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Special Issue on Hispanics in Higher Education

Guest Editors: **Rachel McGee, Ed.D.**
Joyce Tardaguila Harth, Ph.D
Southeastern University, USA

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Aims & Scope

The Journal of Underrepresented and Minority Progress (JUMP) is an interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed, international, open-access journal published by STAR Scholars Publications.

JUMP seeks to advance knowledge of minority and underrepresented people in local, regional, and international settings by publishing narratives, theoretical and empirically based research articles, and reflections. JUMP is indexed in major databases.

The Journal is international in scope and includes work by scholars in a wide range of academic fields and disciplines. Contributions from researchers and professionals in fields like sociology, psychology, higher education, philosophy, education, and cultural studies are welcome in the Journal.

The Journal's audience includes scholars and researchers in social sciences who work on the issues of ethnicity and race, caste and class, religion and spirituality, gender and sexual orientation, power and privilege, wealth and income, health and well-being, beliefs and value systems, and the intersections of these issues.

For questions –

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

OJED
OPEN JOURNALS IN EDUCATION

Journal of Underrepresented & Minority Progress
Volume 8, No SI-2 (2024)
Special Issue on Hispanics in Higher Education
www.ojed.org/jump

ARTICLES

© *Journal of Underrepresented and Minority Progress*
Volume 8, Issue SI-2 (2024), pp. i-v
Special Issue on Hispanics in Higher Education
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EDITORIAL REMARKS

Rachel McGee and Joyce Tardáguila Harth
Southeastern University, USA

This special issue, focusing on the experiences of Hispanic students in higher education, aims to explore the challenges and opportunities faced by Hispanic/Latina/o students in predominantly White institutions (PWIs), Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), and beyond. The articles' thematic cohesion presents an integrated perspective on structural barriers, cultural dynamics, and institutional practices affecting the educational outcomes of Hispanic/Latina/o students in the United States.

The United States Census Bureau defines being Hispanic or Latina/o as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Dominican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture, regardless of race. During the year 2023, approximately 65.2 million people, or 19.1% of the total population of the United States, identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023; Pew Research Center, 2024). Such data would make Hispanics/Latinos the second largest ethnic group in the country after non-Hispanic Whites.

The educational attainment of Hispanics/Latinos in the United States remains a topic of great interest. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2023), 56% of Hispanics/Latinos hold a high school diploma, while only 20% report having a bachelor's degree or higher. Furthermore, in 2022, 21% of students enrolled in higher education institutions in the U.S., and 6% of the faculty members identified as Hispanic/Latino (NCES, 2023). Despite an increase in the number of Hispanic/Latina/o students enrolled in American universities, this group of

students often encounters barriers and practices that have a profound impact on their educational acomplishements.

The call for papers for this special issue was designed to invite manuscripts from scholars who were interested in exploring the diverse experiences of Hispanic/Latina/o students in institutions of higher education in the United States. The response to the call for papers was overwhelmingly positive as we received a myriad of article proposals addressing different aspects of the Hispanic experience in higher education. With the guidance of the editorial board, we proceeded to invite authors to submit their full article manuscripts and to identify potential reviewers for the special issue.

Special Thanks

It is important to note that this issue is only possible with the unwavering guidance and support of a visionary named Dr. Sharif Uddin, our editor at JUMP. We are also very grateful to our outstanding editorial board. We appreciate their vision and support as we progressed with this project.

We were also privileged to work with Gauri Khanna, who is completing her Ph.D. at Jindal Global University in India. Gauri kept our data up to date and was an integral part of our team. We thank her for all her contributions to this special edition.

Finally, but most importantly, we want to thank our wonderful authors, reviewers, and copy editors. Our authors submitted outstanding and thought-provoking articles on Hispanics in higher education. Our reviewers understood and reviewed the manuscripts with great detail and provided valuable recommendations. We are also grateful to our excellent copy editors. They all knew what was needed to keep in line with APA 7th edition and the requirements of the journal while maintaining the integrity of each manuscript.

Thematic Highlights and Contributions

The articles included in this issue point to systemic inequities that continue to marginalize Hispanic/Latina/o students in instutions of higher education. Crucial to the discussion is the role played by institutional frameworks which perpetuate exclusion through implicit biases, insufficient mentorship opportunities, and a lack of culturally responsive practices.

The lack of cultural validation which often translates into missed opportunities by institutions of higher education to integrate cultural values that are pivotal in most Hispanic cultures is another emerging theme. The cultural value of Familismo, which emphasizes familial loyalty and interconnectedness, is identified as a potential source of resilience,

particularly for first-generation college students. Familismo's dual role—motivating while sometimes amplifying familial responsibilities—points to the need for institutions to design support systems that align with the familial structures of Hispanic students.

Mentorship, particularly from faculty of color, is prominently featured as a vital mechanism for fostering academic success and emotional well-being among Hispanic/Latina/o students. Several articles point out that culturally competent mentors can bridge gaps in institutional knowledge, counter isolation, and validate students' identities. This kind of mentorship goes beyond academic guidance and builds the psychological and emotional resilience necessary for Hispanic/Latina/o students to navigate unwelcoming institutional environments.

This special issue is particularly significant for its methodological diversity and interdisciplinary approach. From phenomenological studies to regression analyses and thematic content analysis, the articles employ robust methodologies to explore various experiences and challenges faced by Hispanic/Latino(a) students. The insights are grounded in empirical data and lived experiences, making them highly relevant for researchers, educators, and policymakers.

Moreover, the focus on the critical role that culture plays on our daily lives adds depth to understanding how Hispanic/Latina/o students navigate higher education. The emphasis on first-generation students, doctoral candidates, and the role of Hispanic Serving Institutions provides a comprehensive view of the educational pipeline. By focusing on the Hispanic/Latina/o voices and experiences in the world of higher education, this issue makes an invaluable contribution to the broader discourse on educational equity and social justice.

Recommendations and Future Directions

The collective findings from this issue offer several insights. Among them, the need for institutions of higher education to prioritize recruiting and training mentors who can provide culturally informed guidance to Hispanic/Latina(o) students. This includes recognizing and addressing challenges such as imposter syndrome, academic burnout, and cultural dissonance, adequately funding affinity groups, and embedding Hispanic values into curricula and pedagogy.

Academic policies and practices should leverage familismo as a strength rather than a hindrance. Implementing flexible deadlines, family-oriented outreach, and community-building initiatives can better align institutional goals with students' cultural realities.

Conclusion

This special issue of the *Journal of Underrepresented & Minority Progress* emphasizes the importance of centering marginalized voices in academic discourse. Exploring the interplay between systemic barriers and cultural assets deepens our understanding of the educational experiences of Hispanic/Latina/o students and outlines a path toward more equitable and inclusive higher education practices.

We are honored to be the guest editors of this special issue. It is our sincere hope that this issue serves as encouragement for more research, advocacy and a thoughtful dialogue on the experiences of Hispanic/Latina/a students in the educational system of the United States.

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Peer-Reviewed Article

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Understanding Assimilation within Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Latino immigrants who often experience discrimination lack assimilation. The purpose of this exploration was to better understand the historical lack of assimilation and the relationship, in particular the access to higher education. In this study, assimilation was measured according to English mastery by Spanish speakers. The research question was focused on what extent the level of education relates to assimilation for Latinos in the US. A correlational design with multiple regression analysis was used in this study to analyze the Latino National Survey of 2006 secondary data (N =8634). Results indicated that education was significant. Further, current trends show an increased opportunity for education in the Latino group. There is also an increased need for higher education beyond 2030 in the US. The implications for social change include research-based information to develop programs for Latinos to adapt into the US population. Lastly, the author's positionality will be discussed.

Keywords: Assimilation, Discrimination, Education, Generational Standing, Income, Latinos, Regression

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

One problem for Hispanics in the US is they have difficulty assimilating into US culture, which also has prevented them from accessing key services. This includes facing discrimination and immigrant backlash in higher education (Alba & Maggio, 2022; Antman et al., 2023; Figlio & Özek, 2020). The purpose of this study was to investigate how education, generational standing, and socioeconomic status influence assimilation among Latinos. The researcher reviewed the extant literature and developed a concise synopsis to establish the relevance of the problem. Major sections of the literature review in this paper included a discussion of background on the topic and the theoretical framework. Other sections were education, generational standing, and socioeconomic indicator, but in particular the variable of education.

Reports and studies indicate that the ethnic change is evident in the US, with Hispanics as the country's largest ethnic-minority group (Mindes et al., 2022; Stavans & Ashkenazi, 2022; Van Hook & Glick, 2020). Based on 2020 census, Hispanic people are the second-largest ethnic group in the US (Statista Research Department, 2024). They further explain that some American states are the fastest-growing population. Hispanics account for 50% of the population growth and 15% of the total population in the US, which ranks about the same to the national average for the state of Maryland as an example, according to the American Community Survey (2020). In 2022, California had the highest Hispanic population in the US, with over 15.73 million people claiming Hispanic heritage (Statista Research Department, 2024). Texas, Florida, New York, and Arizona rounded out the top five states for Hispanic residents in that year (Statista Research Department, 2024).

Hispanics are one of the largest growing minority populations in the US. Again, according to Statista Research Department (2024), the Hispanic population is the second largest and fastest-growing minority ethnic group in the US compared to other ethnic groups. The Hispanic ethnic group consists of Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Central or South American and other Spanish cultures irrespective of their race, living in the US. Research indicates that the Hispanic ethnic group was the largest minority in the US by 2021 with a total population of 62.65 million people of Hispanic ethnicity living in the US. The Hispanic population has been steadily increasing by 21.6% in the last decade since 2009. By 2009, 49.33 million Hispanic people were living in the US and this population has steadily increased. The Hispanic population has been estimated at 111.22 million Hispanics by the year 2060, which is an important factor in the population of the US. The statistical data later shows

that the Hispanic population has been consistently increasing compared to other races.

Educational attainment has been a challenge among Hispanics in the US. Research indicates that despite making significant strides in workforce and education in the last decade, Hispanics are academically disadvantaged as they are one of the least educated ethnic groups living in the US (Lichter & Johnson, 2020). They further explain that the majority of the Hispanic students start learning with limited social and economic resources as well as ill-equipped schools leading to educational disparities. Compared to other ethnic groups, Hispanics experience limited proficiency in English, low educational attainment, and a lack of essential economic resources (Liou et al., 2023). Such barriers make it challenging for parents to engage their children in early learning activities that are important for their academic success (Boyce et al., 2020). These factors contribute to low educational attainment among Hispanic ethnic groups compared to other ethnic groups such as Whites, Blacks, and Asian Americans.

Compared to other races, educational growth has been the least among the Hispanic population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2023), the growth in high school completion rates for Hispanic origin groups from 2012 to 2022 increased. This consists of an increase in high school completion from 92.5% to 95.2% for the white non-Hispanic population, 85% to 90.1% for the African Americans and Black population, and from 88.9% to 92.3% for Asian Americans. However, the least growth reported by the Bureau was in high school completion rate was found within the Hispanic population which had the least growth in educational attainment from 65% to 75.2% for adults aged 25 years and older. The data above shows that the academic attainment and performance of Hispanic students once they are enrolled in schools is significantly low when compared with other ethnic groups such as Asians, Blacks and Whites. Other researchers such as (Assari et al., 2020) have demonstrated that such disparities in educational attainment could be caused by limited access to economic and social resources by the Hispanic population as well as increased levels of segregation against Hispanics as a disadvantaged community.

The Hispanic population has low academic attainment compared to other minority populations such as African Americans, and Asians. Despite a steady increase in population as earlier discussed, Hispanic ethnic groups continue to face educational attainment challenges which make them the least educated population in the US (Assari et al., 2020). Such alarming low educational attainment despite their high population should be a cause for concern in the US (Lichter & Johnson, 2020; Assari et al., 2020). The

disparity in educational achievement has been a consistent problem among the Hispanic population that should be addressed to meet the educational needs of its growing population in the US. Such a gap in education attainment between the Hispanic population and other ethnic groups prompts further research on the causes of low academic attainment in higher education.

Framework

There are two theories that explain plausible reasons why assimilation is difficult for Hispanic immigrants in the US. Walzer and Miller (1997) claimed states should have rights to self-determination, arguing that they should be able to control culture. However, some authors like Hidalgo (2014), have used an analogy to explain this phenomenon, stating clubs believe they have a right to exclude non-members from membership. Further, he suggests that excluding non-members from membership would lead to restricting immigration and increasing deportations. Others have argued that the self-determinism theory restricts immigration and are permissible for lawmakers to decide due to the sovereign democratic processes. Regardless of which side one might be on the assimilation argument, the lack of assimilation leads to difficulty in attaining higher education for Hispanics, and access to income based on generational standing as Burroughs (2018) stated. Lastly, self-determinism theory explained that the US enacted policies to protect against immigration. Hamilton (2019) contends that immigrant population growth, targeting ethnic groups like Latinos and Africans were enacted to prevent immigration within the US. Samson (2014) stated that [Latino] immigrants should try to blend in with host countries. This does not negate the harboring of their parent culture. This action alone may lessen immigrant backlash while assimilating. However, staying in the host country can be challenging. The reason that staying in the host country is challenging is when an ethnic group attempts to assimilate into mainstream culture, there is sometimes an environment of prejudice present. An immigrant may assimilate using another way using straight-line assimilation. Straight line assimilation means direct acclimation into the host society. Still, segmented assimilation involved the 19th- and 20th-century European immigrants' smooth transitions into a new US culture after the slaughter of an ethnic group like the American Indians. However, immigrants still may face severe immigrant backlash from the host society.

A second mode of assimilation generated upward mobility Is also linked to the co-ethnic community in power. However, there is resistance from the host country for assimilation (Diaz, 2020). For example, most British, Italians, German, English, and French people easily assimilated into the US

through upward mobility and shared power with the host country but gained access to higher education was a hard-to-come by benefit for minorities like Hispanics (Donato et al., 2022). The last categorization of segmented assimilation as producing downward or straight mobility that produces prejudice, discrimination, and makes people poor in the US. The theory of assimilation provides a plausible explanation of the lack of assimilation as a slow-rate phenomenon regarding access to higher education in the US for Latinos.

An explanation of assimilation origination will be discussed further throughout the literature review and assimilation along with higher education relationships will be evaluated for correlation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Problems Latinos face with Assimilation and Education Explained

The acculturation process, cultural values, and availability of resources influence education and assimilation among the Latino population in the US. The immigration status has resulted in a drift in access to quality education between Latino immigrants and Anglos in the US (Alba & Maggio, 2022). The acculturation process has a significant impact on the Latino population's experiences in the US. Some Latino immigrants choose to stick to their native cultural traditions while some often prefer to adopt the U.S. culture and customs (Diaz, 2020). Differences in acculturation levels impact the connection as Latino individuals navigate differences in cultural expectations and approaches to conflict resolution (Montgomery et al., 2021). Education plays a pivotal role in the recognition and addressing the acculturation and helps in developing resilience and good relations in the community.

Researchers argue that most Latino children experience educational challenges resulting from the pressure of crowding in educational settings (Boch et al., 2021). Maryland has recorded the highest number of Latino immigrant children compared to other states in the U.S. According to Stansbury and Schultz (2023), Maryland is ranked in the third position with 9% of the Hispanic population holding bachelor's degrees and second with 21% holding professional and graduate degrees. Findings from the study established that 4% of Latino immigrants in Maryland have professional and graduate degrees, and 12% have a bachelor's degrees and 84% have completed high school, while 2% do not complete high school (Martínez & Gonzalez, 2021).

With a significant increase in the Latino population has been witnessed over time according to the US Census Report (2016),,,, Salins

(2023) has researched and established that Latinos are highly educated and hold higher household incomes in Maryland, for example, compared to their Hispanic populations in other states in the US. Studies indicate that the enrollment population of Latino students in public schools in Maryland stands at 9% percent of the total student enrollments in the state (Donato et al., 2022). The same study established a significant increase of 106.3% of Latino children in the schools in Maryland. Research on Latino children's performance in school has, however, revealed that Latino students tend to perform poorly compared to their Whites and Asian counterparts in mathematics and reading subjects. Education significantly unleashes the potential to achieve job opportunities and increased household income among the population. Achievement of academic success such as college degrees is associated with diverse social, cultural, and economic benefits creating a conducive environment for the Latino population (Bekteshi & Kang, 2020). Lastly, some Latinos go on to attain a higher education at higher rates more so as time progresses.

In the Northeast US, the highest employment opportunities among Latinos have continued to be recorded in Maryland compared to the other states, for example. Latinos encounter a significant challenge of access to resources which limits their ability to access education in the U.S. (Amin, 2020). Access to Relationship Education programs has been inhibited by diverse factors including language barriers and socioeconomic challenges among Latinos (McCann et al., 2022). Efforts to enhance family access to culturally relevant materials and communal support can empower the Latino population to access better educational outcomes.

Education contributed to Latino immigrants' standings, which added to the rationale for my selection of these variables in this study. According to the Statista (2024), only a quarter of Latinos ages 25 to 29 (23%) had earned a bachelor's degree, which is far less than their White, Black, and Asian counterparts. The quality of education immigrant children received ranks high in the state of Maryland though when compared to Hispanics in other states (Donato et al., 2022). According to the most recent US Census (2020), the Latino population has experienced exponential growth. The Department of Legislative Services (2008) identified Latinos as better educated and possessing higher incomes in Maryland, for example, than their Hispanic counterparts in many other states. In 2006, there were an estimated 76,000 Latino students enrolled in public schools in Maryland, according to the same Department. This number accounts for 9% of the total enrollment of students. Over the past 8 years, the Latino group accounted for a 106.3% increase in student enrollment in Maryland. Also, the 2008 Maryland Report Card, an

annual report developed by the Maryland State of Education on the progress of student performance, found Latinos fell behind Whites and Asians, but they were ahead of Blacks, who are behind their peers. The report card highlighted continuing concerns of an increased dropout rate among the Latino group and a below-margin average of the graduation rate within the state like Maryland, for example.

Generational Standing and other Socioeconomic Factors

Generational standing has been a topic of in-depth discussion in the research, with several existing generations of immigrants available for the purposes of investigation. Generational standing refers to the measure of the Latino immigrant in the host country stay in years (Burroughs, 2018). Researchers such as Donato et al. (2022) have delineated between native-born and immigrant groups, explaining if the persons were born in the US, they are considered native born. First-generation immigrants come from another country and settled in the US, while second-generation immigrants are individuals who are born abroad or those with one parent born abroad (Stavans & Ashkenazi, 2022). Second-generation immigrants are likely to assimilate into an underclass and have downward mobility, consistent with the scope of this study. The downward mobility of the second-generation immigrant who is caught between the old, traditional way of life as taught by his or her parents, which is a weakness, and new potential educational opportunities offered by the US, which is a strength (Van Hook & Glick, 2020). This explanation supported the rationale of my selection of Latino immigrants. The second-generation immigrants involved themselves in chancy behavior compared to natives while third-generation immigrants were born in the US.

The assimilation process among Latino generations has been impacted by generational standing and socioeconomic factors in the US over time. Research has established that those individuals born in the US were considered native-born (Lovrich et al., 2021). First-generation immigrants who originated from other countries and opted to settle in the US are often impacted by challenges including cultural differences, language barriers, and difficulty in navigating the U.S. systems (Martínez & Gonzalez, 2021). For assimilation, there is the need to adapt to the American culture, learn English, and settle for job opportunities that match their academic qualifications.

Second-generation Latino immigrants born in the U.S. to immigrant parents encounter diverse assimilation challenges. Latino children born in the US by immigrant parents tend to predominantly speak English and often tend to exhibit higher educational achievement than their biological parents (Van

Hook & Glick, 2020). Despite the advantages, studies have indicated that they often face challenges including cultural heritage, discrimination, and stereotypes from other children, especially Whites (John, 2022). Second-generation immigrants assimilate into an underclass and tend to undergo downward mobility. This research has confirmed that second-generation immigrants undergo a challenging ordeal of balancing their parents' traditional lifestyle with the new opportunities available in the US. Preserving parent's cultural practices and cultural roots has been significant in embracing the possibilities of the new culture in the US (Antman et al., 2023).

Third-generation immigrants have been established to be predominantly born in the US only and their grandparents were first-generation immigrants from different cultures. Third-generation Latino immigrants have been established to speak the U.S. language fluently and enjoy American food (Hermansen et al., 2022). Similar research indicated that Latino's generational status was positively correlated with socioeconomic status like children's healthy diet (Fanfan & Stacciarini, 2020). The perception is that Latino immigrants with higher financial status have healthier eating habits and maintain a close connection to the Mexican diet styles. Change in generations over time has seen many Latinos become fully assimilated into American society while engaging in American cultural practices, speaking English, and engaging in the American Education system for absorption in the labor market with ease (Jang et al., 2022). Challenges including discrimination and socioeconomic inequalities have, however, continued to exist among the Latino populations in the US over time.

