Supporting First-Generation College Students Through a Pandemic

Dr. La'Tonya Rease Miles
University of California,
Los Angeles

Dr. Vijay Kanagala
Salem State University

Sana Meghani
Trellis Company

Tuesday, July 28, 2020

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Agenda

- Introduction + Opening Statements

- How do you define first-gen?

- Challenges first-gen students are facing right now

- How to create a first-gen program during a pandemic

- Understanding and reshaping master narratives

- Best practices to validate and support first-gen students

- Q&A and Discussion

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Expert Panelists

Dr. Vijay Kanagala
Salem State University

Dr. La'Tonya Rease Miles
University of California,
Los Angeles

How do we enter this work?

WHAT IS A FIRST GENERATION STUDENT?

> **WE DEFINE FIRST GENERATION AS**
>
> students whose parent(s) or guardian(s) have not completed a 4-year degree at a college or university in the **United States.**

Haverford College

PENN FIRST DEFINITION:

"To us, being a first-generation student could look any of the following ways..."

One or both of your parents have not received a college degree

You are the first in your family to pursue higher education in the United States

You are the first in your family to pursue higher education at an elite institution

One or both of your parents started a college degree but did not complete it

You are the first in your family to make efforts toward changing your socio-economic status

Understanding and Re-Shaping Master Narratives

- Entrenched, dominant stock stories related to the educational achievement of underserved students based on longstanding and ongoing deficit views

- Examples of deficit-based master narratives:
  - Latinx, African American, and Native American students, especially women, are not good in STEM
  - Low-income parents and communities do not value education
  - If students have too many adversities, they cannot succeed

Understanding and Re-Shaping Master Narratives

- <u>Counter-Storytelling</u> (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Delgado, 1989). Informed by <u>Critical Race Theory</u>, a counter-story is a tool to expose, analyze, and challenge majoritarian, dominant narratives based on racial privilege

- The global pandemic is providing an opportunity to create a new story, a new vision of education

- What will be the new vision of educational practice when we arrive at the other side of the pandemic?

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Entrenched False Narrative

Shaming, Marginalizing, and Penalizing are acceptable forms of working with first-gen students

False Narrative

- Shaming
- Marginalizing
- Penalizing

Counter Narrative

- Lifting student up; working with love, healing and critical compassion
- Being inclusive and supportive
- Providing constructive feedback; failure is a significant learning experience

Entrenched False Narrative

Students have to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and succeed on their own with minimal to no support from faculty and staff

False Narrative

- Separation

- Distancing

- Lack of communication & support

- Inaccessibility

Counter Narrative

- Authentic, caring relationships are critical for student development

- Validating actions are key to student development and academic achievement (Rendón, 1994)

Validation Theory: Affirming First-Gen Students

- **Validation** is an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that fosters academic and personal development (Rendón, 1994)

- There are two forms of validation:
  - **Academic** -- when in- and out-of-class agents take action to assist students to trust their innate capacity to learn and to acquire confidence in being a college student
  - **Interpersonal** -- when in- and out-of-class agents take action to foster students' personal development and social adjustment

Validation Best Practices

- **VALIDATE STUDENT VOICE AND EXPERIENCE:** Affirm value of personal voice in the classroom
  - Knowledge can initiate from student personal experience
  - Research papers on topics rooted in the student personal experience
  - Develop an inclusive curriculum that allows students to see themselves in what they are learning
- **VALIDATE STUDENT CULTURE:** Recognize and embrace student cultural strengths and the contributions of their culture to American society
  - Make an effort to learn more about student and family history and the sacrifices they have made
  - Validate their language and cultural traditions
  - Recognize and validate student assets

Validation and Online Learning

- Convey caring and support for students
- Praise success
- Begin class by checking in with students and encourage students to check in with each other
- Validate their ability to be successful
- Be reassuring
- Remain accessible
- Use videos to capture your caring and empathy
- Let students know you are aware of their situations during this difficult time
- Show up not just as a professor, but as a human being

Entrenched False Narrative

Limited-income students face too many adversities and are largely incapable of succeeding in higher education

