

Hello!

My name is María Dolores Castillo (she/her/ella). I am a 21 year-old, Latina, first generation undergraduate student. I am currently a 4th year Politics and Legal Studies double-major and the UCSC SUA Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion. Recently, I have been struggling a lot more than ever before with my personal, professional, school, and social life. There had been problems and news coming my way from every direction, and it felt as though there was never going to be a break in my own thoughts. Tears and tears just kept coming out, my words were no longer being used, and my smile no longer felt real. I didn't feel like myself anymore — meaning the little things weren't bringing me happiness, I was unable to be around my friends when I really wanted to, nor was I able to push forward in my studies or social groups. *Why am I sad?* That is a question I still do not have a complete answer to at the moment. I always knew why I was sad and now all of a sudden I don't have an answer. My own room, which was my resting place, became my crying space. I felt suffocated in my own room. My home felt like a home no more. In meetings I would cry, I was present but not present at the same time...I wouldn't feel anything.



One day the Dean of Students, Garrett Naiman, let me know about On the Margins and the positive impacts it has had on other students. I decided to give it a try because it was recommended to me by Garrett, but at the moment I felt as though nothing would be able to help me since nothing was helping prior to our talk. I then met with a student, Daniela Obeso, who kindly took time out of her day to help me learn more about On the Margins and ways to set up an appointment. I decided to set up an appointment while in the meeting with Daniela, which only took about 1-2 minutes to set up.

The day of my appointment arrived and upon logging into the meeting and seeing the coach, I felt really nervous and still held discouraging thoughts in my head. Tanya Erazo and I began to talk and I began to open up to a person I had never met before. The session had been centered around what I had been going through, my thoughts, and ways in which I could move forward. I felt as though my experiences/emotions were valid, I felt as though someone really understood (to an extent) what I was going through, and I finally felt a feeling of motivation to move forward that I hadn't felt for weeks. I left the meeting feeling empowered and with a willingness to find happiness in the fact that I was actually growing as a person when I thought I was just going down. Tanya provided me with practices and new strategies to turn my negative thoughts into empowering ones. Once again, my home became a safe space for me because I now knew that in being able to cry I was actually letting out what I no longer wanted in my life. I began to

become more open about what I was going through with best friends. Later, I decided to schedule another appointment, which also went as great as it could.

Although I was not 100% happy and I continue to struggle with my mental health, I found a new way of looking at the struggles that I am going through. I no longer see them merely as negative experiences, but as situations that need to have occurred in order for me to grow stronger and become the person I want to become in the future. On the Margins really brought light into my life when I felt as though there wouldn't be any until much later. They helped me so much that I recommended it to my best friend, and she came out of a session feeling much better and has shared that she too will continue to schedule more appointments. I am so appreciative of this organization and for them being a part of my life journey. I even smiled in writing this testimonial because I am so proud as to how far I have come — even if they are baby steps. Thank you On the Margins for opening up my mind to change and self love!

Sincerely,

María Dolores Castillo