Socioeconomic status, including household income and level of education, plays a significant role in influencing the assimilation process among Latinos in the U.S. Higher-income families usually have adequate resources at their disposal for access to better healthcare services and quality education which are essential in the assimilation process among the Latinos in the U.S (Azzolini & Schnell, 2024). These resources provide opportunities for advancement and facilitate integration into different facets of life including the culture of the American State. According to Park et al. (2020), the body mass index for Latino children from first-generation and second-generation and from high household incomes is considered to be high. The study findings indicate that less research has been conducted on the assimilation process within immigrant groups despite the information. Mastering the English language was used to test the immigrants' willingness and desire to assimilate into the American culture according to research (Kosack & Ward, 2020). Also, educational levels are observed.

The U.S. census of 2011 indicates a 10% poverty rate and 4.7% unemployment rate in Maryland compared to the national grid (Villarreal & Tamborini, 2023). While Hispanics were identified to have lower income than Caucasian and Asian populations though their level of income was slightly higher than that of the African American populations, findings from previous research have indicated that each Latino household has been approximated to have a net worth of approximately $58,093 (Hermansen et al., 2022). The majority of the Latino family earnings were received through employment and fewer immigrants received assistance from the government contrary to the stereotype and prejudice of Latino populations draining public resources. Hispanics have been identified to work mostly in the service and construction industries as noted by Antman et al. (2023).

Latinos are limited in getting employed in professional and managerial job positions. Latino families prefer to allocate funds to family expenses over investing in education which reflects the importance that Latinos attach to family values (Martínez & Gonzalez, 2021). Research revealed that the level of parents' education and their level of income shape purchasing power and decisions within Latino immigrant families (Boch et al., 2021). Latino neighborhoods often significantly influence the assimilation process. Access to resources to well-established and funded job opportunities, healthcare facilities, and schools can enhance the assimilation process among the Latino community (Donato et al., 2022). Residing in communities and neighborhoods that provide adequate resources and opportunities contributes to the navigation of difficulties that can limit the assimilation process in the US.

The Hispanics have faced various challenges assimilating into the US, especially in their first generation of immigrants into the US. Research indicates that the Hispanic population in the US has found it challenging assimilating into the American culture due to language barriers that hinder their access to significant services such as health and education (Alba & Maggio, 2022). However, such language challenges are only experienced by the first generation of Hispanic immigrants who face language barriers in conveying their message in English making it difficult to access essential services such as education, employment opportunities and healthcare services Cano et al., (2021). However, the subsequent Hispanic generations born by parents, who have lived in the US, find it easy to assimilate into the US because of their proficiency in English. This gives them access to all services including employment opportunities, health and education (Antman et al., 2020). The understanding of the English language makes second-generation Hispanic populations easy to blend with American culture. Yet, they are likely

to lose their cultural heritage while living in the US the farther the generation from the original culture.

Unlike the second and subsequent Hispanic generations in the US, the first cohort of Hispanics immigrating into the US finds it difficult to integrate into American society. Again, this is caused by limited access to essential resources and services including education and employment opportunities (Antman et al., 2023). Some researchers such as Duncan et al. (2020) established that the second and subsequent Hispanic generations in the US experienced increased mobility in terms of access to employment opportunities with decent wages and skill levels, thus leading to a high level of socioeconomic status for those with an instinct for economic growth. On the other hand, subsequent Hispanic generations faced systemic bias and racial discrimination have been a hindrance to their social, and economic progress, despite experiencing growth in socioeconomic status (Peri & Rutledge, 2022). Thus, the Hispanic population faced assimilation challenges in their first immigration into the US but improved and had seamless integration during the subsequent generations.

Empirical research indicates that increased disparities in healthcare access among the Hispanic population could be a significant challenge in the integration and assimilation of Hispanic communities into the US (Diaz, 2020). The systemic bias and racial segregation reported of Hispanics have been rampant in the US against people of Hispanic origin regardless of whether they are first-generation immigrants or have lived in the US for decades. Such racial segregation and systemic bias hinder the assimilation progress of the Hispanic population in the US (Ju et al., 2022; Diaz, 2020). Research articles discussed thus far provide great insight that regardless of the Hispanic generation, systemic bias and racial segregation pose challenges to the assimilation process including limited access to healthcare and other essential services.

In the case of the Hispanic community, different generations may face diverse barriers to assimilation as the first-generation experience language barriers and access to low-wage and low-skilled labor opportunities (Figlio & Özek, 2020). Such challenges make it difficult to afford the cost of healthcare and other services for first-generation Hispanic immigrants in the US (Figlio & Özek, 2020; Boch et al., 2021). Conversely, the second generation of the Hispanic population in the US consisting of Hispanics born in the US, experienced increased access to job opportunities and upward mobility of socioeconomic status (Alba & Maggio, 2022; Antman et al., 2023; Figlio & Özek, 2020; Boch et al., 2021). The findings across the articles offer

important insight into how different generations of Hispanic populations experience assimilation challenges into the US.

RESEARCH METHOD

For the Burroughs (2018) study, five variables of education, generational standing and income, assimilation and language proficiency were surveyed. However, I particularly focused on the educational aspect of the study involving level of education and English mastery and its association with assimilation as the dependent variable. I measured the variable of assimilation by quantifying how well and many Hispanics have learned the English language, with the dependent variable found in the LNS (2006). The LNS (2006) tested various variables like education, generational standing, income and tested whether assimilation in the Hispanic immigrant group was plausible. Assimilation measured the rate at which a Latino adapted to the US ways, such as learning English. The assimilation measuring rate was a common notion believed by the Hispanic immigrants in the US.

Participants

The data was taken from the LNS (2006) survey which was secondary data polled throughout the US in Spanish and English by phone taken from the University of Michigan. In a sample of N = 8,634 individuals, there were 4,738 (54.9%) women and 3,896 (45.19%) men. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 97 years (M = 40.52, SD = 15.47). To accomplish this, the original study put them into a multiple regression math equation which were assimilation, generational standing, education and income. However, for the purpose of this study, I only focused on identifying how the independent variable of education within the Latino immigrant group in the US related to the Hispanic immigrant group dependent variable of assimilation. The other independent variables of generational standing, and income were mentioned and inserted in the original research but were not the primary focus of this research paper. Data was analyzed using SPSS software. The countries of origin are listed in Table 1.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which education influence Latino's group assimilation in the American society. Basically, to what extent do education influence Latino's group assimilation in the American society?

Table 1
Country of Origin

Ancestry	*N*	%
Venezuela	5,704	66.10
Puerto Rico	822	9.50
Cuba	420	4.90
El Salvador	407	4.70
Dominican Republic	335	3.90
Guatemala	149	1.70
Colombia	139	1.60
Spain	105	1.20
Ecuador	103	1.20
Honduras	87	1.00
Peru	65	0.80
Nicaragua	51	0.60
Bolivia	36	0.40
(DO NOT READ)		
US	35	0.40
Costa Rica	32	0.40
Don't Know	30	0.30
Argentina	28	0.30
México	27	0.30
Refused	18	0.20
Chile	17	0.20
Panamá	14	0.20
Uruguay	7	0.10
Paraguay	3	0.00
Total	8,634	100.00

METHODS AND RESULTS

Methodology

Quantitative correlational research methodology was used in this study. Quantitative methods are used in instances when researchers seek to collect and analyze quantifiable data from participants (Mohajan, 2020). In this study, a quantitative research methodology was appropriate because the aim was to collect and analyze data on the historical lack of assimilation of Latino immigrants in the US, particularly in relation to English mastery and its impact on access to higher education. To establish the predictive

relationship between study variables, a correlational research design was used. Secondary data set was from the Latino National Survey (LNS) was used.

The following main research question and hypotheses were tested using both multiple and logistic regression: Research Question: To what extent do each of the three predictors (generational standing, education, and income) individually relate to assimilation in the Latino Immigrant group in the US?

H0b: First-generation, less educated, and poor Latinos will not assimilate into the US society.

Hab: First-generation, less educated, and poor Latinos have a harder time assimilating into the US society.

For the set of hypotheses, the null hypothesis (H0b) was also rejected because the findings of this study yielded a significant positive relationship between educational level and fluency in English. Fluency in English indicated a sensitivity to the duration of the individual's stay in the US (Table 2). The highest level of education is listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Highest Level of Education Completed

	N	100%
High school graduate	2,110	24.4
Eighth grade/below	1,714	19.9
Some college	1,646	19.1
Some high school	1,256	14.5
4-year college degree	818	9.5
Graduate degree	582	6.7
GED	286	3.3
None	222	2.6
Total	8,634	100.0

Note: The most common highest level of education completed for the participants was those who had graduated from high school (24.4%). This was followed by eighth grade or below (19.9%), some college (19.1%), four-year college degree (9.5%), a graduate of professional degree (6.7%), GED (3.3%), and no formal education (2.6%).

This can be seen in the fact that when grandparents were born outside the US, there was no significant correlation in English speaking skills. However, positive significant correlations were yielded when parents were born in the US (immigrant born) and when the individual was born in the US (native born). The second hypotheses suggested that there would be a

correlation between the level of education of Latinos, together with income level, and their likeliness to assimilate into the US society as measured by their reported proficiency in English (Table 3). While controlling for age and nationality, increased levels of education resulted in increased levels of mastery of English; therefore, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis for the hypotheses. Table 3 presents the fluency of English for Hispanic immigrants in America.

Table 3
Fluency of English

	N	100%
Just a little	2,735	27.51
Not at all	1,041	12.06
Pretty well	860	9.96
Very well	694	8.04
Missing	3,672	42.53
Total	8,634	100.0

Note: The most common response was that the participant knew "just a little English" (27.51%). This was followed by the responses of "not at all" (12.06%), "pretty well" (9.96%), and "very well" (8.04%), while 42.53% of the participants gave no responses (Table 4). Results Due do the ordered categorical responses of the dependent variable "English proficiency" and also to allow for control of covariates, it was decided to perform both hierarchical multiple and hierarchical logistic regression in order to compare the results. The responses for the dependent variable ranged from 1 to 4 with 1 = "not at all", 2 = "Just a little: 3 = "Pretty well"; and 4 = "Very well." A dichotomous variable was created for logistic regression in which a response less than 2 indicated no mastery of English (coded as 0) and a value greater than or equal to 2 indicated mastery of English (coded as 1). Table 4 indicates the odds Ratios for the Logistic Regression Model.

After controlling for age and nationality, the full model was found to be statistically significant, $\chi^2(23) = 1279.59$, $p < .001$. The odds of people born in the US relating to assimilation in the Latino group are 0.089 times the odds of those not born in the US. These results are depicted in Table 4. Education was found to be statistically significant in that people with no education relating to assimilation in the Latino group were 0.066 times the odds of those with education resulted in greater likelihood of being fluent in English. Specifically, those with a no formal education were 15.15 times as likely to not master English, compared to someone with a graduate degree. Those with only an 8th education were 7.58 times as likely not to master English; with

some HS education, 3.71 times as likely not to master English; and with only a high school education, 1.13 times as likely to not master English. Other levels were not significant. Table 5 is the Coefficient Table for Multiple Regression Model

Table 4

Odd Ratios (ExpB) for Logistic Regression Model

	B	*S.E.*	*Sig.*	*Odds Ratio*	95% C.I. for Odds	
AGE	.003	.003	.362	1.003	.996	1.010
Mexican (ref)			.000			
Hispanic	-.078	.235	.740	.925	.583	1.467
Central American	-.192	.193	.318	.825	.565	1.204
Cuban	-.367	.266	.168	.693	.411	1.167
D Dominican	-.070	.262	.790	.932	.558	1.559
Puerto Rican	1.279	.253	.000	3.593	2.187	5.903
Salvadoran	-.230	.256	.368	.794	.481	1.311
Parents Born in US (1)	-.104	.112	.352	.901	.724	1.122
Grandparents Born Outside I US (1)	.131	.132	.322	1.140	.880	1.478
Born in US ((1)	-2.421	.193	.000	.089	.061	.130
Graduate (ref)			.000			
NO education	-2.723	.454	.000	.066	.027	.160
8th grade	-2.024	.217	.000	.132	.086	.202
Some H.S.	1.312	.218	.000	.269	.176	.413
GED	-.126	.268	.639	.882	.521	1.491
H.S. grad	-.845	.204	.000	.430	.288	.641
Some college	.092	.211	.663	1.096	.725	1.658
4-Year college	-.005	.239	.983	.995	.623	1.589
> $65K (ref) >			.000			
< $15K <	-2.259	.199	.000	.104	.071	.154
$15k - $24,999	-1.750	.189	.000	.174	.120	.252
$25k - $34,999	-1.150	.190	.000	.317	.218	.460
$35k - $44,999	-.681	.201	.001	.506	.341	.751
$45k - $54,999	-.287	.227	.206	.751	.481	1.171
$55k - $64,999	-.034	.274	.901	.967	.566	1.652
Constant	3.699	.384	.000	40.396		

Being born in the US was statistically significant ($p<.001$). The estimated difference between those, the estimated difference between those born in the US and those not born in the US is .932 in English proficiency with those born in the US scoring that much higher. Grandparents born outside US was not statistically significant ($p = .119$, $b = -.051$).

Table 5

Coefficient Table for Multiple Regression Model

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	*t*	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.374	.039		61.603	.000
	Respondent Age	-.006	.001	-.098	-6.417	.000
	Central American	.090	.062	.021	1.459	.145
	Cuban	.356	.061	.088	5.844	.000
	Dominican	.215	.060	.051	3.570	.000
	Hispanic	.441	.052	.122	8.448	.000
	Puerto Rican	.808	.056	.213	14.366	.000
	Salvadoran	.010	.055	.003	.182	.856
2	(Constant)	2.282	.063		36.231	.000
	Respondent Age	-.002	.001	-.041	-2.940	.003
	Central American	.131	.054	.030	2.417	.016
	Cuban	.195	.054	.048	3.614	.000
	Dominican	.167	.053	.040	3.155	.002
	Hispanic	.192	.047	.053	4.083	.000
	Puerto Rican	.629	.050	.166	12.672	.000
	Salvadoran	.069	.048	.018	1.440	.150
	Were parents born in the US?	.100	.029	.042	3.395	.001
	Were grandparents born outside the US?	-.051	.033	-.019	-1.560	.119
	Were you born in the US?	.932	.046	.256	20.339	.000
	Four-year college degree	.371	.062	.094	5.971	.000
	8th grade or less	-.386	.046	-.191	-8.384	.000
	GED	.182	.071	.038	2.549	.011
	HS Graduate	-.012	.047	-.005	-.249	.804
	Some College	.344	.051	.126	6.687	.000
	Some HS	-.126	.050	-.051	-2.530	.011
	< $15K	-.231	.034	-.101	-6.849	.000
	15K - 24999	-.074	.033	-.034	-2.263	.024
	25K - 34999	.089	.037	.035	2.422	.015
	35K - 44999	.287	.045	.087	6.419	.000
	45k - 54999	.405	.057	.093	7.133	.000
	55k - 64999	.564	.075	.096	7.530	.000

Education was statistically significant. An increase in education generally resulted in an increase in English language fluency. Specifically, people with only an 8th grade education resulted in a decrease in English

language fluency on average by .386 ($p < .001$) compared with people with a graduate degree, some high school education resulted in a decrease of .126 ($p = .011$). This corresponded to an increase in English language fluency with a GED ($b = .182$, $p = .001$); Those with a four - year degree had a .371 increase ($p = .001$); and this with some college had an increase in English language fluency of .344 ($p < .001$) (Table 5).

Income was found to be statistically significant with increasing income resulting in a general increase in English language fluency. Specifically, those who had an income of less than $15K resulted in a decrease in English language fluency by .231 ($p < .001$). $15K - $24,999 resulted in a decrease by .074 ($p = .024$). This trend continued, when income increased, the resultant change in English fluency improved. Table 5 depicts this information.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Limitations of the Study

The researcher used survey data from the LSN (2006). Notably the age of the data, albeit representative of a large percentage of Hispanics, is a limitation of this study. More recent data would constitute a more accurate picture of the assimilation of Hispanics as it currently stands. However, the results of the study confirmed previous and recent studies in the literature indicating that the trends are similar despite the age of the data (Alba & Maggio, 2022; Antman et al., 2023; Figlio & Özek, 2020). Another limitation is that LNS (2006) data collection was done telephonically via a computer assisted telephone interviewing process. There is a possibility that telephone interviews do not yield as much data as face-to-face interviews and it was not possible to verify the participant's ethnic identity. It is therefore possible that some of the respondents might not have been Hispanic. These factors are a threat to the external validity of the study. Furthermore, although given the opportunity to choose the language in which the interview was conducted, telephone interviews are tiring, and no guarantees can be provided that the participant understood the questions 100%. Moreover, without visual clues the interviewers could not tell whether the participants were open and honest. Hopefully, by giving assurances of protecting the participants' anonymity and confidentiality, the answers were honest and objective. A threat to the internal validity of the study is the possibility of someone not completing due to severe illness or death as this would result in skewing the results. To combat this possibility, a large sample was chosen to compensate for dropouts. Another threat to internal validity comes from the statistical analysis. Regression has the possibility of producing different outliers since extreme sources tend to change with time and move more towards the mean (Creswell, 2015). This

possibility was mitigated by not selecting extreme sources. Further, the results of this study can be generalized due to the sample size, and location across the US. The results of this study can, however, not be generalized to other immigrant population groups since the data were restricted to Hispanics only.

INTERPERTATION OF FINDINGS

Against the backdrop of immigration-segmented assimilation, which was one of the theoretical frameworks guiding this study, I explored the relationships between assimilation, measured by fluency in English, level of education, generational standing, and socioeconomic indicators like annual income but mainly focused on education for the purpose of this study. Different views are incorporated in the immigration segmented assimilation theory, and some researchers have focused on spatial integration (Antman et al., 2023), whereas others took a broader view including several demographic aspects such as religion, age, and gender amongst others (Alba & Maggio, 2022). The theory originated from the perception that an ethnic group would oust another by means of assimilation and … [not allow access to higher education] (Walzer & Miller, 1997).

The researcher presumed in this study that the level of assimilation of a Latino immigrant is related to their proficiency and fluency in English, which was in accordance with Allard et al. (2014) research. Although his research studied Latino immigrant education in English language comprehension in elementary schools and high schools, it has further implications to higher educational goals within the immigrant group to higher education also. The researcher furthermore assumed that the participants' self-reported knowledge and fluency in English on the LNS (2006) was an accurate estimation of their English skills. The researcher made the choice to focus on educational level as a variable in exploring the assimilation of Latinos. Accordingly, the researcher used the data depicting educational level, generational standing, and socioeconomic indicators like annual income in correlation with the data on English skills as provided by the participants. The findings of this study indicated that third generation Latinos were more assimilated into US culture as measured by their fluency in English and also their educational level and annual income. According to as supported by Boch et al. (2021), third-generation immigrant are native born as opposed to the second generation, which is referred to as immigrant born.

The findings of this study confirmed that there was a correlation between a person's immigrant status and economic and educational standing (Alba & Maggio, 2022; Antman et al., 2023; Figlio & Özek, 2020). In this study, the results showed that the further the Latino was removed generationally, the higher their educational level, economic position, and

fluency in English. Pertaining to the educational level of the Latinos, there was a higher level of education compared to the LNS (2006) data where there were lower educational values. Accordingly, 12% of immigrants have bachelor's degrees and 3% have advanced degrees, whereas the LNS figures indicated that 9.5% immigrants held bachelor's degrees and 6.7% held advanced or professional degrees. An even more positive trend was reported that 84% of Latinos completed high school compared to the 24.4% of the LNS (2006) figures. The LNS (2006) data indicated that 14.5% Latinos obtained some high school, meaning that they had dropped out of high school, whereas almost ten years later only 2% did not complete high school in another study. These numbers prove that Latino immigrants in the US have improved educationally over the decade. Assuming that these figures mostly reflect the educational attainment of the younger generation of Latinos who were native born (third generation), the findings of this study compliments with the suggestions of several studies that immigration status is linked with better educational achievements (Alba & Maggio, 2022). The overall increase in educational attainment of Latinos can be interpreted as indicative of their assimilation into US culture. An increase in educational level was correlated with an increase in English skills, and therefore, assimilation and the ability to attain a higher education.