False Narrative

- Low-income communities have nothing going for them

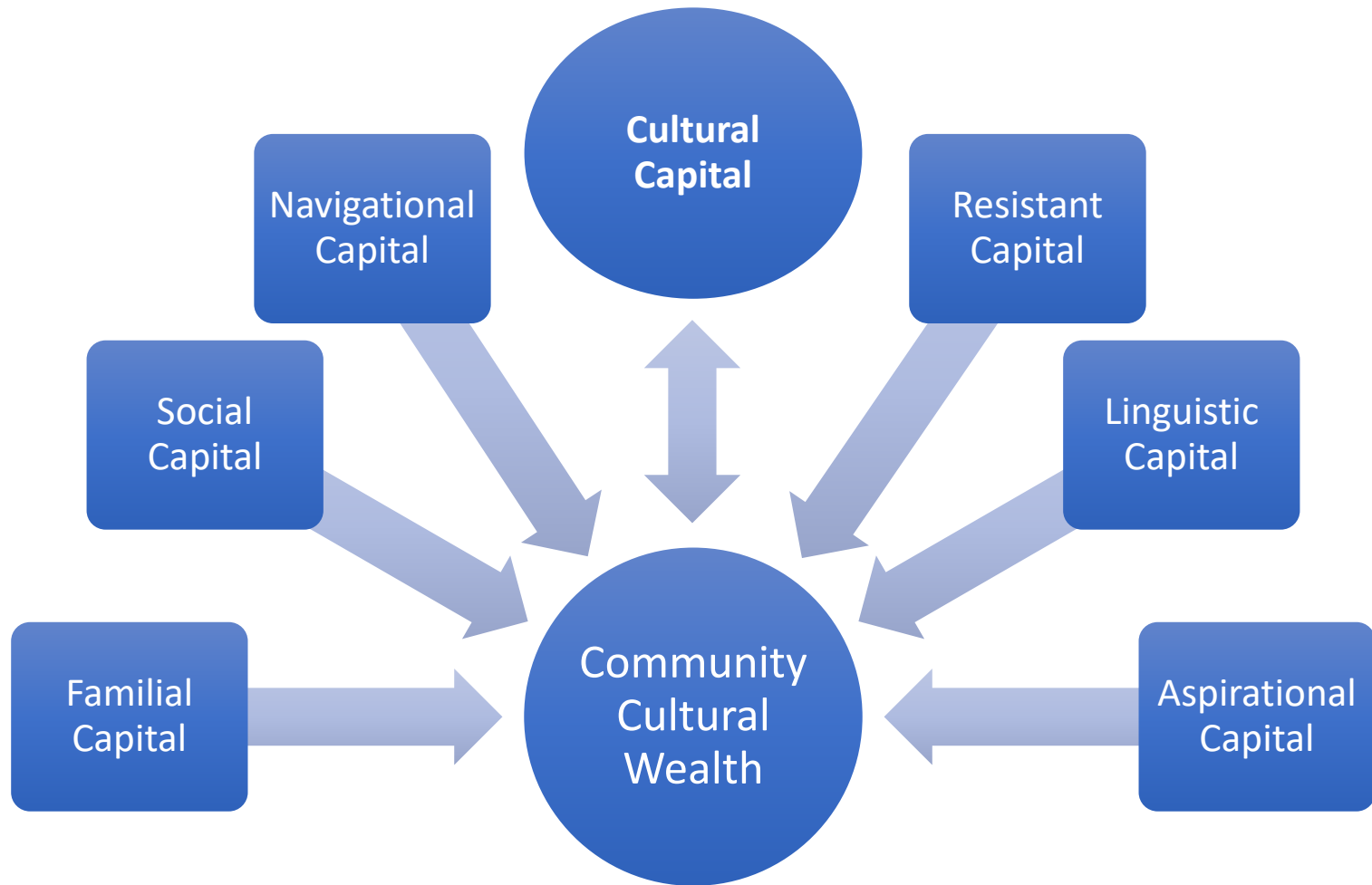- Low-income parents don't care about education

