to knowledge and research that has been identified as missing in higher education/community college educational leadership.

COMPENSATION

There is no compensation for participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Interview recordings will be recorded to the Zoom cloud and will be only accessible by the researcher. All participants will be given a copy of their interviews, and if all members of the focus group agree, a copy of the focus group. The participants will be given pseudonyms and any identifying information will be changed to ensure confidentiality.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the entire study or any part of the study without any negative effect on your relations with San José State University. You also have the right to skip any question you do not wish to answer. This consent form is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You will not waive any rights if you choose not to participate, and there is no penalty for stopping your participation in the study.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study, please contact Marisol Quevedo at marisol.quevedo@sjsu.edu or at 650-489-6858.
- Complaints about the research may be presented to the Director of the Ed.D. Leadership Program, Dr. Bradly Porfilio, at bradley.porfilio@sjsu.edu or (408) 924-3566.
- For questions about participants' rights or if you feel you have been harmed in any way by your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Richard Mocarski, Associate Vice President for Research, San Jose State University, at 408-924-2479 or irb@sjsu.edu

SIGNATURES

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to be a part of the study, that the details of the study have been explained to you, that you have been given time to read this document, and that your questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

Participant Signature

_____

_____

Participant's Name (printed)   Participant's Signature   Date

Researcher Statement

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to learn about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the participant understands his/her rights and the purpose, risks, benefits, and procedures of the research and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

_____

___

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent   Date

Appendix C

Pre-Intake Survey

First and Last Name

Please indicate your birthdate and age

Do you identify as a millennial?

○ Yes
○ No

What is your gender identity?

How do you identify ethnically?

How do you identify racially?

Which community college institution do you work for?

How long have you worked at this institution?

What is your formal position and title?

In what way(s) have you served in a leadership capacity (examples include: supervisor, manager, committee member, student club advisor/mentor or any other related role) aimed at supporting historically underrepresented student populations through diversity, equity, and/or inclusion efforts on your campus or institution?

How long have you served in these roles?

Please share any initial thoughts or questions related to the study or indicate anything you would be interested in discussing.

→

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Appendix D

Interview Protocol Draft

1. Using specific identity markers, such as age, race, gender, how would you describe yourself?
2. Which experiences have influenced your identity development?
3. How do you believe your racialized, gendered, political identity has impacted your work/how you do your job?
   1. How you serve students
   2. What do you choose to do above/beyond your role (student club advisor, committee work, volunteer work)?
4. Do you feel as if you have the ability/permission/influence to move student-centered, equity-informed, and social justice-based initiatives forward at your institution?
   1. Why or why not?
   2. In what ways, have you tried, what was the response?
5. How would you describe your leadership style?
   1. What has been your process in developing and defining your leadership style?
6. Can you share an example of how your leadership style/approach compares, resembles, or challenges typical leadership styles you have experienced in your career?
7. What has been your process in developing and defining your leadership style?
8. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix E

Focus Group Protocol Questions

1. Can you share your experiences as a MWOC serving as community
    college leaders dedicated to addressing diversity, equity, inclusion
    (DEI) issues in higher education serving as leaders beyond your job
    duties?

2. As a Millennial Women of Color (MWOC), working within the
    California Community College system, how did you develop your own
    leadership approach/style?

3. In what ways, if any, did/do you (re)imagine leadership to support the
    growth and transformation of your institution to better serve
    marginalized, minoritized, and underrepresented students?

Appendix F

Participant Table

Participant Name	Role	Racial/Ethnic Identity	Education Level	Location
Dahlia	Program Coordinator	Mexican-American	First-Generation Student M.Ed.	Bay Area
Daisy	Student Support Services Supervisor	Mexican	First-Generation Student M.Ed.	Southern California
Flor	Program Coordinator	Latina	First-Generation Student M.Ed.	Bay Area
Heilala	Former Student Affairs Practitioner	Tongan and Samoan	First-Generation Student Ed.D.	Bay Area
Irene	Program Coordinator	Mexican	First-Generation Student Ed.D.	South Bay Area
Iris	Student Services Specialist	Xicana	First-Generation Student Ed.D.	Southern California
Jade	Program Coordinator	Black	First-Generation Student M.A. Student	Bay Area
Jasmine	Program Support Specialist	Indian	First-Generation Student M.A.	Bay Area
Leilani	Student Affairs Program Manager	Mixed Race	First-Generation Student Ed.D.	Bay Area
Lily	Program Manager	Salvadorian	M.A.	Bay Area
Maya	Director	Black	First-Generation Student Ed.D.	Bay Area
Nalini	Program Coordinator	Indo-Fijian American	First-Generation Student Ed.D.	South Bay Area
Teuila	Program Manager	Pacific Islander American	First-Generation Student Ed.D.	Bay Area
Violeta	Project Director	Latinx-Palestinian	First-Generation Student Ed.D. Student	Bay Area
Xóchitl	Program Coordinator	Chicana	First-Generation Student M.A.	South Bay Area