Socioeconomic factors as measured by annual income had not been studied in the field in relation to the assimilation of Latinos prior to the initial observation conducted by Burroughs (2018) and this study. Antman et al. (2023) analyzed the diet and body mass index of Latinos in relation to their annual income and found that second generation Latinos of a lower income followed a more traditional diet and were better nourished compared to their counterparts with a higher socioeconomic status which led to better educational outcomes. This could reflect more assimilation within the US dietary culture, which for the purposes of this study was a possible indication of more assimilation linked with a higher annual income.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are a few recommendations that emerged from conducting another study. The researcher used a quantitative correlational study to explore this study. There are, however, some limitations related to quantitative correlational study given that the focus is to offer a predictive relationship between study variables quantitatively. Consequently, the focus on collecting and analyzing quantitative data in this study limited the ability to offer in-depth descriptions or explanations for the reported data from participants. Therefore, it is recommended that future researchers use alternative methods such as the qualitative approach to offer in-depth

descriptions of the link between study variables. By adopting qualitative methods, the researchers are able to use interviews to solicit in-depth descriptions and data from participants, which is key to the understanding of the study phenomenon.

One of the limitations of this type of study was the sample size used. A small sample size negatively affects the generalizability of the findings. In this study, a homogenous sample of Hispanic immigrants in Maryland. Generalizing such findings to other immigrants' groups across the US could be challenging. Therefore, future studies could be undertaken with a similar national sample but focusing on contemporary data with a heterogeneous sample of participants from other ethnic communities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Implications for positive social change may emerge from the findings of this study. In terms of theoretical frameworks, it is evident that scholars and politicians may harbor the fear of one ethnic group ousting another. With the dramatic rise in the Hispanic population (US Census Bureau, 2020), this sentiment might increase in political circles leading to more actions against undocumented immigrants among others in higher education. The findings of this study may contribute to a better understanding and appreciation for the plight of Latino immigrants, leading to more empathetic treatment of undocumented immigrants and their children.

Moreover, educationalists might use the findings to renew efforts in teaching Latino scholars better English skills to increase their academic performance and employability which could ultimately positively impact on their assimilation and ease into American culture. This study highlights the interrelationship between English proficiency, education, employment and assimilation of immigrants such as Latinos. The importance of increased efforts to assist all immigrants to learn English not only to assist everyday communication but more importantly to facilitate assimilation of Latinos. While these findings cannot be generalized to other immigrants improved and more sympathetic treatment of immigrants could result from understanding the assimilation process and difficulties these groups experience. There is still evidence of discrimination against different ethnic groups in terms of access to goods and services. The findings of this study may serve to create more understanding amongst service delivery groups and result in improved access to services for Latinos. The researcher drew upon the potential societal contributions of this study, including the advancement of knowledge in the discipline of public policy and administration. Lawmakers may recognize why the Latino immigrant group has problems assimilating into the US culture and how they might make this transition easier through implementing

federal and state laws and programs. Perhaps assimilation in the US culture allows gains for acceptance for the Hispanic hegemony. Also, it would produce access to more goods and services and decrease discrimination in society.

Beyond 2030

Many variables need to be noted that indicate the changing forecast of the future for Hispanic immigrants in higher education particularity in southwest US. For example, the (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2020) statistics show that most mothers start to have their children after the age of 30 in the US. This is because young adults wait until their careers are established or after they are finished college. The CDC (2020) reported that fertility rates for Latinos are growing expediently. This puts an increased demand on two-year and four-year colleges for resources and enrollment in the future.

CONCLUSION

This research was aimed at exploring the assimilation of Latino immigrants to better understand why assimilation remains problematic for Latino immigrants in higher education. In addressing the lack of assimilation Latinos will be better equipped to avoid backlash and exclusionary practices. The unit of measuring assimilation was fluency in English which proved to be pivotal in the level of assimilation. The results showed a positive correlation between English skills, higher education and assimilation but not employment or annual income and assimilation. In addition, the more assimilated the generation, the better English proficiency. Also, it was found in my study that the higher education was, the higher the annual income was made. The centrality of English skills in assimilation leads to the realization that more effort should go into teaching immigrant families English. Findings of the research may lead to certain social implications, including better understanding Latino immigrant groups, passing equitable laws, and treating undocumented workers with more empathy and understanding.

Author's Positionality

The author's background was shaped by her study of a Master's degree in International Studies at Morgan State University with a Latin American emphasis, her study abroad at the Universidad of Guadalajara in Mexico while seeking her Master's degree, and her dissertation research at Walden University in Public Policy and Administration. Further, there is no conflicts of interest presented for this study. The author is of Black-American descent without any Latino ancestry but is very compassionate of the Latino immigrant minority group though she is not a direct immigrant herself. She

feels that attaining a higher education for Latino immigrants is key to upward mobility in the US, and her research supports this thesis.

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Latinx College Students in a PWI: Perceptions of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA), Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction, and Access to Mentorship

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ABSTRACT

Latinx students' college enrollment has dramatically increased. However, Latinx students in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) still face challenges given the racial disparities in inclusion, diversity, equity, access (IDEA), and psychological wellbeing (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). In addition, first-generation college students (students whose parents did not receive a four-year US bachelor's degree) also encounter challenges given the lack of institutional knowledge compared to their non-first-generation peers (students whose parents have at least one US bachelor's degree from a four-year higher education institution). The current study elicited responses from 404 students. Results showed that Latinx and first-generation college students reported lower perceptions of IDEA and a lower sense of basic psychological needs satisfaction than their White and non-first-generation peers. Practical and policy implications are provided for higher education administrators, faculty, and staff when working with Latinx and first-generation students. Results indicated the urgent need to respond to basic psychological needs among Latinx students and first-generation college students through policy-making and prioritizing student events to support Latinx students' academic and social activities.

Keywords: basic psychological needs, first-generation, inclusion, diversity, equity, access, Latinx

INTRODUCTION

Individuals who identify as Latinx are the second largest ethnic-racial group in the United States and comprise about 18% of the population (Rodriguez et al., 2021), with predictions suggesting that this number will grow to 29% by 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). In line with this population growth, U.S. college campuses have witnessed Latinx college student enrollment increase from half a million in 1980 to 3.8 million in 2018 (Mora, 2022). By 2020, Latinx students accounted for 20% of all students in postsecondary institutions, which makes them the second highest population after their White peers (54%), and ahead of Black (13%) and Asian (8%) students (Mora, 2022).

Nonetheless, research indicates that Latinx students frequently encounter social and educational challenges, resulting in reduced student involvement (Green & Wright, 2017) and elevated dropout rates (Burke, 2019). Over a third of Latinx students enrolled at higher education institutions are first-generation (Santiago et al., 2019; Raab, 2022), lacking equal opportunities for information, support, networks, and exposure as their counterparts who are not first-generation (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020). Research demonstrates that these factors make them less likely to receive their bachelor's degree than their peers in other ethnic-racial groups (Mora, 2022; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006).

To illustrate, after commencing their university education, 35% of Latinx students discontinue their studies without obtaining a degree within six years, while this figure stands at 27% for White students (Loveland, 2018). The previous underscores the intricacies surrounding degree completion, particularly as institutional factors can impede the progress of Latinx students (Bensimon et al., 2019). Given the evolving demographic landscape in the United States, higher education institutions have formulated new approaches to improve enrollment, retention, and graduation that effectively cater to this demographic shift.

In recent decades, universities have expanded their commitments to campus inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) initiatives, significantly contributing to the increased number of underrepresented students attending higher education institutions. Today, scholars continue to participate in a national conversation regarding how academic institutions can facilitate real and productive change for Latinx students attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs). Although existing research has documented that these university initiatives have improved conditions for Latinx students' attending college (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015), there is still considerable work that needs to be accomplished in terms of Latinx students' retention and graduation rates, especially regarding their experiences and perceptions of the initiatives that universities implement around IDEA, psychological wellbeing, and access to mentorship on campus. In the current study, we explore Latinx students' college experiences compared to those

of their White peers at a PWI. We also consider the intersectionality with college generation statuses of Latinx and White students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-Determination Theory and Basic Psychological Needs: Connections to Latinx College Students

Self-determination theorists argued that autonomy, relatedness, and competence are three basic psychological needs universally crucial for individuals' flourishing (Deci & Ryan, 2004). Autonomy refers to a sense of volition where students feel their agency is respected, their voices are heard, and their feelings are attended to. Additionally, autonomy does not mean independence. Instead, faculty support of students' autonomy can also include providing guidance and support to foster a sense of volition. Relatedness means a sense of connection, being part of a community where students feel cared for by others and want to care for others as well. Finally, competence is a sense of confidence. It does not mean students can competently do everything, but that they can feel encouraged to face and tackle challenges confidently. When these basic psychological needs are supported and satisfied, individuals can flourish and be motivated to pursue academic success and enjoy social competence and wellbeing (Su-Russell & Russell, 2021; Wei et al., 2005).

There is a wealth of literature providing robust evidence of the benefits of supporting college students' basic psychological needs satisfaction, such as academic motivation (Faye & Sharpe, 2008), mental health (Wei et al., 2005), and student athletes' recovery (Bejar et al., 2019). Existing research primarily focuses on racially and socioeconomically privileged college students instead of considering racial minorities from PWIs or first-generation students. Given the importance of basic psychological needs among college students, the most vulnerable and underserved students deserve research attention instead of focusing on students from WEIRD (western, educated, industrial societies, rich, and democratic) backgrounds (Henrich et al., 2010). Identifying the disparities in basic psychological needs between Latinx students, especially those who are also first-generation students compared to their peers, will help researchers and administrators implement macro-level policies and take micro-level actions to support these underserved college students further. Ultimately, these efforts could potentially enhance retention and graduation rates.

Latinx Students' Perceptions of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access

Despite the increasing amount of attention from some of the predominately White institutions to address inclusion, diversity, equity, and access, Latinx students might still be far from satisfactory regarding these IDEA efforts. Though Latinx students have positive perceptions of faculty support

(Arellanes & Hendricks, 2022; Arellanes et al., 2024), their experiences can still be highly racialized due to racial microaggressions and racialized aggressions from some of their instructors and peers (Cuella & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2023).

Depending on their academic programs, Latinx students' experiences and perceptions of IDEA efforts might be negative, given their marginalized status in a given academic field. For instance, Latina students are marginalized within the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) majors. According to a qualitative study, Latina students in STEM encountered skepticism and experienced self-doubt, which led them to feel a sense of isolation (Rodriguez & Blaney, 2021).

Latinx students at predominantly White institutions believe that inclusion should be further addressed (Campbell-Whatley et al., 2021) due to the lack of interracial interactions and ignorance, which deteriorate the existing racial divide (Cuella & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2023). These exploratory studies encouraged us to address the different levels of perceptions of IDEA efforts between Latinx students and their White peers.

Latinx Students from PWIs and Their Access to Mentorship

Despite significant college enrollment improvement (Mora, 2022), Latinx students' retention and graduation rates remain concerning (Capers, 2019). Only 23% of Latinx students (25-29 years old) obtained a bachelor's degree or more in 2021, which was lower than that of Black (26%), White (45%), and Asian peers (72%). Latinx students are also more likely to be first-generation students (44%) compared to their peers of any other racial background, Black (34%), Asian (29%), and White (22%) (Santiago et al., 2019). Compared to non-first-generation students, first-generation students may face more challenges because they might not receive adequate guidance from their parents, who did not have college experiences to help them navigate the higher education system. Given the barriers that Latinx first generation students face, such as academic unpreparedness, a sense of displacement due to ethnic-racial identity, and a lack of institutional knowledge and social capital (Rodriguez et al., 2021; Clayton et al., 2019; Sánchez-Connally, 2018; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015), they are more likely to have to negotiate their space and sense of belonging due to their status. This might explain the Latinx educational crisis where Latinx graduation rates remain lower than their peers of other racial backgrounds despite the continuously increasing number of college enrollment (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Strayhorn (2012) emphasized the importance of a sense of belonging by connecting with their peers and faculty/staff. In essence, students believe they are integral to a specific community (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020) and are valued by their peers within that group (Luedke, 2019). Scholars have observed a positive correlation between Latinx students' sense of belonging and their ability to persist

academically (Luciano-Wong & Crowe, 2019; Romo et al., 2020). Consequently, despite persistent challenges, students access the emotional and educational assistance required to recognize their potential for obtaining degrees (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015).

Relatedly, research illustrates that students with supportive professors and mentors form trusting relationships (Holloway-Friesen, 2021) and have higher degrees of belonging, self-esteem, and socialization that ultimately help them succeed academically (Michel & Durdella, 2018; Green & Wright, 2017). Two decades ago, Harrell and Forney (2003) argued the importance of mentorship in preparing first-generation and Latinx students as they transitioned from high school to college. College students, especially those at a disadvantage given their social statuses, found mentorship beneficial to their academic success. For example, non-first-generation and first-generation students perceived it essential to have positive and frequent conversations with faculty members (Hutchison, 2017). Guidance and mentorship might spontaneously spring and potentially benefit students academically and psychologically, especially those from underrepresented populations . Evidence suggests that emotional and educational support may help Latinx students persevere despite the continuous challenges (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). The source of support from faculty mentors may become vital, especially for Latinx first-generation students to develop a sense of community on campus.

Garriott and Nisle (2019) found that institutional support included assistance from a teacher or tutor, access to a mentor for advice or encouragement, help from the academic advisor, and support from peers to make them feel included and motivated. According to Romo and colleagues (2020), student support services increase optimism for degree attainment and impact a student's sense of belonging, leading to higher GPAs, finding additional support, and increasing persistence (Tovar, 2015). These types of support significantly helped reduce stress for first-generation students. Being a first-generation student can be disadvantageous, but other social positions, such as being a racial minority and low-income, might add additional challenges as first-generation students navigate the higher education system. Kezar and colleagues (2022) labeled these students as "at-promise" students as they discussed the benefits of having a comprehensive support system. It takes a whole university campus and all the active members of the institution to form a culture of ecological validation that emphasizes structures, processes, and norms. Mentorship from faculty, advisors, and peers was among many factors that can help these at-promise students. Diversity and inclusion were also at heart when designing training programs and building relationships between at-promise students, staff, and faculty (Kezar et al., 2022). Given this evidence, the current study investigates access to faculty mentors at a PWI. Unequal access to faculty

mentors could display a systemic barrier that would limit at-promise students from achieving their academic goals.

Faculty Efforts on Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA): Diverse Experiences of IDEA among Students on Campus

Faculty efforts can substantially impact students' diversity-oriented values (Hurtado et al., 1998). For example, faculty-student discussions on political and religious diversity and students taking courses on historical, political, and social events can help students appreciate diversity and step out of their comfort zone (Parker & Trolian, 2020). However, whether these perceptions and experiences would differ given students' statuses being racially minoritized or first-generation students is unclear.

Recent efforts across university campuses to address IDEA-related issues have substantially increased nationally and at the research site where students were recruited in the current study. The training opportunities for faculty and staff have increased. Intentional conversations have also taken place to support minority students, especially Latinx and first-generation students, through student-registered organizations and campus-wide events and activities to raise awareness of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access. Though we should applaud these efforts to address critical issues, we should also consider (1) whether students' perceptions of faculty efforts to address IDEA differ due to their diverse social and racial backgrounds and (2) whether these efforts benefit students psychologically.

Despite the increasing efforts on college campuses to address IDEA initiatives (Harrison-Bernard et al., 2020), students, especially marginalized ones, might still feel a lack of belonging, empowerment, or success due to their disadvantageous statuses. Given that faculty has a lot of direct and indirect interactions with students, faculty's efforts to address IDEA-related issues may directly impact students' lives (Hurtado et al., 1998; Parker & Trolian, 2020). A recent effort from Parker and Trolian (2020) showed that faculty's equitable treatment was associated with racial minority students' positive perceptions of the diverse campus climate. However, this equitable treatment construct was a one-item question to tap into the frequency (never too often) of fair treatment. To the best efforts of the authors, there remains no gold standard way of measuring IDEA. Thus, the current study attempts to fill this need by creating a more in-depth measure of IDEA to be able to effectively conceptualize students' perceptions of faculty efforts related to IDEA.

The Current Study

Given the ever-changing demographics among college students and the considerably low graduation rates among Latinx students who are also likely to be first-generation, it is urgent to explore and identify associates and contributors to

enhance college retention and increase graduation rates across U.S. university campuses. In addition, faculty efforts to address IDEA issues on campuses deserve critical attention, given its benefits for college students (Parker & Tralian, 2020). It is worth investigating if students who are racial minorities and/or first-generation would perceive these efforts differently compared to their peers with more advantageous backgrounds.

Despite faculty's efforts to address IDEA issues, our understanding is still limited in terms of the perceptions of Latinx students on the issues of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access. Previous research that investigated Latinx's perceptions and experiences is exploratory and lacks comparisons between Latinx's perceptions of IDEA issues and their White peers (Cuella & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2023; Rodriguez & Blaney, 2021).

Furthermore, a wealth of theoretical and empirical efforts demonstrated the benefits of basic psychological needs-autonomy, relatedness, and competence, including but not limited to academic motivation (Faye & Sharpe, 2008). These critical factors may lead to academic success. It is important to be able to provide empirical evidence regarding the disparities in perceived basic psychological needs among underserved college students who may benefit from higher education in addressing these issues, given its close relevance to academic success and graduation rates that many Latinx and first-generation students are still facing.

To address these gaps, we sought to explore the following research questions:

RQ1: Are there differences in IDEA perceptions, access to faculty mentoring, and basic psychological needs satisfaction among Latinx students at a PWI compared to White students?

RQ2: Are there differences in IDEA perceptions, access to faculty mentoring, and basic psychological needs satisfaction among first-generation college students as compared to non-first-generation college students?

RQ3: Do first-generation Latinx have different perceptions of faculty IDEA efforts, different access to faculty mentoring, and different levels of basic psychological needs satisfaction as compared to Latinx students who are not first-generation college students, first-generation White college students, and non-first-generation White college students?

RESEARCH METHOD

Procedure and Participants

The University Institutional Review Board approved the current study. Data from the current study were drawn from a mixed-methods project that included students' IDEA-related experiences at the beginning and the end of the semester. The current study only focused on students' experiences at the beginning

of each semester. Students for this study completed a survey. First, some students who completed the survey utilized an existing system from the Department of Psychology to involve students in research projects. We compensated these students with course credit. Second, we specifically recruited from classes that discussed topics related to diversity and/or the Latinx community. Students from these courses received compensation via gift cards. We acknowledge that our sample might not represent the chosen campus since students self-selected to participate in the current study and were recruited through the courses the authors taught.

To address the equity issues that Latinx students and first-generation students still face and the lack of attention to these populations regarding their psychological wellbeing, the current study aims to compare the experiences of Latinx and White peers in consideration of their college generational statuses; we selected only students who self-identified as Latinx (*n*= 105, 26%) or White (*n*= 299, 74%) in the resulting sample. Most participants were women (*n*= 281, 69.6%), and many identified as first-generation students (*n* = 122; 30.2%). Detailed demographics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics (N =404)

	N (%)	Mean (SD)
Race		
Hispanic	*n* = 105 (26%)	
Non-Hispanic White	*n* = 299 (74%)	
Generation Status		
First generation college students	*n* = 122 (30.2%)	
Non-First generation	*n* = 280 (69.3%)	
Gender		
Female	*n* = 281 (69.6%)	
Male	*n* = 107 (26.5%)	
Non-binary/third gender	*n* = 9 (2.2%)	
Transgender	*n* = 2 (.5%)	
Cisgender	*n* = 1 (.2%)	
Genderqueer	*n* = 1 (.2%)	
Prefer to self-describe	*n* = 1 (.8%)	
Prefer not to say	*n* = 1 (.2%)	
Age		19.99 (2.60)

Measures

Given that limited resources provided established measures to evaluate students' perceptions of IDEA, we used examples (Buckle, n.d.; Fatoric, 2021;

Garvey, 2019) to create questions that reflect students' perceptions of faculty's efforts to address IDEA in the university. Factor loadings of the IDEA measures are presented in Table 2.

Inclusion

Inclusion was calculated by the mean scores of eight inclusion questions that asked how much the student agreed or disagreed with the statements on a 5-point scale, from 1= *strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*. For example, one of the items was, "I feel a sense of belonging through faculty." Reliability analysis was performed, and we found that the inclusion questions have excellent internal consistency (α=.90).

Diversity

Diversity was calculated by the mean scores of the four diversity questions that asked how much the student agreed or disagreed with the statements on a 5-point scale, from 1= *strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*. One of the items was "Faculty invests time and energy into building diversity." Reliability analysis was performed, and we found that the diversity questions have good internal consistency (α=.82).