- Deficit-based perspectives

Counter Narrative

- Low-income students have significant unacknowledged assets
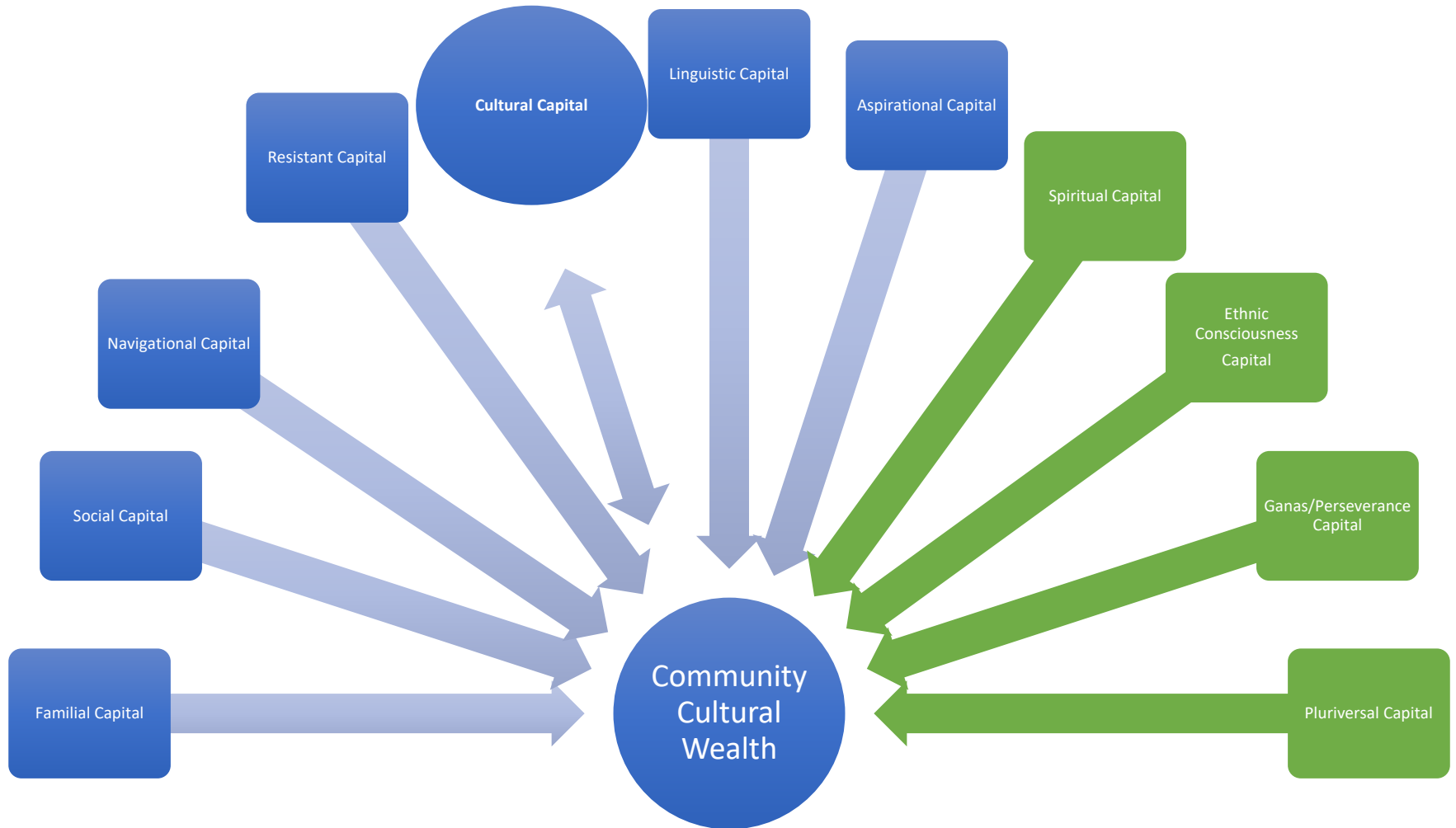
- Asset-based framework

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Community Cultural Wealth Model

Yosso, 2005

Ventajas y Conocimientos Model

Rendón, Nora, & Kanagala, 2014

Challenges First-Gen Students Face

El Camino College