Equity

Equity was also calculated by the mean scores of the three equity questions that asked how much the student agreed or disagreed with the statements on a 5-point scale, from 1= *strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*. One of the items was "Faculty has been effective in increasing equity." Reliability analysis was performed, and we found that the equity questions have good internal consistency (α=.71).

Access

Also, our measure of access was calculated by calculating the mean scores of the ten access questions, which asked how much the student agreed or disagreed with the statements on a 5-point scale, from 1= *strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*. For example, one of the items was, "Students are given opportunities to learn about people from different races, ethnicities, and/or cultures through faculty." Reliability analysis was performed, and we found that the access questions have excellent internal consistency (α= .92).

Faculty Mentor

The faculty mentor variable was a single item asking students, "How many faculty members are you close enough with to call a mentor?" About 48.1% of

students reported that they did not have any mentors. Among the students who reported having at least one mentor, 18% reported having one mentor, 18.8% reported having two mentors, 9.8% reported having three mentors, 3% reported having four mentors, and 2.3% reported having five mentors. Given the dispersion of this variable, a dichotomous variable was created as access to mentorship, 0 = *having no mentors*, and 1 = *having at least one mentor*.

Table 2

Factor Loadings for Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access Subscales (N =404)

Items	I	D	E	A
1. I feel my unique identity, attributes, traits, characteristics, skills, experience, and background are understood by faculty.	.81			
2. I feel my unique identity, attributes, traits, characteristics, skills, experience, and background are valued by faculty	.82			
3. I feel comfortable being myself around faculty	.73			
4. I feel a sense of belonging through faculty	.84			
5. I feel respected by faculty	.76			
6. I feel connected to faculty	.79			
7. I can identify people similar to myself in leadership positions or positions of power in faculty	.71			
8. Faculty fosters an inclusive environment characterized by cultural understanding, engagement, ethical behavior, and a commitment to social justice	.76			
1. I feel valued by faculty		.70		
2. Faculty invests time and energy into building diversity		.85		
3. Faculty supports having diverse faculty and staff		.80		
4. Faculty supports the mentorship of diverse student populations		.87		
1. Students from all backgrounds and identities have an equitable opportunity to become successful in/through faculty			.84	
2. There are resources available that support my ability to achieve academic success within/with faculty			.78	
3. Faculty has been effective in increasing equity.			.77	
1. Students are given opportunities to learn about people from different races, ethnicities, and/or cultures through faculty				.75

2.	Faculty often think about what students of different races, ethnicities, and/or cultures experience	.76
3.	Faculty can have honest conversations about different races, ethnicities, and/or cultures	.80
4.	Students are encouraged to think more deeply about different races, ethnicities, and/or cultures with faculty	.79
5.	Students are able to have important conversations about different races, ethnicities, and/or cultures, even if conversations may be uncomfortable with faculty	.81
6.	I feel comfortable to discuss issues related to different races, ethnicities, and/or cultures with faculty	.72
7.	Faculty provides a safe and supportive environment for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color	.70
8.	I can gain resources to learn more about issues related to different races, ethnicities, or cultures through faculty	.79
9.	Faculty provides an atmosphere to speak out against injustices, inequalities, and inequities that affect marginalized communities	.82
10.	Faculty provides opportunities to participate productively in a global society	.74

Note: I=Inclusion, D=Diversity, E=Equity, A=Access

Students' Social Positions

We created four groups based on students' race and generational statuses to reflect students' social positions: first-generation White (n = 13; 9.8%), first-generation Latinx (n = 35; 26.3%), non-first-generation White (n = 52; 39.1%), and non-first-generation Latinx (n = 32; 24.1%).

Basic Psychological Needs

College students' basic psychological needs were assessed with a basic psychological need satisfaction scale (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagné, 2003). Participants were asked to respond to 20 questions on a 7-point scale from 1 (*not at all true*) and 7 (*very true*) to reflect students' perceived autonomy, relatedness, and competence. The example item for the autonomy subscale is "I feel like I am free to decide for myself how to live my life;" the example item for the relatedness subscale is "I get along with people I come into contact with;" and the example for the competence subscale is "I have been able to learn interesting new skills recently." The Cronbach's α values are .70 (5 items of autonomy), .80 (7 items for relatedness), and .67 (5 items for competence).

Positionality Statements

The first author identifies as a Chinese cisgender female. Her research focuses on the influence of quality caregiving on young children's socioemotional wellbeing and the impact of contextual factors (race, culture, socioeconomic status, etc.) on caregiving. She has developed research projects with college students about their reflections on the experiences of racial socialization with parents and siblings.

The second author is a White cisgender male. He is fluent in Spanish, has traveled extensively throughout Latin America for service and leisure, and has lived and worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the region. His primary political science research focuses on Latin America, principally related to resource-extractive community-led protests.

The third author identifies as a White cisgender male. One of his primary foci in research is the educational attainment of Latino families and the importance of father involvement and support.

All contributing authors have extensive experience teaching courses that highlight diversity and inclusion with college students. The second and third authors teach courses that focus on Latinx culture and community.

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

First, we conducted a series of independent sample t-tests to address our first research question: Are there differences in IDEA perceptions, access to faculty mentoring, and basic psychological needs satisfaction among Latinx students at a PWI compared to White students? Access to mentorship did not vary between Latinx and White students, $t(397)=-.18$, $p = .858$. Perceived faculty efforts to address inclusion, $t(397)=4.44$, $p < .001$, diversity, $t(397)=3.92$, $p <.001$, equity, $t(397)=3.13$, $p <.001$, and access, $t(397)=3.30$, $p <.001$, were significantly higher among White students than Latinx students. White students scored higher than their Latinx peers on perceived autonomy, $t(393)=2.58$, $p =.010$, and relatedness, $t(393)=2.24$, $p =.013$, and marginally significantly higher on perceived competence, $t(393)=1.96$, $p =.051$.

Second, we conducted a series of independent sample t-tests to address our second research question: Are there differences in IDEA perceptions, access to faculty mentoring, and basic psychological needs satisfaction among first-generation college students compared to non-first-generation college students? We found that access to mentorship did not vary between first and non-first-generation college students, $t(395)=-.66$, $p = .513$. Perceived faculty efforts to address inclusion, $t(395)=3.48$, $p<.001$, diversity, $t(395)=2.78$, $p =.006$, equity, $t(395)=3.94$, $p <.001$, and access, $t(395)=2.80$, $p =.003$, were significantly higher among non-first generation college students than first-generation college students.

No significant differences were found between first-generation college students and non-first-generation college students in terms of perceived autonomy, $t(391)=1.34$, $p = .182$, relatedness, $t(391)=1.72$, $p = .087$, or competence, $t(391)=.55$, $p = .582$.

Table 3

One-Way ANOVA Comparisons Post-hoc Results of Faculty IDEA and Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction between First-Gen Hispanic Students versus Their Peers (N = 404)

Constructs		Comparisons	Statistical Significance Levels
IDEA efforts by faculty	Inclusion	First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen White	$p < .001$
		First-Gen Hispanic < First-Gen White	$p < .001$
		First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen Hispanic	$p = .024$
	Diversity	First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen White	$p < .001$
		First-Gen Hispanic < First-Gen White	$p = .013$
	Equity	First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen White	$p < .001$
		First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen Hispanic	$p = .036$
	Access	First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen White	$p < .001$
		First-Gen Hispanic < First-Gen White	$p = .013$
Basic Psychological Needs	Autonomy	First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen White	$p = .029$
		First-Gen Hispanic < First-Gen White	$p = .050$
	Relatedness	First-Gen Hispanic < non-First-Gen White	$p = .026$
	Competence	All comparisons	ns
Access to Mentorship		All comparisons	ns

Third, we conducted a series of one-way ANOVA tests to address our third research question: Are there differences in IDEA perceptions, access to faculty mentoring, and basic psychological needs satisfaction among first-generation college students compared to non-first-generation college students? Findings revealed no mean-level differences in terms of access to mentorship [F (3, 392) = .71, p =.547. However, there were mean-level differences for all IDEA measures: perceived inclusion [F (3, 393) = 10.08, p <.001], perceived diversity [F (3, 393) = 6.40, p < .001], perceived equity [F (3, 393) = 7.03, p < .001], and perceived access [F (3, 393) = 5.95, p <.001]. Mean-level differences were also found in terms of perceived autonomy [F (3, 389) = 3.00, p =.031] and relatedness [F (3, 389) = 2.76, p =.042], but not competence [F (3, 389) = 1.51, p =.212]. Tukey post hoc analyses showed that first-generation Latinx students' perception of faculty efforts to address inclusion, diversity, equity, access, perceived autonomy, and relatedness were significantly lower than their peers. Detailed mean-level comparisons and probability levels are presented in Table 3.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Latinx students generally perceived their faculty's efforts to address inclusion, diversity, equity, and access, and their sense of autonomy and relatedness lower than their White peers. First-generation students perceived their faculty's efforts to address inclusion, diversity, equity, and access lower than their non-first-generation peers. Latinx first-generation college students scored lower than their peers on inclusion, diversity, equity, access, autonomy, and relatedness. Overall, no group (by race or college generational status) differences were found regarding their access to faculty mentorship.

Latinx versus White Students: Perceptions of Faculty IDEA Efforts, Basic Psychological Needs, and Access to Mentorship

First, Latinx students' perceptions of their faculty to address IDEA are lower than that of their White peers. Likely, Latinx students may not feel their unique identity, attributes, traits, or other characteristics and background were well understood or valued by faculty given the PWI context that they might see themselves reflected on campus or identify those in power to be similar to themselves. Consequently, they may not feel connected to, comfortable around, or respected by faculty. Despite the university's efforts to provide IDEA training to faculty members, students may not be aware of the faculty's efforts if they feel intimidated by the authority figures and are therefore inclined to distance themselves from faculty. Other than IDEA training on campus, it is worth considering cultivating a culturally enriched campus by hosting cultural festivities and designing interior and exterior environments with cultural symbols to help

cultural learning. Furthermore, there might be a mismatch between the efforts of faculty to address IDEA versus the perceptions of Latinx students. Despite the increasing awareness and efforts by faculty and campus-wide initiatives, Latinx students might not have been the beneficiaries of these changes due to their daily experiences. Depending on their academic program, their membership in Latinx student organizations, and their interracial relationships (Cuella & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2023), Latinx students might still experience a frequent sense of isolation (Rodriguez & Blaney, 2021), and racial microaggressions from instructors and peers (Cuella & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2023). Therefore, Latinx students in predominantly White institutions expressed that there is a strong need for further work to address inclusion and diversity (Campbell-Whatley et al., 2021), including the respect for diversity within the Latinx student group (Gonzelez et al., 2018).

Suggested evidence from early childhood education (Rasheed et al., 2019) showed that race/ethnic matching between teachers and school-aged children was associated with children's more active engagement in learning and motivation. The mismatch was not associated with poorchild engagement when the classroom was highly diverse. In contrast, when the classroom is less diverse, the mismatch is associated with insufficient engagement or motivation (Rasheed et al., 2019). However, a researcher from a recent critical review (Redding, 2019) argued that evidence on the effectiveness of race/ethnicity matching for Latinx students is far from conclusive. Regardless of ethnic matching, students can still form positive relationships with supportive mentors, which can help nurture socioemotional wellbeing and academic success (Green & Wright, 2017; Holloway-Friesen, 2021; Michel & Durdella, 2018). A mutually respectful and trusting relationship between students and faculty mentors may outweigh the benefits of ethnic matching (Arellanes & Hendricks, 2022; Bordes & Arredondo, 2005)

Second, compared to their White peers, Latinx students reported lower basic needs, specifically autonomy and competence. Possible explanations are that Latinx students may not perceive a sense of agency given that their environment might not nourish their identity and allow them to nurture a sense of unique self, in addition to a lack of guidance and support, which are essential aspects of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2004). The distance from faculty might also undermine their sense of connectedness and hamper a sense of community on college campuses, resulting in lower levels of sense of relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2004). Given the importance of basic needs satisfaction (Faye & Sharpe, 2008; Su-Russell & Russell, 2021; Wei et al., 2005), it is crucial to continuously explore the differential experiences of Latinx versus White college students and how these disparities may have implications on their wellbeing and academic successes.

Third, even though Latinx and White students did not differ in terms of their access to mentorship, possibly due to the operationalization of the construct,

the influence of mentor-mentee relationship quality and mentoring activities on Latinx and White college students should still be considered in future investigations.

First VS Non-First-Generation Students: Perceptions of Faculty IDEA Efforts, Basic Psychological Needs and Access to Mentorship

First-generation students scored their perceptions of faculty's IDEA efforts lower than their non-first-generation peers. Non-first-generation students likely have more institutional knowledge and social capital, making them feel more comfortable contacting their faculty, making connections, and discussing their needs. Such opportunities may help non-first-generation students feel comfortable around faculty, develop a sense of belonging through faculty, and feel they are respected, valued, and understood by faculty. Frequent interactions can present more opportunities for non-first-generation students to learn about faculty's academic work and possibly efforts to address IDEA. Similar to previous research (Pike & Kuh, 2005), first-generation students perceived college environments as less favorable than their peers and reported lower integration and gains. Likely, first-generation students were less actively engaged socially and academically than their peers when interacting with faculty (Arum & Roksa, 2011). As Wang (2014) documented, when students feel empowered by faculty and when faculty minimize power distance with students, first-generation students may perceive this as a significant turning point to help further connections with faculty and integration into college.

Surprisingly, first-generation and non-first-generation students did not differ in their perceived basic psychological needs satisfaction or access to mentorship. Previous research explored first-generation students' challenges and successful experiences (Demetriou et al., 2017) some identified the effectiveness of intervention programs for first-generation students (Schwartz et al., 2017).

Future research may investigate the changes in perceived psychological needs satisfaction among first-generation students before and after the intervention programs. Faculty mentorship is potentially crucial to first-generation students' belonging and academic success. It is likely that the operationalization of access to mentorship in the current study did not capture the quality relationships from the faculty mentoring experiences. Future research should continue investigating faculty mentorship with a focus on relationship quality, different aspects of mentoring, and the intersectionality of race and college generational statuses.

Latinx First-Generation College Students

As revealed in the current study, Latinx first-generation students perceived their faculty's IDEA efforts and autonomy and relatedness much lower than their

peers, putting them in a disadvantageous position. Like Kezar and colleagues (2022), students with multiple disadvantageous social identifiers, or "at-promise" students, desire a comprehensive support system that considers multiple levels of ecological systems in which Latinx first-generation students can be influenced. Latinx students likely faced barriers relating to peers or faculty/staff on campus. Given that most peers and faculty/staff are White, Latinx first-generation students might not perceive that their voices are heard or respected since these thoughts might differ from the "mainstream." Among all participants from the chosen PWI, Latinx first-generation students might not have the opportunity to know what faculty/staff have been working on to address IDEA-related initiatives. It is also likely that Latinx first-generation students' perception of the processes and products of the IDEA efforts did not profoundly address IDEA issues that are relevant to them, especially regarding race and college generation status.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the importance of exploring Latinx first-generation students' campus experiences, we acknowledge several caveats in the current study. First, the current study only focused on Latinx and White college students and their perception of faculty IDEA, basic needs satisfaction, and access to mentorship. Other racial groups are also important to include in future investigations. Second, the construct access to mentorship was operationalized based on the number of faculty members that students believe are close enough to call a mentor. Students likely may not understand "mentor" and have different assessments on "close enough." The numeric data that capture the number of faculty mentors may not reflect the quality of mentor-mentee relationships or different aspects of mentorship that students receive. Future research may consider expanding the assessment of access to mentorship by evaluating different aspects of mentorship and levels of mentoring activities students receive. Qualitative investigations may also give additional insight regarding faculty mentorship and the navigation to gain access to faculty mentorship.

CONCLUSION

The current study investigated how race and generational status influence college students' perceptions of faculty IDEA efforts, perceived basic needs satisfaction, and access to mentorship in a PWI in the Midwest. Although the findings were disheartening that Latinx first-generation students perceived their college environment as less favorable and their college experiences as less satisfying than their relatively privileged peers, the current research calls for urgent action to face these disparities, given the importance of IDEA and basic needs satisfaction. Relationship building between faculty and students, cultural learning

for faculty and staff, and culturally enriched interior and exterior environments on campus are likely to encourage Latinx first-generation students to be engaged in classrooms and on campus. A campus climate that is fundamentally respectful to racial minority individuals and socially and economically disadvantaged groups will help shape a positive and nurturing environment for faculty and students.

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Exploring the Pandemic's Impacts on Latinx Students' Learning

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ABSTRACT

Through inductive thematic analysis of focus group data conducted during the Spring 2020, Fall 2020, and Spring 2021 semesters within courses focused on the Latinx community, this study illustrates the challenging impacts of COVID-19 and online learning on Latinx students at a predominately White institution during the pandemic. It underscores their concerns regarding access to essential educational resources, especially online learning tools, mental health support, and building connections with peers and the campus community. These findings highlight the importance of understanding the Latinx student experience to inform educational policies and pedagogical practices, particularly in the context of post-pandemic online and remote learning, aiming to address their unique challenges effectively.

Keywords: Latinx college students, COVID-19, online and remote learning, mental health

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on Latinx students' experiences at a predominately white institution (PWI) during the online and remote learning semesters of the COVID-19 pandemic. To be inclusive and remain gender-neutral, we utilize Latinx because our students and research participants identified as Latina, Latino, and Latinx. Individuals who identify as Latinx are the second largest ethnic-racial group in the U.S. and comprise about 18% of the population (Rodriguez, 2021b), with predictions suggesting that this number will grow to 29% by 2060 (Colby & Ortman, 2015). Additionally, Loveland (2018) indicates that Latinx students will comprise one-fifth of all college students in the U.S. by 2025.

However, studies also show that Latinx students often face social and educational barriers at college that lead to lower student engagement (Green & Wright, 2017). This makes them less likely to receive their bachelor's degree than their peers in other ethnic-racial groups (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). For instance, 35% of Latinx students withdraw from college six years after starting their university studies without earning a degree, compared to 27% of White students (Loveland, 2018). As such, degree attainment is more complex, especially when institutional agents make it harder for Latinx students to succeed (Bensimon et al., 2019).

With the changing demographics in the U.S., higher education institutions must have recruitment, enrollment, retention, and graduation strategies that address this population shift and the challenges Latinx students face. In this paper, we are interested in giving Latinx students a voice to express the additional barriers they faced during the pandemic semesters of online and remote learning. This qualitative project includes forty-seven participants in eight focus groups conducted in five of our online courses during the Spring 2020, Fall 2020, and Spring 2021 semesters. Based on an inductive thematic analysis, our focus group data confirm the preliminary research on the effects the pandemic and online and remote learning had on Latinx students' educational and learning outcomes. Latinx students faced increased challenges contributing to and exacerbating their existing obstacles in their academic pursuits. Specifically, Latinx students expressed serious concerns over available educational resources, mental health challenges, and increased disadvantages during the pandemic semesters, negatively affecting their learning and academic success.

Universities cannot expect students to become experts in what resources are available at the college to help them succeed. According to Romo and colleagues (2020), student support services increase optimism for degree attainment and impact a student's sense of belonging, leading to higher

GPAs, finding additional support, and increasing persistence (Tovar, 2015). However, we also cannot expect higher education institutions to fully comprehend the barriers students face without asking students themselves. As such, evidence from this study can be utilized to inform educational policy and pedagogical considerations within higher education as we move out of the pandemic. Understanding the Latinx student experience during the remote learning period of the pandemic can help identify their unique challenges and assist faculty, staff, and administrators at colleges and universities to offer the support these students need to achieve.

BACKGROUND

In March 2020, the U.S. experienced the onset of lockdown measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As cases surged across the country, federal, state, and local governments implemented various restrictions and guidelines to curb the transmission of the virus and protect public health. These measures included stay-at-home orders, closure of non-essential businesses, limitations on gatherings, and the promotion of social distancing and mask-wearing (Mervosh et al., 2020; Bosman et al., 2020). The initial lockdowns were influenced by recommendations from health experts and organizations like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (Moreland et al., 2020; CDC, 2023) and the World Health Organization (WHO) (WHO, 2023), aiming to slow the spread of the virus and alleviate the strain on healthcare systems. The restrictions had far-reaching effects on the economy, education, travel, and daily life, leading to significant disruptions and adjustments for millions of Americans (Pew Research Center, 2021).

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Spring 2020, higher education institutions in the U.S. implemented various measures to ensure the safety of students, faculty, and staff while maintaining educational continuity (Green, 2020). As the virus spread rapidly, many universities and colleges transitioned from in-person instruction to remote learning (Hess, 2020; Hubler & Hartocollis, 2020; Levenson et al., 2020). This involved developing and deploying online learning platforms and tools and adapting curriculum and assessments for virtual delivery (Gallagher & Palmer, 2020; Gillis & Krull, 2020; Lemay et al., 2021). The earliest phase of this shift shows that most faculty relied on email, synchronous video technologies, and institutional Learning Management Systems to engage students online (Johnson et al., 2021, p: 31). For example, 80% of faculty members from 672 U.S. institutions reported using synchronous teaching methods with various videoconferencing tools, whereas 65% reported using asynchronous mediums (Johnson et al., 2020). As a result, 84% of students reported having some or

all classes moved to an online format (Cameron et al., 2021). The cumulative number of undergraduate students enrolled in at least one distanced education course increased drastically from 6 million in the pre-pandemic Fall of 2019 to 11.8 million in 2020 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022).

The Fall 2020 semester in higher education was characterized by a mix of in-person, hybrid, and remote learning formats as institutions grappled with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic (The Economist, 2020). Many colleges and universities implemented numerous safety measures, such as reduced class sizes, physical distancing protocols, mandatory mask-wearing, and enhanced cleaning procedures for on-campus instruction (Leidner et al., 2021; Fox et al., 2021). These adjustments aimed to balance providing a safe learning environment and ensuring educational stability (Hartocollis, 2020). However, many courses were delivered remotely or through hybrid models that combined online and in-person components. Given the variety of teaching modalities, many faculty reported using completely new teaching methods and changing student assessments, such as modifying exam formats or reducing the number of assignments. One study reported that 17% of faculty changed readings, 48% reduced the amount of work, and 32% lowered expectations about the quality of student work (Johnson et al., 2021). This indicates a general disruption to the learning environment, in addition to the challenges students had already faced, like access to technology, staying engaged, and social connections in the absence of traditional campus experiences.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact higher education during the Spring 2021 semester, as the emergence of highly transmissible new variants compelled many institutions to maintain a mix of in-person, hybrid, and remote learning modalities (Lee, 2021). While some colleges and universities gradually increased the number of in-person classes and reopened certain facilities, others opted to continue with predominantly online instruction due to public health concerns (Korn & Abbot, 2020). Safety measures such as physical distancing, mask-wearing, and enhanced sanitation practices remained in place for on-campus activities. Many institutions also focused on expanding their technological infrastructure, providing support services for remote learning, and addressing the digital divide among students (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers have documented several critical factors that have affected Latinx student success while at college. For example, Latinx students often face barriers, such as unawareness of the college process, feeling

unprepared academically, experiencing displacement because of their ethnic-racial identity, and lacking access to social networks and educational resources (Rodriguez et al., 2021b; Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Clayton et al., 2019; Sánchez-Connally, 2018; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). Moreover, these students are more likely to come from low-income backgrounds, to be first-generation students, have lower high school GPAs, and have less access to rigorous coursework, making it more difficult to develop strong study skills and tools for balancing academic, family, and work obligations (Lincoln, 2023; Vega, 2016). Even with all the challenges Latinx students faced on campus before COVID, research also demonstrates that these students still performed better in a face-to-face classroom environment compared to an online course (Figlio et al., 2013), boding poorly for them during the online and remote learning period of the pandemic.

The challenges Latinx college students faced before the pandemic were further exacerbated during the global health crisis. COVID and the shift to online courses and remote learning options introduced new obstacles and increased disparities. A digital divide existed before the pandemic, particularly among students of color and lower socioeconomic status (Gonzales et al., 2020; Reisdorf et al., 2020). However, as online learning became the default during the pandemic, the abrupt adoption of various digital tools in higher educational institutions further highlighted socioeconomic and educational inequalities in the U.S. (Fortuna et al., 2020).

Synchronous instruction with videoconferencing tools became difficult as students had unequal access to the internet, technological devices, and dedicated and separate workspaces (Flaherty, 2020). For instance, 54% of Latinx college students expressed concerns about paying for internet services. In contrast, 36% of Black and 21% of White users had similar worries (Vogels et al., 2020). They also faced more difficulties "attending online classes mostly due to childcare responsibilities, lack of internet, being sick, or stressed" (Rodríguez-Planas, 2020, p. 17). Moreover, Gallaga (2020) notes that 65% of Latinx students during the pandemic had trouble meeting their basic food and housing needs, as they faced significantly higher financial uncertainties (Rodriguez et al., 2021a; Molock & Parchem, 2020; Trammell et al., 2021; Reyes-Portillo, 2022), likely leading to increased stress and anxiety making it difficult to focus on school (Rodríguez-Planas, 2021).

Scholars have also approached the effects of the online and remote learning period forced upon students from a mental health perspective. For instance, the rapid shift to online learning platforms increased students' mental health distress (Hu et al., 2022), decreased their coping abilities (Clabaugh et al., 2021), and reduced their overall learning quality (Hu et al.,

2022). These findings are consistent with other research reporting a decline in the emotional well-being of college students (Reyes-Portillo et al., 2022; Son et al., 2020). Lee and colleagues (2021) note that many students reported having amplified levels of anxiety and depression. In particular, female, nonwhite, and first-generation college students experienced a lack of motivation due to increased pressures and distractions from the transition (Gillis & Krull, 2020). As a result, these adverse outcomes led students to delay graduation and enrollment (Aucejo et al., 2020; Hamann et al., 2021). In fact, Hispanic-serving institutions experienced a significant decline in student enrollment (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). For example, Bulman and Fairlie (2022) reported that the enrollment rate of Latinx students in the California community college system declined by 18%, which is significant given that 72% of Latinx high school students enroll in California's community colleges (Colmenares, 2022).

Furthermore, Hill and Artiga (2022) discuss that people of color, including Latinx individuals, faced higher rates of COVID-19 infection and death compared to White individuals when age differences across racial and ethnic groups are considered. While these disparities fluctuated during the pandemic, people of color were disproportionately affected by surges caused by new variants. The elevated infection rates among people of color likely resulted from increased exposure risks related to their employment (such as having jobs that cannot be done remotely), living situations, transportation, residing in larger households, and relying on public transportation. These groups have consistently experienced higher age-adjusted death rates during resurgence periods, reflecting disparities across all age groups and an older White population. The differences in COVID-19 infection and death rates among racial and ethnic minority groups can amplify college students' challenges, affecting their (mental) health, academic progress, and overall well-being.

In summary, before the pandemic, Latinx students had already grappled with systemic barriers and educational disparities, such as limited financial and educational resources and underrepresentation in higher education. However, the additional challenges associated with the pandemic and the shift to online and remote education (e.g., isolation, mental and physical health problems, unreliable internet connectivity, lack of suitable study environments, and limited technological proficiency) likely intensified these issues, potentially hindering Latinx students' abilities to achieve their educational goals. As we navigate the complexities as we move out of the pandemic, educational institutions must acknowledge and address these inequalities and compounded challenges, ensuring that Latinx students have

equitable opportunities and receive the necessary support while pursuing their degrees.

RESEARCH METHOD

The University's Institutional Review Board (IRB 2019-554) approved this study. The data from this study were obtained from a larger ongoing mixed-methods project that assesses students' experiences related to IDEA principles at the start and conclusion of the semester within the authors' courses (Arellanes & Hendricks, 2022; Arellanes, Hendricks, Su-Russell, 2024). We base these principles on our university's IDEA values that affirm and encourage "community and a respect for differences . . . [that foster] an inclusive environment characterized by cultural understanding and engagement, ethical behavior, and a commitment to social justice" (Illinois State University, 2024b, "Diversity and Inclusion" section). For this study, we rely on eight focus groups conducted in five of our courses from Spring 2020 to Spring 2021 at a large state university in a peri-urban, corporate-focused county in the U.S. Midwest.

Background of the University and Courses

As of the Fall 2023 semester, the predominately White public four-year university had 20,989 students enrolled, including 2,539 graduate students. About 28.6% of the entire student body comes from a traditionally underrepresented group. This rate has been on the rise across the U.S. in recent years. For example, data from Common App shows a 32% surge in applicants from underrepresented minority backgrounds from 2019 to 2020 (Doherty & Pandey, 2022). Underrepresented students at our university identified with the following ethnic-racial groups: Hispanic (12.1%), Black or African American (10.1%), two or more selections excluding Hispanic (3.8%), Asian (2.6%), and American Indian/Alaskan Native (0.1%) (Illinois State University, 2024a).

Two of the study's authors are actively involved in teaching courses that aim to support the Latinx community in a broad sense. The authors integrated the university's IDEA principles into these classes, emphasizing the importance of fostering a sense of community and respecting differences. These values promote an inclusive atmosphere characterized by cultural understanding, ethical conduct, and a commitment to social justice (Illinois State University, 2024b, "Diversity and Inclusion" section). We incorporated these principles into our course materials, activities, assignments, and mentoring to provide students with increased opportunities and connections, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging and representation. The study utilized the following courses: Latino Psychology, Psychology Senior

Seminar, Latin American Politics, and Central American Politics. Participants in this study took these courses.

Latino Psychology is a 3-credit hour course for third and fourth-year students, and Psychology Senior Seminar is a 3-credit hour capstone course for fourth-year students. The primary goals of these two courses are to introduce students to research focusing on culture, ethnicity, gender, etc. Specifically, students examine current research on the psychological functioning of Latinx individuals in the U.S. In doing so, they become familiar with how psychologists (and other social scientists) have investigated the behavior of the Latinx population (e.g., cultural identities, belief systems, language, mental health, etc.) and the contexts of their behavior (e.g., gender, families, communities, religion, school, media, etc.).

Latin American Politics is a 3-credit hour class for second to fourth-year students that familiarizes them with Latin America's politics, economics, cultures, and societies. The course focuses on political and economic development, emphasizing the recent democratization wave and the implementation of market policies across the region. Students explore themes (e.g., democratization, political-economic models, political movements, immigration, repressive regimes, etc.) relevant to the region by focusing on case studies of one or two countries. They explore academic literature, current events, and documentaries to facilitate meaningful discussions. Students relate the theories they learn to real-life examples throughout Latin America.

Central American Politics is a 3-credit hour class for third to fourth-year students that focuses on the five countries of Central America—Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, as well as examines Panama and Belize. Students examine the broader historical trends and questions surrounding U.S. involvement and intervention in the region and how this has, directly and indirectly, affected Central American countries and their peoples. In particular, students explore Central America's profound economic, political, and social changes through themes such as revolutions, civil wars, peacebuilding and transitional justice, political inclusion and participation, crime, violence, and migration.

Focus Group Procedures and Participants

Within each class, students could join two types of focus groups—one involved students who self-identified as Latinx, and the other engaged students who did not. In total, we conducted eight focus groups in five of our courses. We distinguished separate groups because all classes, whether political science or psychology-related, focused on supporting the Latinx community. Latinx students may have unique experiences within these classes, especially during the pandemic's remote and online learning aspects,

than those who do not identify as Latinx. We were interested in learning about these different experiences for this paper. As such, by providing Latinx students with separate focus groups, we gathered evidence highlighting their specific and unique challenges.

Trained graduate student research facilitators conducted the focus groups. Because of the challenges of COVID-19, focus groups occurred via Zoom. We ensured that the facilitators ethnically matched the participants to aid in the comfort and openness of all focus groups. Ethnic matching means students and facilitators self-identify similarly as Latinx or non-Latinx in that focus group (Easton-Brooks, 2019). The facilitators informed student participants that the study aimed to learn about the best teaching practices within the course and their experiences concerning available resources that aid their success and sense of belonging within the campus community. Before moving forward with obtaining students' informed consent, the facilitators also ensured students that 1) participation was voluntary, 2) the study would not affect their course grade, 3) their instructor would not attend the focus group sessions, 4) all data would be deidentified, and 5) any data analysis would occur after the semester ended and grades were finalized. Following each focus group, facilitators and the research staff debriefed and shared interview reflections. We used keynotes from these debriefings to inform our data analysis.

Upon completing the focus group, participants completed a short demographic survey using an anonymous Qualtrics link. We analyzed these data in SPSS. Twenty-four Latinx and twenty-three non-Latinx students completed the study for a total of forty-seven undergraduate participants. Additional participant details can be found in Table 1 below.

Data Analysis

Using thematic analysis, we analyzed the focus group transcriptions in MAXQDA20 after each semester ended. Thematic analysis is a widely used and robust systematic qualitative data analysis method focused on identifying patterns across data (Nowell et al., 2017). Following Boyatzis's (1998) inductive qualitative analysis procedure, we analyzed each focus group independently. Researchers then met to further the coding system and develop preliminary themes. After discussing these themes, the researchers recorded the data to focus on the initial findings. We repeated this process until we had a consensus that alleviated all discrepancies within the data and coding scheme. Braun and Clarke's (2006) model informed the construction and application of thematic analysis.

As the two authors instructed the courses, bias, and validity were potentially problematic to our positionality (Holmes, 2020). Positionality

suggests that our social, historical, and political setting affects our orientations and that we are not isolated from the social processes we research (Malterud, 2001). As Foote and Gau Bartell (2011, p. 46) note, "[t]he positionality that researchers bring to their work, and the personal experiences through which positionality is shaped, may influence what researchers may bring to research encounters, their choice of processes, and their interpretation of outcomes." Each author in this study acknowledges their privilege, strives to be aware of their biases, and recognizes that their experiences and opinions may impact their coding and analysis of the data. As such, it is crucial to mention our positionality.

The political science instructor/co-author identifies as a White cisgender male. He is fluent in Spanish, has traveled extensively throughout Latin America for service and leisure, and has lived and worked as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the region. His primary political science research focuses on Latin America, principally related to resource-extractive community-led protests. The psychology instructor/co-author also identifies as a White cisgender male with some Hispanic background. One of his primary foci in research is on the educational attainment of Latino families. Both instructors have volunteered and conducted advocacy work within the Latinx community. The third co-author identifies as a Chinese cisgender female. Her research focuses on the influence of quality caregiving on young children's socioemotional well-being and the impact of contextual factors (race, culture, socioeconomic status, etc.) on caregiving. The fourth co-author identifies as a Bangladeshi cisgender female. Her research interests include the role of institutions in democracy, the political economy of South Asian regions, and socio-political dynamics in hybrid regimes. The fifth author is a Hispanic

Table 1:
Focus Group Demographics

	Latinx Focus Group				Non-Latinx Focus Group			
	N	%	Range	Mean	N	%	Range	Mean
Ethnicity								
Latino or Latina	22	91.7			0			
Latinx	2	8.3			0			
Non-Hispanic White	0				18	78.3		
African American	0				1	4.3		
Asian American	0				1	4.3		
Multi-racial	0				3	13.1		
Age			19-27	22			18-26	22
Gender								
Male	8	33.3			10	45.5		
Female	16	66.7			12	54.5		
Total Family Income[a]			20K-100K+	40K-50K			30K-100K+	90K-100K
U.S. Generation								
1st Generation	0				2	8.7		
2nd Generation	19	79.2			2	8.7		
3rd Generation	2	8.7			3	13.0		
3+ Generation	1	4.3			16	69.6		
First-generation college student[b]	13	54.2			6	26.1		
College Cumulative GPA			2.2-3.8	2.9			2.5-4.0	3.3

Note. [a] collected in $10k increments ranging from $0 to 100K+. [b] Reference group = Yes.

cisgender female who researches expressive arts therapy, severe mental illness, and intersectionality. The third and fourth authors have limited experience working with the Latinx community. These authors provided an outside perspective that increased the validity of our findings, as they did not lead any of the classes and reviewed and coded the data separately.

To further increase the trustworthiness and validity of our study, eight undergraduate and graduate student researchers independently audited the data and the identified themes. These students had training in the basic principles of qualitative data analysis and completed a semester-long project where they coded data independently and collaborated on potential themes. They were not present for this project's data collection or the initial data analysis. We used their work to validate the themes present in the current study. First, we compared our results to theirs. Then, we shared this manuscript with them to ensure they could identify their results within it. Their analysis closely aligned with our results, adding to this study's validity. Finally, adding to this validity, resources from this study, including course syllabi, products from the semester-long project, focus group questions, and other resources, are publicly available through OSF Materials (Arellanes & Hendricks, 2021).

RESULTS

Based on our data-driven inductive thematic analysis, we present three themes. Within the first theme, "Lack of Adequate (Online) Learning Resources," we demonstrate how the remote learning period during the pandemic made Latinx students more aware of their preexisting learning disadvantages. This theme also highlights that they had less access to adequate online learning resources, limiting their ability in their courses. In the second theme, "The Inability to Make Meaningful Connections," we document that remote learning further isolated Latinx students, magnifying their already limited sense of belonging to the campus community. This inhibited their capacity to learn and find educational resources and organizations that could help them succeed academically. In the third theme, "Approaching Mental Health Issues," we reveal that the transition to online learning during the pandemic adversely affected students' mental health, affecting their academic focus and engagement. Students emphasized the need for accessible and culturally sensitive mental health resources remotely and on campuses, with a desire for designated spaces for quick support and emergency therapy sessions. Students acknowledged our efforts to accommodate their mental health challenges during the pandemic, particularly appreciating engaging and respectful teaching approaches.

Below, we describe the results of these themes from Latinx and non-Latinx student participants enrolled in our Latinx-community-focused courses. Although our results include non-Latinx student participant data, the scope of this paper focuses on Latinx student experiences during the pandemic semesters. As such, we frame our findings in this perspective.

Lack of Adequate (Online) Learning Resources

Insights derived from Latinx students shed light on the socio-economic disparities and the resulting educational disadvantages they have faced. Participants highlighted the inequitable distribution of advantages in life, exemplified by the contrast between individuals growing up in the Southside of Chicago or different environments compared to those with access to more resources. The ramifications of such disparities become evident when considering these students' academic journey. The lack of equivalent educational opportunities disadvantages them, hindering their ability to keep pace with their peers in the (virtual) classroom. Participants expressed frustration at the seemingly unsympathetic stance of some professors, who fail to acknowledge the additional support and resources required by students facing such challenges. The need for more assistance and resources to level the playing field is underscored, as participants contend that expecting these students to catch up without considering their unique circumstances is unrealistic and perpetuates educational inequalities. Addressing these concerns is imperative for fostering an inclusive learning environment that provides every student with equal opportunities for academic success. To illustrate, one Latinx student stated:

> *You cannot expect someone who, I don't know, grew up in the Southside of Chicago or in a different environment to have the same level of education as someone with advantages in life. And it kind of sucks because it puts that person at a disadvantage. Like how do you expect them to be in the classroom and just be leveled up with everyone else? They're not because they need more help. They need more resources. And I think oftentimes professors don't consider that. They just expect us to catch up.*

Furthermore, Latinx students provided unique perspectives on navigating their academic landscape during the pandemic. The lack of equitable access to essential resources emerged as a prevalent concern, with students expressing difficulty accommodating their circumstances due to

resource limitations. The issue of unreliable internet connectivity is particularly highlighted, with interruptions during crucial academic engagements, such as presentations, resulting in a sense of helplessness and the need to adapt to unforeseen disruptions. For instance, one Latinx student said:

> *I feel like not all of us are at a place where we might have the resources because we're still accommodating because of the pandemic. Sometimes our Internet does not turn on. I had an issue where I was presenting a project, and then halfway through, my Internet went off, and I couldn't get back on. So I just had to accommodate to that.*

Moreover, Latinx students voiced their frustration at the lack of comprehensive guidance and support in utilizing online tools, exemplified by the challenges faced in effectively understanding and utilizing platforms like Zoom. This disparity between virtual and in-person learning experiences is further underscored as students lament the diminished personal connection in online settings. One Latinx student said,

> *I had nobody ever explain any of these resources. No one ever explained Zoom to me. There is no personal connection online compared to when we're in class, and I often experienced internet issues. There was even one time that I didn't have my main laptop, and my backup computer didn't have a working charger.*

Based on these issues, participants preferred in-person classroom settings, attributing their success and enhanced understanding of course material to their physical presence in the classroom. The transition to online learning during the pandemic showed the inability to replicate the same energy and engagement experienced in face-to-face interactions. As one Latinx student mentioned,

> *I think that I personally thrive the most in classroom environments, and I've really been able to understand that and like confidently state that being forced to take five courses online and recognize that my energy really does come from the classroom and I can't replicate it online*.

Students emphasized the significance of forming meaningful connections with peers in their in-person coursework. These connections served as vital support systems, fostering a sense of community and camaraderie. Students who found study partners or collaborators through such connections highlighted the lasting impact on their academic journey as these relationships endured beyond the confines of the classroom. Notably, the presence of one or two reliable individuals in each class, with whom students could exchange reminders or seek assistance, was particularly cherished by those who felt reserved or shy in physical and virtual classroom environments. Students believed such peer-to-peer support bolstered academic success and cultivated a stronger sense of belonging on campus for Latinx students.

The Inability to Make Meaningful Connections

Latinx students also emphasized the profound impact of campus proximity on their social engagement and involvement in university activities. Participants longed for the potential connections they could have forged if they were physically on campus, fostering a greater sense of belonging and participation in various groups. For example, one Latinx student said, "*I know people involved in different groups on campus, and I think that brings a little bit more of a connection, especially since I'm at home now*." To further illustrate, a different Latinx student stated:

> *From making music with others to having study buddies from my classes, I will always have a better connection in-person. You start to notice the people you have classes with, see them around campus, and want to talk to them. Being involved with different groups on campus brings more of a connection.*

The distance from campus, in some cases, hindered active involvement, as students discovered intriguing groups they wished to join but could not feasibly participate in due to their remote location. For instance, another Latinx student mentioned,

> *If I was on campus, I feel like I would have known more people, and I feel like I would be involved more on campus, like being at home, I've found out more about different groups that I want to be a part of, but I can't really participate in them because I'm two hours away from the school.*

To combat being away from campus, courses like the ones in this study were seen as a way to make friends and learn about meaningful topics for the students. Having courses related to the Latinx community was seen as a resource and a potential location to make connections even if students were not physically in the same place. For example, a Latinx student shared,

> *The classroom environment is very comfortable. It is our safe space to have discussions about tough topics. Honestly, this is the first class that I've felt the most comfortable sharing in that way; I really did appreciate that. That type of learning environment is super important… I feel lucky to be at a university that offers classes like this.*

Additionally, the significance of social circles in accessing information about available resources became apparent, with students acknowledging that awareness of such resources often came through word-of-mouth or during times of need. One Latinx student said, "*Over time, I learned more about them because of other people, because of the groups that I'm involved in, or because I have friends that are involved in groups, and they tell me about them.*" However, Latinx students highlighted the challenge of resource accessibility, where despite the university offering numerous resources, students remained largely unaware of their existence and potential benefits. For instance, a Latinx student suggested that:

> *You have to find resources on your own because something happened that you have to look for them. It could be the most minor thing ever, like talking to someone about a resume, or it could be about something that happened to you with another person, things like that. There are different levels of situations. And I think most people don't look for a resource until they need it.*

Participants emphasized the learn-as-you-go nature of discovering resources through personal experiences or when faced with specific situations, suggesting that proactive dissemination of information about available resources is crucial for effective utilization. To illustrate, a Latinx student acknowledged,

> *The university offers many resources, but as I think [Maria] mentioned, they're kept away from students. Many of us are unaware*

that we're even paying for this. And not even aware that this is where your funds are going and that you can use these resources.

This lack of awareness raises questions about transparency and how students can fully utilize the services they financially support. As one Latinx student suggested, "*I don't know how to find these things. I do not know what the university offers. How can I search for something if I don't know it exists?*" When specific resources were available that they knew, students detailed that they were still only available during times in which they had work or class. One Latinx student explained, "*Some students, like me, have other jobs and don't have much time to go to office hours, tutoring, or workshops because bills come first before my academics*." Other Latinx students emphasized that their lives outside their academic careers, especially during the pandemic, were more essential. For example, one non-Latinx student noted, "*What's written in the syllabus is not more important than what's going on in their life*."

Approaching Mental Health Issues

As one can ascertain from the last statement, fears of the pandemic and the transition to online learning brought forth new and additional challenges, taking a toll on students' mental health. For example, one Latinx student said, "*I am currently doing therapy because of all the stress I face.*" Grappling with the realities of these difficult situations associated with the transition to remote learning during the pandemic took an extreme toll on students' mental health, adversely affecting their academic focus and engagement.

Participants highlighted the pressing need for universities to offer accessible and culturally sensitive mental health resources for students. They expressed a desire for designated spaces where they could quickly seek support and talk to someone if needed, including emergency therapy sessions, which many students did not know existed. A non-Latinx student desired a place "*where you could just talk to somebody if needed. Or, I know you can have an emergency therapy session, but I don't think anybody knows that. I wish more people knew they had super easy access to mental health services."*

Students acknowledged the existing Counseling Center as a crucial resource; however, its capacity limitations, evidenced by waiting lists and overcrowding, posed challenges for students seeking timely assistance. Notably, students identified the value of mental health services run and operated by members of their respective ethnic communities, highlighting the potential benefits of culturally relevant care. To address this, students

emphasized the importance of hiring more professionals. A Latinx participant stated,

> *Many people I know have tried to reach out to the Counseling Center, and there's either been a waiting list, or it's just too crowded, to where they cannot get to all the individuals. So, I think an emphasis on hiring more individuals is also needed, and students are reaching out for this as something that the institution should focus on.*

The focus groups made it clear that students' personal struggles and mental health issues during this period impacted their academic success, leading to calls for increased understanding and support, especially from their professors. Some participants felt that many professors did not understand what it meant to be a student living during the pandemic. Students shared that they recognized that faculty were going through tremendous change as well, but students often felt confused or lost during this period. This led to increased stress and thoughts of dropping out. To remedy this, students sought faculty who would break down the traditional roles of faculty and student and instead think of the student as a person first, then as a student. A non-Latinx student shared,

> *The faculty has to find ways to bring everybody together. We don't always want to think about schoolwork. If you have us interact outside of class and get to know each other on a different personal level, that will help bring students together. If students feel like they have a family, a connection, that will keep them [in college]. We're lonely, and that leads to depression, but if we can make connections to people that we're comfortable with, that will help. It doesn't have to be people of your same culture; it can be anybody.*

There is a notable acknowledgment of our efforts in accommodating our students' challenges, even when faced with situations beyond our control. Our dedication to accommodating students' needs was also acknowledged, exemplified by our efforts to support individual learning goals. According to data gathered from the focus groups, participants lauded us for our engaging and respectful teaching approaches. Students felt we cultivated a comfortable and safe discussion environment, particularly when addressing challenging topics. This conducive atmosphere fostered a sense of openness. It encouraged students to share their thoughts and experiences freely, making it the first remote class in which they felt comfortable during the pandemic. As

one Latinx participant claimed: "*Incorporating group activities, particularly discussions, emerged as a significant benefit, enabling students to express their cultural perspectives and share their learnings in a non-judgmental space*." The positive impact of this approach on student engagement was evident, as all group members actively participated, contributing to a rich and inclusive learning experience.

Overall, students suggested that our commitment to creating a safe and supportive learning environment, coupled with our effective teaching methods, such as group activities, exemplified our dedication to helping students succeed and fostering a sense of community within the virtual classroom. To illustrate, one Latinx student said:

> *Group activities, like discussions, are a huge benefit because they allow people like myself to have the ability to speak about our cultural upbringing, perceptions, and what we're learning in the class. Everyone in my group attended, participated, and responded. It was a safe environment for everyone to talk with no right or wrong answers.*

Participants appreciated our empathetic and understanding demeanor, even when we could not connect to every aspect of their cultural backgrounds. As one Latinx student noted, "*Just because he can't fully relate, that doesn't mean he's not empathetic, understanding, or trying as hard as he can to make people feel safe about sharing their lives.* Students shared that when we communicated our experiences, such as working in the Peace Corps, knowing how to speak Spanish, or discussing our community-based research within Latinx communities, it assisted students in overcoming their expectations that we should ethnically match with the course materials.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of our study, based on a data-driven inductive thematic analysis, illuminate critical issues Latinx students faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly during remote learning. Our research underscores the existing socioeconomic inequalities that Latinx students grapple with and how these disparities were exacerbated during the pandemic. The contrast between those growing up in disadvantaged areas and those with access to more resources was stark. Latinx students experienced challenges from the lack of equivalent educational opportunities, resulting in difficulties keeping pace with their peers in the virtual classroom. Notably, the frustration voiced by students was directed not only at the challenges themselves but also at the

perceived lack of understanding and support from some professors. This theme illustrates the urgent need for higher education institutions to address systemic inequalities in access to educational resources. To foster an inclusive and equitable learning environment, it is imperative to acknowledge students' diverse backgrounds and unique challenges. Faculty and administrators should consider providing additional support and resources to level the playing field. This could involve targeted assistance programs, improved access to technology and reliable internet, and faculty development initiatives to enhance online teaching methods.

Our results also emphasize the profound impact of physical campus proximity on students' social engagement and involvement in university activities. Latinx students longed for the connections and sense of belonging that physical presence on campus facilitates. The distance from campus hindered their ability to actively engage in groups and organizations, limiting their opportunities for meaningful connections and involvement. As research documents, students not connected to the campus are more likely to have lower GPAs, student engagement levels, graduation rates, and academic success (Billingsley & Hurd, 2019; Burke, 2019; Green & Wright, 2017; Aguinaga & Gloria, 2015; Crisp et al., 2015). Our findings highlight the importance of campus life and co-curricular activities in the overall college experience. It demonstrates the need for institutions to develop creative solutions to engage remote students actively. Universities can explore virtual alternatives to on-campus activities, ensuring students can access resources, join clubs, and connect with peers regardless of physical location. Additionally, fostering a sense of community among remote students should be a priority, as it contributes to their overall well-being and academic success.

The challenges posed by the transition to online learning during the pandemic extended beyond academics to students' mental health. Latinx students reported increased stress and anxiety, with some seeking therapy to cope with the added pressures. They emphasized the necessity for accessible and culturally sensitive mental health resources on campuses, including designated spaces for quick support and emergency therapy sessions. This theme underlines the critical importance of mental health support in higher education, particularly during times of crisis. Universities must invest in expanding mental health services and resources, addressing capacity constraints, and ensuring that students are aware of available support. Culturally relevant and remote mental health care can play a pivotal role in addressing the unique needs of diverse student populations. Moreover, the role of instructors in creating a supportive learning environment cannot be

understated. Our study shows that engaging and respectful teaching approaches can positively impact students' mental well-being.

However, before we conclude, we must acknowledge several limitations in interpreting the findings of this study. Firstly, the study's participant pool consisted solely of students who volunteered at one Midwestern university, which may not be representative of Latinx college students at other institutions. Furthermore, the research was conducted within the context of courses specifically designed to support the Latinx community, implying that participants likely possessed distinct intrinsic motivations related to this community support. Consequently, the generalizability of our study's findings to different student populations and institutions may be limited. Secondly, while our emphasis allowed for a nuanced examination of the experiences of Latinx students, it also implies that the recommendations and insights generated from this research may not be directly applicable to other ethno-racial groups or students from various marginalized backgrounds who may face distinct challenges and require tailored support mechanisms. These limitations warrant careful consideration when extrapolating the implications of our findings to broader student demographics and educational contexts.

Even with these limitations, we offer valuable insights into the pandemic experiences of Latinx students that have broader implications for higher education institutions. This paper highlights the need for systemic changes in how universities approach online learning, resource allocation, and mental health support. By addressing the issues identified, institutions can strive to establish more equitable, inclusive, and supportive learning environments that benefit all students, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances. These insights illuminate the critical importance of prioritizing mental health services, promoting faculty diversity, and implementing engaging teaching strategies, especially in online courses. To remain responsive to student needs and foster an inclusive and effective learning environment, U.S. higher education institutions must take proactive steps to address these insights, ultimately aligning institutional practices with student voices and providing the necessary support to navigate academic and personal challenges effectively.

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Exploring the College Adjustment of Latiné Students at Hispanic Serving Institutions

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how familismo and family obligations act as a spectrum of strengths and challenges. Latiné students ages 18-25 (M =21.54, SD = 4.128) were recruited from Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) in California. Participants (N = 91, 85.7% women) were asked to fill out a survey concerning their social, personal, and academic adjustment, mental health, and support from their professors. Key findings indicated that familismo was associated with positive academic adjustment. Additionally, familismo was positively correlated with high levels of professor support. Furthermore, high levels of professor support and familismo were correlated with low depressive symptoms. These results indicate that familismo may act as a protective factor that can be utilized by academic professionals to increase positive adjustment for their students.

Keywords: Hispanic, familismo, adjustment, Latiné, college adjustment

DEDICATION

To my mom and the countless sacrifices you have made. You are the embodiment of strength and love. Through life's triumphs and challenges, you have been my guide. As I continue to grow, I carry your love and teachings with me.

Figure 1

Dedication

INTRODUCTION

Young Latiné people (those ages 35 or younger) are the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population (Lopez et al., 2020). Furthermore, with a median age of 28, Latinés are the youngest racial/ethnic group in the country (Lopez et al., 2020). Despite these numbers, only a small percent of all four-year university students in the United States identify as Latiné. Of those students, only about half will end up graduating from college (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2019). The reasons for low enrollment and graduation rates among Latiné young adults are varied, as are the tools and techniques that can be used by universities to assist students through their adjustment and to improve these outcomes. Recent work indicates that though Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) are a newer concept in higher education, they have the potential to be the critical factor in higher college admission and completion rates among Latiné students (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). This paper will focus on examining potential familial and institutional challenges (e.g., numerous family obligations and potential lack of emotional support resources) as well as potential strengths (e.g., familial cultural capital and academic support) among Latiné college students attending HSIs.

To date, a limited number of studies have addressed the role of family obligations and familismo concerning college adjustment. The majority of current studies focus on one aspect of Latiné college students' adjustment such as mental health, social adjustment, or academic adjustment, in relation to familismo or family obligations, and of those studies, few explored the perception of support from their institution.

This study attempts to further understand Latiné college adjustment by addressing three facets of adjustment (social, emotional, academic) as well as the association of each adjustment with family obligations and familismo values. Additionally, this study will examine how these factors interact with perceived professor support at HSIs and students' reported current mental health. The goal of this research is to empower and support Latiné students by identifying what factors appear as strengths and/or challenges impacting college adjustment so that steps can be taken by academic professionals at HSIs to further create a culturally competent environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many Latiné families are characterized by close bonds and strong connections. This characteristic is commonly referred to as *familismo* and is widely recognized as an important aspect of Latiné culture (Cerezo et al., 2018). According to researchers, familismo is an ongoing, multidimensional cultural value manifested via sentiments and behaviors that indicate loyalty

and cohesion to one's close circle, and often includes several positive aspects, such as familial support, interconnectedness, and respecting one's elders (Calzada et al., 2012; Cerezo et al., 2018; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008). Researchers have highlighted the importance of family relations and the presence of close bonds within Latiné communities, and the benefits and costs these bonds have on college decision-making and adjustment (Cerezo et al., 2018; López et al., 2019; Matos, 2015). Furthermore, studies have found that much of Latiné young people's motivation has been attributed to a drive to succeed for their family (Esparza & Sánchez, 2008; Niemeyer et al., 2009). Matos (2015) conducted a qualitative study that found that Latiné students who have excelled academically thank their parents for their success, emphasizing the support, sacrifice, and direction they received. Within this study, family capital (i.e., familismo, encouragement, and transfer of values between family members) was identified by students as an influential factor in their academic achievement and perseverance in attaining a college diploma (Matos, 2015). Depending on Latiné youths' environmental and developmental background, familismo appears as a spectrum in which advantages and disadvantages coexist (Calzada et al., 2012). Familismo may have distinct effects on different areas of Latiné functioning, such as the intersection of family obligations and college adjustment, as it represents a collection of interconnected risks and protective variables.

Latiné youth raised in households that strictly adhere to familismo are often more likely to have family obligations, such as aiding with the childcare of younger family members and helping with household chores (Calderón-Tena et al., 2011). These obligations, when excessive, may obstruct academic adjustment and students' well-being by taking a toll on students' attention and energy (Desmond & Turley, 2009; Molina et al., 2019). Past studies have examined the importance of gender roles in Latiné families to better understand the differences in the distribution of familial responsibilities. For example, studies have reported that Latiné women act as emotional caregivers significantly more than their male counterparts, and this additional obligation may impact their college adjustment (Lam et al., 2012; Matos, 2015; Orellana, 2003). According to research, there are discrepancies between Latinés and other racial/ethnic groups on levels of family obligations and attitudes toward these obligations (Fuligni et al., 1999; Sy & Brittian, 2008). In comparison to other racial/ethnic groups, it was found that Latiné young women had higher expectations and ideals about their responsibility to help, respect, and support their families than their European-American classmates (Sy & Brittian, 2008). These results showed a sense of responsibility among these adolescents to support, aid, and respect their family members (Fuligni et al., 1999). Overall, research has indicated that Latiné women overwhelmingly are more likely to

fulfill family commitments than other groups surveyed (Sy & Brittian, 2008). These findings demonstrate that for Latiné youth family obligations may be viewed as an added stressor that may impact their college adjustment or mental health outcomes.

HSIs work to support Latiné students' academic success and graduation rates by providing academic assistance, addressing college readiness, and providing mechanisms for Latiné students to stay linked to family and support networks (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Familismo, though often studied in the context of immediate family, can also be broadened to social connections at one's university. These connections can act as a form of capital by providing access to networking opportunities and academic support (Crisp et al., 2015; Rios-Ellis et al., 2012). Studies show that familismo values can affect Latiné students' overall academic achievement and well-being in academic settings, due to the links between familismo derivatives (e.g., mentorship) and positive academic outcomes such as a higher sense of belonging, academic achievement, and assistance with combating institutional barriers (Cerezo et al., 2018; Morgan Consoli et al., 2015; Rudolph et al., 2014).

According to López et al. (2019), professors' mentorship, close friendships, and cultural clubs can be seen as a derivative of familismo. Though familismo has been associated with positive outcomes for Latiné students, it is not without challenges. For example, some studies that address family obligations among Latiné college students found that some students felt difficulty in balancing family obligations and being in school, these studies indicated that students' expectations and responsibilities to continue to help their family did not decrease when transitioning to college (Cerezo et al., 2018; Sy & Brittian, 2008). Furthermore, having to maintain family obligations while taking on the responsibilities of transitioning to college can lead to poor academic adjustment and a sense of well-being among Latiné students (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2014). For these students, positive social relationships and support are vital because they model how to handle the academic and social pressures of college and can provide a space for cultural affirmation (Cerezo et al., 2018). An example of obstacles and pressure that Latiné students face is the misconception that Latiné students are not as academically capable compared to their non-Latiné classmates (Cerezo et al., 2018).

Current research has shown that having a form of social/familial support can act as a buffer against these stressors. Latiné students have referred to ethnically similar classmates and staff as their "campus family," and these relationships offered them social and academic support that contributed to a positive adjustment (Cerezo et al., 2018). Social connections

to others in their ingroup allow students to embrace aspects of their identity that they may try to diminish in academic settings, and may positively impact the social, emotional, and academic adjustment of Latiné students (Bernal et al., 2009; Cerezo et al., 2018).

This research will draw on two theoretical frameworks, Intersectionality and Latina/o Critical Theory (Latcrit), to help examine the current study. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in the 1980s to describe how an individual may be subjected to multiple disadvantages due to the intersection of their various identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality theory can be used as a guide for analyzing and advocating for policy and systemic change, that focuses on how diverse identities affect one's experiences. Gender socialization provides "guidelines/norms" for what actions are desirable and expected related to each gender. In many spaces, women are confined to the socially accepted actions of their cultural group (Crenshaw, 1989). As previous literature has shown, compared to their male counterparts and ethnically different classmates, Latiné women are socialized to fulfill more family obligations and maintain familismo values. By using an intersectional approach, this study can better explore how these factors are impacting the adjustment of these women within college campuses.

In addition to intersectionality, this study will also use Latcrit theory to provide a framework for exploring the unique strengths and challenges Latiné students face. Latcrit theory is a branch of Critical Race theory that examines the experiences of the Latiné community by incorporating the impact of gender, culture, and race/ethnicity on their lived experiences (Bernal et al., 2009). By considering the intersection of Latiné identities researchers can further understand the unique experiences Latiné individuals face within various spaces, such as academic environments. Latcrit theory has been the guiding theory within many Latiné student-focused studies discussing the incorporation cultural norms and values within academic spaces, specifically regarding the cultural importance of family (Cano & Castillo, 2010; Castillo et al., 2004, 2015). Given that this study is looking at the adjustment of Latiné college students, this theory uses a strengths-based approach to understand better how certain factors, such as familismo, are beneficial for students and can be further utilized by HSIs to increase both academic adjustment and mental health outcomes.

RESEARCH METHOD

Present Study

Currently, challenges balancing familial and school obligations have mostly been a theoretical topic that has had limited empirical investigation to

date for Latiné women college students. Additionally, we know relatively little about the family obligations Latiné college students endure since most studies on Latiné family obligations have concentrated on adolescents. This study is an attempt to fill this gap within this field of literature. Based on previous research, this study is guided by two key research questions:

1. Does a college student's gender predict college adjustment indirectly through family obligations?

   H1: Both genders will significantly be impacted by family obligations within their adjustment. Overall, women's social and emotional college adjustment will be most affected by family obligations, due to research showing that women have a stronger connection to family obligations.

2. Do Latiné college students report having the resources and support they need to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally from their university?

   H2: Given that these students are attending HSI's they are likely to benefit from the resources that these institutions provide. However, we still expect Latiné women to utilize university resources more than Latino men, as women have a strong connection to familismo.

Participants

Data was collected from 91 college students who identified as Latiné and ranged in age between 18 and 25. All participants attended HSIs in California at the time of data collection. These participants were recruited through emails, flyers, social media posts, and in-person class presentations. The demographic characteristics of this sample (N= 91) can be found in Table 1. Participants within this study ranged from age 18-25 with a mean age of 21.54 years old (SD= 4.128). Majority of the participants were women (85.7%). Additionally, the majority reported being first-generation college students (68.1%) and born in the U.S. (89%). About half of the participants reported living with their parents (48.4%), and almost all reported being full-time students (97.8%). Additionally, regarding participants parents' education levels, it was reported that 78.1% of participants mothers had that a high school diploma or less, and 74.8% of participant's fathers had a high school diploma or less.

Procedures

This study was approved by the San Diego State University Institutional Review Board before data collection. The primary method for

participant recruitment was emailing student organizations and professors at HSIs to ask for assistance in participant recruitment. Additionally, this study utilized social media by creating and promoting graphics on various university-affiliated cultural club Instagram pages. Lastly, in person presentations were given to various classes at different universities. To protect the identity of any possible undocumented students, this study did not gather any identifying data including, but not limited to, questions concerning citizenship status. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire through Qualtrics that took about 15-20 minutes to complete (please see Appendix A for the complete questionnaire).

Table 1

Demographics and Descriptive Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	%
Women	85.7%
Born in the U.S.	89%
Mother Born in the U.S.	25.3%
Mothers Education	
Less than a Highschool diploma	35.2%
Highschool Diploma	42.9%
Associate degree	11%
Bachelor's Degree	6.6%
Post bachelor's degree	2.2%
Father Born in the U.S.	20.9%
Father's Education	
Less than a high school diploma	37.4%
Highschool Diploma	37.4%
Associate degree	7.7%
Bachelor's Degree	8.8%
Post-bachelor's degree	3.3%
Participant Class Standing	
Freshman	18.7%
Sophomore	11%
Junior	35.2%
Senior	23.1
Master's	11%
PhD	1.1%
Full time student	97.8%
Living at home with parents	48.4%
First gen college student	68.1%

**Note*: Participants ($N = 91$); Mean Age = 21.54 ($SD = 4.128$)

Each participant was presented with a consent form describing the study and tasks involved. Participants were asked to consent to the study before being able to complete the questionnaire. Those with access to the study link had the option to submit their name to be entered in a lottery. Once entered they had the chance to win one of thirty Amazon gift cards valued at $50 each, or one of five Amazon gift cards valued at $100 each.

Demographics

This study assessed the following demographic variables: gender, race/ethnicity, living arrangements, GPA, sibling status, if they are the first person in their family to attend college, and what country they were born in. Participants also reported on their parents' education levels as well as their country of birth. These questions give context to the survey data allowing us to define participants and evaluate their data more effectively.

Familismo

The Familism scale (Sabogal et al., 1987) is a widely used measure examining the degree to which one places importance on familial values in three separate domains: family obligations, support from the family, and family as referents. The scale consists of 12 items and asks participants to indicate on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) is it important to "interact with family" or "help the family". This measure has been previously used to assess familismo values among Latiné college students and has shown strong psychometric properties (Gonzalez-Guarda et al., 2012; Santisteban et al., 2012). For the purposes of this study, all subscales showed acceptable reliability (Family obligations $\alpha = 0.66$, family support subscale $\alpha = 0.83$, family as referents $\alpha = 0.62$).

Family Obligations

Participants' current levels of family obligations were assessed using the Youth and Family Obligations Measure (Fuligni et al., 1999). The Youth and Family Obligations Measure is used to determine youths' expectations for how often they should contribute to household tasks, spend time with their family, and respect their family. Using a scale ranging from 1 (almost never) to 5 (almost always), participants were asked to answer questions such as, "help take care of your brothers and sisters" and "follow your parents' advice about choosing friends" (Fuligni et al., 1999). The two subscales, *Current Assistance* ($\alpha = 0.87$) and *Respect for Family* ($\alpha = 0.74$), had good psychometric properties.

College Adjustment

Participants' college adjustment was assessed using College Readjustment Rating Scale (CARS) (Zitzow, 1984). The CARS survey includes 26 questions and asks participants to indicate on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) how well they are adjusting socially and academically to the university. Example questions include "Since coming to this university I have developed close personal relationships with other students" and "The student friendships I have developed at this university have been personally satisfying". Two subscales, *Academic Adjustment* and *Social Adjustment*, were created by combining the items that correspond to that scale. Reliability for both scales were good (academic adjustment α = 0.81, social adjustment α = 0.72).

Mental Health

Participants' mental health was assessed using two separate measures: the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) (Radloff, 1977) and the Generalized Anxiety Disorder scale (GAD-7) (Spitzer et al., 2006). The CES-D scale consists of 19 questions and asks participants to indicate their recent depressive symptoms. Participants were asked to indicate the depressive symptoms they have had during the week by marking "Rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day)", "Some or a little of the time (1-2 days)", "Occasionally or a moderate amount of time (3-4 days)", or "Most or all of the time (5-7 days)". Samples from this scale include "I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me" and "I felt hopeful about the future". A composite score was created by combining all items (α = 0.93).

The GAD-7 scale consists of 7 questions that are used to measure recent anxiety symptoms. The scale asks participants to indicate how frequently they experience these symptoms "not at all", "several days", "more than half the days", or "nearly every day". They will answer questions such as "my sleep was restless" and "I feel like people dislike me". Both measures have been widely used with young adults (Brown et al., 2005; Zhong et al., 2015). All items were combined to create overall anxiety scale score (α = 0.95).

Professor Support

Participants' perceived professor support was assessed using the Academic Support Scale (Sands & Plunkett, 2005). The Academic Support Scale (Sands & Plunkett, 2005) consists of 6 questions. The purpose of this survey is to determine how students feel about their professors and university. Specifically, this survey asks students to indicate on a scale of (1) Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Agree, and (4) Strongly Agree, if they feel

supported, respected, and cared about by their university and professors. Questions from this scale include, "My professors have encouraged/motivated me to stay in school" and "My professors care about my education."

RESULTS

Descriptive and Preliminary Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed to evaluate the adjustment of Latiné students across variables of interest. See Table 2 for a complete list of means and standard deviations. Depressive symptoms on the CESD were high in this sample ($M = 22.9$, $SD = 12.7$) with 61.8% scoring at or above the cutoff of 16 indicating a risk for depression. Anxiety symptoms on the GAD-7 were also high in this sample ($M = 9.13$, $SD = 6.33$) with 41.9% scoring at or above the cutoff of 10 indicating risk for moderate to high general anxiety.

Table 2

Standard Deviation, Mean, and Rage of Familismo, Adjustment, and Professor Support in Latiné Students

Variables	M	SD	Range
CESD	22.9474	12.75188	0-49
GAD-7	9.1216	6.32662	0-21
FAM Family Obligations	23.6471	3.55134	11-30
FAM Family as referents	11.9277	3.75072	5-25
FAM Family support	11.4235	2.77479	3-15
Current Family Obligations	41.1	8.1	21-55
Academic Adjustment	3.9898	.50993	2.14-4.79
Social	2.7532	.94961	1.0-4.67
Personal	3.0855	.55405	1.63-4.63
Professor Support	18.5270	4.38310	6-24

Family Obligations as a Mediator

The first research questions examined how factors such as gender and family obligations impact college adjustment. We hypothesized that Latiné students' college adjustment will be impacted by family obligations. Additionally, we hypothesized that for Latiné women specifically, their social and emotional adjustment to college will be impacted by their family obligations.

A series of regression analyses were conducted to examine the associations between the variables. First, gender was entered at step 1. Then, family obligations measure was entered at step 2. Mediation analysis indicated that family obligations did not mediate the relationship between gender and outcomes, and there was no association between current family obligations and college adjustment. Though there were no significant results regarding current family obligations within our sample, we did find significant results when examining if participants believe one should participate in family obligations. Specifically, regression analysis found that the subscale of family obligations within the familismo scale were significantly positively associated with academic adjustment (B = 0.042, SE = 0.016, 95%CI [0.009, 0.074], β = 0.285, p = 0.012). Additionally, the familismo belief that one should partake in family obligations was significantly negatively associated with depressive symptoms. Please see Table 3 for details.

Professor Support

The second research question examined if Latiné students felt supported at their HSI. We hypothesized that students were likely to report positively about the support they receive, though ultimately women would report this higher than men.

Due to our sample being predominately women, we were unable to conduct a gender comparison. Within this sample, overall, among participants, there was a correlation between high support from their professors at their academic institutions and high levels of family support within a familismo context. Additionally, there was a moderate negative correlation between professor support and depressive symptoms and a significant positive correlation between professor support and academic adjustment. Please see Table 3 for details.

Family Obligation Analyses for Women Participants

One-way ANOVA was used to examine differences in social and emotional adjustment for women who indicated low, moderate, or high levels of family obligations. For the current family obligations scale from the family obligations questionnaire, there was an association between high levels of family obligation and anxiety symptoms in women F (2,60) = 3.55, p = .018. Specifically, Tukey's pairwise comparisons indicated that who had excessive family obligations had significantly more symptoms of anxiety, (M = 14.18) compared to both those who reported moderate (M = 9.41, p = .028) or low levels of current family obligations (M = 7.5, p = .026). There was an

Table 3

Intercorrelations for Familismo (FAM), Academic Adjustment, Personal Adjustment, Social Adjustment, Family Obligations, and Professor Support in Latiné Students

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Participant gender	1											
2. CESD scale	.359**	1										
3. Anxiety scale	.317**	.847**	1									
4.Cars_AcademicMean	-0.149	-.533**	-.426**	1								
5. Cars_ Personal Mean	-0.180	-.701**	-.620**	.682**	1							
6. Cars_Social Mean	-0.128	-.329**	-.296*	.232*	.393**	1						
7. Professor Support scale	-0.133	-.264*	-0.100	.426**	.237*	-0.074	1					
8. Familismo - family obligations subscale	-0.091	-.280*	-0.216	.285*	0.172	0.020	0.153	1				
9. Familismo - family support subscale	-0.147	-0.218	-0.113	.237*	0.133	0.068	.251*	.396**	1			
10. Familismo - family as referents subscale	-0.077	0.011	0.069	-0.118	-0.022	0.060	-.241*	0.061	0.115	1		
11. YFO Current Assistance scale	0.165	0.175	0.212	0.149	-0.011	-0.073	0.039	0.214	0.093	.240*	1	
12. YFO Respect for Family	-0.118	-0.128	-0.166	0.181	0.078	0.002	-0.037	.375**	0.192	.247*	.470**	1

Note. 78 = women and 12 = men 1 = prefer not to say

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

association between high levels of family obligation and depressive symptoms on the CESD in women F (2, 62) = 2.58, p = .042. Specifically, Tukey's pairwise comparisons indicated that who had excessive family obligations had more significantly more symptoms of depressive symptoms, (M = 31.72) compared to those who reported low levels of current family obligations (M = 19.25, p = .042), and there was a trend suggesting it was higher than those who had moderate obligations (M = 24.24, p = .089). There was a finding approaching significance that suggests for women an association between low levels of family obligation and social adjustment in college as assessed using the college adjustment scale F (2, 63) = 1.64, p = .1. Specifically, Tukey's pairwise comparisons indicated that who had low family obligations scored higher on the social adjustment scale, (M = 2.60) compared to those who reported moderate (M = 2.63, p = .09) or high levels of current family obligations (M = 2.6, p = .15)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The goal of this research is to support Latiné students' success by examining the spectrum of advantages and challenges that Latiné college students face with their adjustment. These results provide a unique lens into the experiences of Latiné students as it explores multiple types of adjustment as well as the reported support students are receiving from their HSIs.

Results from this study indicated that familismo may act as a protective factor for Latiné students. Within this sample there was a direct association between familismo and positive outcomes in college adjustment and mental health for Latiné students. Within our sample, participants reported experiencing significant levels of depression and anxiety symptoms. Despite this, participants who reported lower depressive symptoms had higher levels of familismo. Additionally, findings indicated that participants who report high levels of familismo are adjusting well academically to their university environment. Within this study and current literature, familismo, a cultural value of Latiné students, is seen as a strength that should be utilized by academic professionals as it is positively associated with positive adjustment (Cerezo et al., 2018; Morgan Consoli et al., 2015; Rudolph et al., 2014). This approach to improving a university's environment entails a commitment to developing a system that recognizes and capitalizes on the many assets of their Latiné students to serve a greater goal of striving for equity. Valuing these students' forms of capital and cultural wealth can lead to universities creating improved forms of intervention and prevention for a

positive adjustment. Many institutions and educators view the school system as effective and place the responsibility of change on the students who they view as disadvantaged. These narrative limits student mobility for a smooth adjustment to college. Research that works to further understand minority community cultural wealth and how their forms of capital can be utilized to improve universities' approach to the gap in graduation rate, minimize inequities in mental health outcomes, and improve social adjustment. Latina/o critical (Latcrit) theory provides a framework for academic professionals and researchers to critique oppressive aspects of educational institutions and to view the characteristics of Latiné students, such as familismo, as an asset of their students.

This study found that participants reported feeling supported at their university in correlation with high levels of familismo. Though this study anticipated that participants attending HSIs would report feeling supported by their university, due to our limited sample we are unable to conduct a gender comparison. The correlation between familismo and professor support aligns with current literature that explores the benefits of affirming and leveraging the cultural values of familismo within university services, programs, and staff (López et al., 2019). Professor support is not limited to creating spaces for positive peer engagement. Studies have shown that specifically for Latiné women, support from their professors can be extremely helpful in their adjustment to college (López et al., 2019). Research suggests that incorporating familismo ideals can improve professors' approach to mentorship and academic persistence for their Latiné students (Crisp et al., 2015). Taken together, these studies demonstrate the magnitude to which familismo may positively impact Latiné students' adjustment. The authors of this study recommended that professors engage in mentorship practices to mirror some of the core values of familismo. This includes having meaningful and personal interactions with students. Future studies could further explore the mental health outcomes of Latiné women to develop intervention and preventive measures that utilize familismo values. Furthermore, though our study did not yield significant results regarding the impact that current family obligations have on college adjustment, due to the significance documented within the results of other studies (Molina et al., 2019; Sy & Brittian, 2008) these findings should be explored further in association with resources provided by their university for Latiné students to alleviate the stressors of family obligations.

Through an ANOVA analysis results indicated that excessive current family obligations for our women participants had significant impact on depressive and anxiety symptoms compared to those with low levels of current family obligations. These findings are in line with current studies which have shown that Latiné college students have reported high levels of mental health symptoms, such as depression and anxiety (Corona et al., 2016; French & Chavez, 2010; Huynh et al., 2012). Researchers indicated that Latiné youth's experiences of high levels of depressive reports may be due to excessive levels of family obligations and responsibilities (Zeiders et al., 2013). In 2021, reports estimated that 65% of Latiné college students have untreated mental health issues (McCormack, 2021). In addition to cultural factors that deter Latiné students from seeking professional help, there are institutional barriers these students face when seeking mental health support, such as discrimination by providers, language barriers, and differences in cultural values (McCormack, 2021). The statistics in this study and others demonstrate the importance for universities and academic professionals to develop culturally sensitive and value driven approaches to providing support, guidance, and mental health resources for their Latiné students.

This study must be examined through acknowledgement of the limitations faced. First, this study had a small sample size that was composed primarily of women participants, which limited our ability to examine gender differences. Future studies should do a similar analysis within a larger and more gender-diverse sample size to yield more significant results regarding gender differences among Latiné students' adjustment. Second, some of the subscales have low reliability and should be reevaluated more closely to determine how well they examine these constructs within this population. Third, this was a cross-sectional study limiting our ability to make any causal conclusions. Lastly, while we recruited participants from several HSIs in California, the samples were small to allow for comparisons between different institutions. However, the study's findings reveal prospective possibilities for application and additional exploration. For example, future studies should aim to recruit larger samples from multiple HSIs to examine institutional differences in resources and student experiences.

Future studies could further explore familismo through a strength-based lens using qualitative methods. Research that uses a strength-based lens challenges the idea that Latiné students arrive in class with cultural deficiencies. Qualitative studies that listen to the lived experiences and histories of Latiné students provide us with insight to oppression that have

been faced within their institutions. It challenges deceit-informed research that centers on objectivity and may not fully explore the epistemologies of Latiné students. Qualitative studies on Latiné college adjustment can center aspirational and navigational capital. These forms of capital can be overlooked within quantitative studies and can lead to interpretations formed through a deficit lens, this can lead to overgeneralizations of Latiné students and their backgrounds and limits what is viewed as educational success.

This study examined Latiné college students' academic, social, and emotional adjustment with a focus on the potential strengths (familismo) and challenges (family obligations) within these students' lives. Ultimately, it was found that familismo had a significant impact on different aspects of adjustment among Latiné college students sampled. Though there were no significant findings regarding family obligations, future research should continue examining college adjustment at HSIs and the impact that these factors have. Additionally further work that uses a strength-based lens should address the mental health adversities that Latiné students face. Though HSIs may offer specialized mental health resources for their Latiné students there are still barriers for these students seeking this support. This work is vital for universities and academic professionals to further understand how to utilize the cultural capital of Latiné students to better support them through all forms of adjustment.

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They Have My Back: An Exploration of the Narratives of Latina Members of Latin Greek Letter Organizations (LGLOs) and their Journeys to Graduation

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the narratives of 28 Latina women who became members of their Latin Greek Letter Organizations (LGLOs) and the role that membership played in their journeys to baccalaureate degree attainment. The research question examined how participants narrated their college experiences, namely relative to successfully graduating. This research sheds light on the role that LGLO membership plays for Latina college students in their successful degree attainment, specifically that LGLOs facilitate the development of various skills, knowledge, and practices that assist members with their undergraduate experiences to graduation and well beyond. This research also adds to the larger body of literature in its investigation of the role of LGLOs within an overarching examination of Latinx college student success.

Keywords: Latin Greek Letter Organizations; Latina college students, Latinx academic achievement

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Latinx people constitute the largest ethnic group in the United States at 18.3% of the population and are projected to be nearly 1 in 2 Americans by 2030 (*Excelencia* in Education, 2020). From 2000 to 2016, Latinx students in higher education have increased 134% (de Brey et al., 2019) but low Latinx college completion rates persist with only half of Latinx college students at 4-year institutions reaching the milestone of graduation (*Excelencia* in Education, 2020). Factors identified as contributing to Latinx college completion include: intentional postsecondary retention and academic pathways programs (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Santiago et al., 2017), mentoring (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Quintanilla & Santiago, 2017), Latinx representation in faculty (Taylor & Santiago, 2017), and Latinx-based student organizations (Castellanos, 2016), including Latin Greek Letter Organizations or LGLOs.

Latin Greek Letter Organizations (LGLOs) refer to the Greek letter sororities and fraternities that were established largely by and for Latinx college students as a response to the absence of university resources and support. They are generally attributed as having been founded in the mid 1970's with roots that date back even farther, still. Their closest model are historically Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs) in terms of historical reason for founding, missions that are centered around cultural maintenance, parallels in their respective literatures, and similarities in threats posed to their continued existence.

Empirical exploration of Latin Greek Letter Organizations have only just begun regarding their connection and relationship to Latinx college student success. This study adds to nascent literature about the relationship between these Latinx-centered student organizations and student success factors through the narratives of Latina students whose LGLO memberships further explore the idea of their serving as a vehicle for support, specifically as it relates to academic achievement. While higher education often vaguely defines academic achievement, I chose to define it for the purposes of this study as successful degree completion in large part due to the reality that participation in the knowledge-based economy is predicated upon the assumption of having one's baccalaureate degree. As the largest ethnic group in the United States, Latinx success is vital to and intricately tied with the success of this nation.

Author Positionality

My positionality as a Latina, first-generation United States-born American who has had to straddle multiple cultural boundaries throughout

my lifetime compelled me as a researcher to seek out a CRT theoretical lens in my attempt to illuminate the experiences of Latinx college students with respect to their occupying several (and at times conflicting) identities and spaces. Additional positionalities that merit acknowledgement in such a research inquiry is that of being a Latina woman working in higher education who is an actively involved member of an LGLO with experience serving in leadership within that LGLO's organizational structure. While I acknowledge that I should be continually aware of my memberships so as to not allow my biases or unchecked assumptions pave the way for my inquiry in lieu of sound methodology, I tend to view these memberships as a benefit to the research as a cultural insider who is better suited to understand community language and mores than a researcher who is non-Latina and/or non-LGLO member. A critical race paradigm tends to agree with this perspective of encouraging scholars of color such as myself to study issues particular to our respective communities and to engage with other community members in co-constructing knowledge, and with this study I answer Anzaldúa's (1990) call for Latina voices via my participants and myself to occupy critical theorizing space (p. xxv).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Latinx populations continue to grow nationwide in the United States with similar demographic shifts reflected in the microcosm of higher education. Latinx students are enrolled in postsecondary institutions at historic and unprecedented rates, "from 1.4 million to 3.2 million students" between the years 2000 and 2016 (de Brey et al., 2019, p. 126). Despite these gains, Latinx persistence to graduation remains a challenge with many Latinx students stopping-out or dropping-out before reaching the goal of graduation. Barriers rooted in structural and systemic oppression result in various push-pull factors that contribute to Latinx college attrition. Explanations for the persistence of low Latinx graduation rates include first generation status, a population we know to be particularly vulnerable (Flink, 2018; Salis Reyes & Nora, 2012); limited access to necessary cultural capital about college (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Núñez et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2012); challenges around academic preparation for college and the related need for remedial coursework (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Ross et al., 2012); limitations around financial access (Núñez et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2012; Saenz, 2002; Saenz et al., 2007); the tension of serving in myriad roles in addition to that of student, including that of being family caretakers (Cox et al., 2011; Saenz 2002; Saenz et al., 2007); and challenges of academic and social integration

while at college (Ross et al., 2012) to name a few. These well documented challenges should be understood as the societal failings which negatively impact Latinx people (and people of other ethnic and racial minorities), and not as a list detailing all the things that Latinx undergraduates supposedly lack.

Additionally important for consideration are the growing ways in which Latinx college students are being understood from a strengths-based approach relative to the unique "funds of knowledge" that they "tap into to resist oppression" while transitioning to and at college (Rios-Aguilar & Marquez Kiyama, 2012, p. 7). Pulling from this strengths-based lens and paradigm, a burgeoning subsection of the literature relative to Latinx students in higher education includes an investigation of the relationship between Latinx-centered student organizations, like LGLOs, and Latinx student success measures and outcomes. The literature suggests that these unique organizations operate as sites of support and resistance and accordingly serve as a way for Latinx students to collectively mitigate the very real systemic challenges faced when in college. From this paradigm, I outline the existing literature on LGLOs by grouping the findings thematically.

Main Findings/Themes of the LGLO Literature

Four main themes can be extrapolated from the literature on Latin Greek Letter Organizations in terms of their role and significance, with an additional fifth theme that undergirds the former four.

Belonging & Mattering in the Face of Marginalization, Isolation, and Alienation

Virtually all the literature on Latinx-centered student organizations and LGLOs, specifically, demonstrates time and again the importance of culturally specific subspaces on campuses for Latinx students and that LGLOs serve as a haven and a place of mentorship and growth where Latinx members feel a sense of belonging and mattering in the face of marginalization, alienation, and isolation (Arellano, 2018; Atkinson et al., 2010; Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Delgado-Guerrero et al., 2014; Dueñas & Gloria, 2017; Estrada et al., 2017; Garcia, 2019; Garcia, 2020; Gloria et al., 2005; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Moreno, 2012; Moreno & Sanchez Banuelos, 2013; Núñez, 2009; and Orta et al., 2019). The well-documented phenomenon of Latinx marginalization in higher education creates the conditions for necessitating subspaces where Latinidad or "Latinx-ness" is centered, appreciated, valued, respected, and validated. Within this theme endures

an express desire of Latinx college students to be a part of these subspaces, to maintain, sustain, and develop them, and to carve them out where they do not exist. Embedded within this theme includes LGLOs often conceptualized as important reproductions of family away from home and are structured from a collectivist paradigm. In this way, one can understand Latinx-centered subspaces and LGLOs, specifically, as sites of resistance in the face of the real and continued marginalization experienced by Latinx students.

Leadership skills and Professionalism

A second theme in the literature is that LGLOs have been found to be critical spaces wherein important leadership and professional skills and experiences are fostered, enhanced, and often expected vis-à-vis LGLO membership (Atkinson et al., 2010; Delgado-Guerrero et al., 2014; Estrada et al., 2017; Guardia, 2021; Moreno, 2012; Moreno & Sanchez Banuelos, 2013; and Orta et al., 2019). Specifically, leadership development is articulated in two main ways: the accrual of professional social capital by way of the learning of soft and hard skills through the LGLO, and the access to networks that is afforded by way of the LGLO.

Sense of responsibility, civic engagement, and service to community engendered

A third theme is that of a sense of responsibility engendered or further developed by way of membership in an LGLO. This sense of responsibility is multifaceted including a responsibility to self, to one's chapter and organization, to one's family, and to the larger Latinx community. The theme shows up in the literature in three main ways: as the opportunity for members to lead, in being of service to the community, and the expectation/pressure to lead (Arellano, 2018; Atkinson et al., 2010; Estrada et al., 2017; Garcia, 2020; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Moreno, 2012; Moreno & Sanchez Banuelos, 2013; Núñez, 2009; Olivas, 1996; Orta et al., 2019). First, LGLOs offer leadership opportunities to Latinx students otherwise not afforded, and thus arises a sense of duty in taking advantage of those opportunities and not letting them go to waste. As such, members view leading and being of service as both a privilege and expectation. Second, LGLO membership promotes its leadership opportunities as a platform to serve and give back to the community. Third, a fine line emerges between the responsibility to lead and the pressure to do so in order to maintain the functioning of the LGLO chapter and in turn the organization as a whole.

Academic Achievement

The fourth theme relates to the promotion of academic achievement because of LGLO membership. A handful of research inquiries regarding LGLOs investigate the linkages between the social dimensional aspects of LGLOs and the impact that belonging and mattering has on student success outcomes and academic achievement, suggesting a positive relationship between the two. However, the primary purpose of these studies does not typically investigate their academic components, and as such the discussion and implications are often tangential and underdeveloped. A few notable exceptions that detail the greatest nuance in the area of academic achievement is best exhibited by studies from Delgado-Guerrero et al., 2014; Luedke, 2019; Moreno and Sanchez Banuelos, 2013; and Orta et al., 2019. These studies yield insight about LGLOs in higher education and broader society relative to the accrual of academic and professional skills that are then applied to degree completion. Most studies on LGLOs call for additional inquiries to focus on this particular dimension of academic achievement which is where this study situates itself.

Familismo as Undergirding All

Familismo as a codified concept has been utilized in the behavioral sciences and education (Gonzales, 2019) and refers to the centrality of the family unit in Latinx culture with regards to values, morals, and decision making. Familismo is grounded in collectivism in which it is uncommon to think about the individual divorced from the larger family unit. At its core, familismo eschews the dominant U.S. concepts of the individual and autonomy in favor of interdependence and community as means of radical resistance. The concept of familismo is so critically embedded within Latinx culture as a vital value and tenet that it shows up in virtually all themes with regard to the literature on LGLOs (Arellano, 2018; Atkinson et al., 2010; Delgado-Guerrero et al., 2014; Dueñas & Gloria, 2017; Estrada et al., 2017; Garcia, 2020; Guardia & Evans, 2008; Miranda et al., 2020; Moreno, 2012; Moreno & Sanchez Banuelos, 2013; Olivas, 1996; Orta et al., 2019). Given the centrality of communal culture as epitomized via the Latinx family, it makes sense that Latinx undergraduates understand and articulate their LGLOs (and their sense of belongingness in them) in terms of familia. Familismo also appears in the subtheme of leadership skills and professionalism as the familia-like settings of LGLOs provide safe spaces to learn in a judgment-free zone the critical skills that aid in the accrual of the necessary cultural

capital for Latinx students to succeed in spaces where hegemonic values pervade. Familismo further enmeshes itself within the subtheme of responsibility and service, where, much like within our Latinx family structures, there endures a sense of a duty and expectation to lead, to help, and to serve something larger than oneself. Lastly, familismo appears in the discourse relative to academic achievement wherein going to college is often talked about as being a sacrifice for the greater good of their family.

RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative study is rooted in a Critical Race Theory theoretical framework which employed a narrative methodology through the use of counter stories. The research question explored how Latina-identified college graduates who were undergraduate members of a Latin Greek Letter sorority narrate their experiences of earning their baccalaureate degree to understand: (1) How they talk about the impact of LGLO membership in their academic experiences and (2) What their stories reveal about the skills, knowledge, practices, or relationships gleaned via LGLO membership that supported them in their academic journeys. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews of 28 alumnae Latina baccalaureate degree holders who gained membership in an LGLO during their undergraduate years at institutions in the Mid-Atlantic United States (a previously virtually unresearched geographic area in the literature). Purposeful criterion sampling was used in the calls for participants and included those who: (1) self-identify as Latina/e/x or Hispanic, (2) attended an undergraduate institution in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States (which I defined as New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland), (3) became a member of an LGLO during their undergraduate experience, and (4) have since graduated with their baccalaureate degree. Candidates who met the outlined criteria were sent a consent form and an invitation to coordinate a scheduled interview. Counter stories were collected and recorded via Zoom. Initial transcribing was automated via this platform and edited as necessary against the interview recordings. The framework for data analysis borrowed from Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) narrative coding approach of broadening, burrowing, and storying and restoring which Kim (2016) interprets as first broadening by "looking for a (broader) context of the story," then burrowing by "focus[ing] on more specific details of the data" (such as "participants' feelings, understandings, or dilemmas"), and finally storying and restoring by finding ways to represent and retell the stories "so that the significance of the lived experience of the participant

comes to the fore" (p. 207). Accordingly, larger segments were coded via descriptive coding (broadening), then organized via second-level coding into categories and eventual themes (burrowing), which in turn ultimately informed counter stories that were re-told individually and as part of a larger fictionalized metanarrative (storying and restoring).

Participants

The 28 women who participated in this study represent a range of backgrounds and experiences within the larger shared identity of being Latina members of Latin Greek Letter sororities within the Mid-Atlantic region who successfully graduated from college. While this inquiry is decidedly not a quantitative study, the inclusion of some traditionally quantitative metrics are helpful in shedding light on the sum total of a robust group that includes the stories and experiences of 28 individuals (See Table 1). All participants were traditional college students in the sense that they began their postsecondary education straight after high school, and only one became a non-traditional student after stopping out for a decade and then later returning to finish her degree. Relative to how long ago participants graduated from time of interview (which took place in the summer of 2022), the mode was having graduated two years ago (six participants) followed by the second most often of three years ago (five participants; see Table 1). The mode for the amount of time participants were undergraduate members of their respective organizations (the time between having become a member and when they graduated) was four semesters (eight participants) followed by six semesters (five participants). Identities around family's country of origin spanned 12 distinct Latin American nations (plus one non-Latin American country). Eight participants had ties to Puerto Rico, five participants were Dominican, and four were Salvadoran. Five participants hailed from two countries of origin and thus represented binational and/or bicultural identities. In terms of representation with where participants attended college, nine participants graduated from institutions in Maryland, nine from New Jersey, seven from Pennsylvania, and three from New York. There were no participants from the state of Delaware. Relative to LGLO membership, five distinct organizations were represented overall with 22 participants hailing from sorority A, followed by two participants from sorority B, two from sorority C, one from sorority D, and one from sorority E. With respect to college generational status identity, 20 responded yes they were first-generation college students, five were not, and three self-identified within a unique category of being the first in their family to be

educated within the U.S. system of higher education (as opposed to being educated at a post-secondary institution outside the U.S.). The most common institution represented among participants was a huge, public, R1 institution with 11 participants.

Table 1
Characteristics of Participants at a Glance

Participant	Preferred Pronouns	Ethnic Identity	Family's Nation of Origin Identity	College generation status	Where They Attended College	How long ago they graduated college	How many semesters participant was a member of their LGLO until they graduated	Institutional profile
Alicia	she/her	Latina	Bolivian	US 1st gen college student	Maryland	6 years ago	8 semesters	L Pu M1
Aracely	She/hers/ella	Latina	Ecuadorian	Yes	New Jersey	19 years ago	6 semesters	S Pr R2
Ariadna	she/hers	Latina	Puerto Rican	Yes	Maryland	5 years ago	5 semesters	H Pu R1
Ava	she/her	Latinx	Dominican	US 1st gen college student	Maryland	6 years ago	7 semesters	L Pu M1
Blanca	She/Her/Hers	Latina	Puerto Rican	Yes	Pennsylvania	21 years ago	2 semesters	M Pu R2
Claudia	She/her	Latina and Hispanic	Salvadoran	Yes	Maryland	2 years ago	3 semesters	L Pu M1
Daniela	she/her	Latina	Guatemalan	No	New Jersey	3 years ago	4 semesters	M Pu R2
Emilia	she/her/hers	Latina	Salvadoran	Yes	Maryland	21 years ago	5 semesters	M Pu R1
Evelyn	She/Her/Hers/Ella	Latina	Peruvian	Yes	New Jersey	5 years ago	6 semesters	H Pu R1
Fernanda	not provided	Latina	Dominican	Yes	New York	2 years ago	4 semesters	S Pr M1
Gabby	She/her/Ella	Latina	Puerto Rican	Yes	Maryland	15 years ago	7 semesters	H Pu R1
Gladys	She/Ella	Latina	Puerto Rican	No	Pennsylvania	25 years ago	11 semesters	H Pu R1
Glory	she	Latina	Dominican	Yes	New Jersey	15 years ago	6 semesters	H Pu R1
Isabela	She/Her/Hers	Latina & Middle Eastern	Puerto Rican and Iranian	No	New York	2 years ago	4 semesters	S Pr M1
Jimena	She/her	Latina	Puerto Rican	Yes	Pennsylvania	7 years ago	5 semesters	S Pu M1
Lisette	She/her/hers	Latina	Colombia	Yes	New Jersey	2 years ago	5 semesters	S Pu M1
Maite	She/Her/Ella	Afro-Latina	Panamanian and Puerto Rican	No	Pennsylvania	3 years ago	6 semesters	H Pu R1
Melinda	she/her	Hispanic	Puerto Rican	Yes	New Jersey	1.5 years ago	1 semester*	M Pu R2
Nancy	she/her	Latina	Colombian and Nicaraguan	Yes	Pennsylvania	25 years ago	7 semesters	M Pu R2
Nayeli	she/her	Latina	Dominican	Yes	New York	2 years ago	4 semesters	S Pr M1
Noemi	She/They/Ella	Latine	Dominican	US 1st gen college student	Pennsylvania	2 years ago	4 semesters	M Pu R2
Olivia	She/Hers	Latina	Colombian and American	Yes	Maryland	4 years ago	7 semesters	H Pu R1
Paula	she/her/hers	Latina	Ecuadorian and Costa Rican	Yes	Pennsylvania	3 years ago	4 semesters	H Pu R1
Samantha	she/her	Hispanic	Peruvian	No	New Jersey	3 years ago	3 semesters	H Pu R1
Sara	She her hers	Latina	Ecuador	Yes	New Jersey	10 years ago	9 semesters	H Pu R1
Sofia	she/her	Latina	Salvadoran	Yes	Maryland	5 years ago	6 semesters	L Pu M1
Vero	She / her / hers	Latina	Salvadoran	Yes	Maryland	3 years ago	4 semesters	H Pu R1
Yara	not provided	Latina	Honduran	Yes	New Jersey	1 year ago	4 semesters	S Pr M1

Note. College generation status includes an option for those participants who identified as being a first generation college student in American higher education meaning that at least one parent had a post-secondary education in their home country. Length of undergraduate membership was measured in semesters as this is a significant time unit in higher education. The key for institutional profile type is loosely based on the Carnegie Classification system where S = small enrollment, M = mid sized enrollment, L = large enrollment, H = huge enrollment, Pr = private institution, Pu = public institution, R1 = very high research activity, R2 =

high research activity, M1 = master's colleges and universities with larger programs (The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education., n.d.).

FINDINGS

In making meaning of the emergent themes across interviews, I set up the basic structure of findings as being largely bifurcated into one of two buckets: those elements that participants viewed as benefits, that is, those skills and knowledge they believed they gained as a direct result of their LGLO membership; and those they viewed as challenges and difficulties brought about because of membership, the non-beneficial aspects related to membership.

Membership Benefits

The participants spoke handily and at length about the various benefits they believe they gleaned as a result of membership in their LGLO. Seven rather distinct (if at times, overlapping) themes emerged from within the overarching umbrella of Membership Benefits which include: Academics; Accountability; Professionalism; Leadership; Connecting and Reconnecting to Latinidad; Resilience and Perseverance; Networks; and Support.

Academics

While participants differed in terms of their academic preparedness prior to college with some having very solid academic backgrounds and others less so, every single participant talked about specific academic skills, practices, behaviors, and knowledge that was gleaned through their LGLO. This included namely: the practice of study hours that were set and mandated by the LGLO; teaching participants how to best organize and manage their time (which was critical considering various competing deadlines and assignments inside and out of the classroom); exposure to and knowledge of various learning styles which translated into being able to articulate what they needed because of how they best learned; as well as a handful of miscellaneous academic practices and skills.

Bar none, by far the most often cited practice by participants regarding learned academic practices was that of setting aside intentional time for studying through LGLO-mandated study halls or study hours. Glory said that her chapter "was really big on our academics…we were all just very focused on making sure that our grades were straight and we were going to graduate" and this was done largely through joint study sessions that dated back to when she was pledging." Olivia talked about how study

sessions were largely within her organization, but that once or twice a semester her chapter partnered with other Greek organizations on campus for large scale study hall events that included refreshments like coffee and donuts. (She said this practice had the added bonuses of helping build cross campus partnerships with other organizations while also serving as a recruitment tool in demonstrating in real time the premium her organization placed on academics.) Gladys similarly talked about study groups that took place both formally and informally, both within her organization and in partnering with other organizations.

Several participants discussed how their LGLO taught them skills around how to organize and manage their time. Ava talked about how organizing her time included setting a structured academic routine and said the practice began while pledging where she had "a set study schedule." In a similar vein of setting a schedule to manage her studies, Ava recalled learning through her LGLO the study skill of chunking time for accomplishing tasks and assignments. She said she applied this strategy in her undergraduate courses, as well as to her various tasks and responsibilities within the purview of sorority leadership, and admitted she still uses it now in her career.

Some participants talked about how their LGLO gave them exposure to different learning styles which in turn empowered them with a language and greater understanding of how they best learned. Nayeli said that "[my sorority] helped me realize how I best learn new information" by being compelled to experiment with various learning paradigms, namely during her orientation process. Alicia also talked about this process of being exposed to various study techniques and strategies, through which she learned what worked best for her and what was not as personally advantageous. Maite mentioned something similar that through different "academic workshops" as well as individualized conversations she learned there "are different ways to manage your time, these are different ways to study, not everyone studies the same way."

Accountability

Grade Point Average (GPA) requirements set at the overarching national level of sororities were discussed by several participants as being a standard that served as an accountability measure, mostly as it served as a motivator for members to be able to stay active in their organizations. GPA requirements are almost always tied to good and active standing, both within the context of the larger organization as well as to remain in good standing on campus with the university. Alicia talked about GPA

serving as a "benchmark" and "driving factor" where everyone "would literally tell each other, make sure your GPA is on point" so that they could remain active and participate in sorority activities. Claudia also spoke to this point of the minimum GPA requirement serving as an "incentive to keep up with your grades and academics to ensure that you're able to participate in all the fun stuff." Sofia talked about the GPA requirement as a motivator but that "in the grand scheme of things was not that hard to accomplish," which lends insight to the common practice expressed among several participants in which their individual chapter set an even higher GPA requirement to motivate and hold members accountable. In this vein, Evelyn talked about the national GPA minimum as the chapter's "primary layer expectation" and that her chapter maintained an internal higher expectation of 3.0 (as compared to the national requirement of 2.5). Yara similarly talked about having an internal chapter GPA expectation that was higher than the national requirement: "I think you need a 2.75 but our goal as undergrads was always to maintain a 3.0." Olivia also recalled that her chapter held a higher GPA minimum than the national one.

Beyond the GPA requirement that stuck out for many as a fairly standard accountability measure, a number of participants also talked about the accountability that was offered when members found themselves in academic difficulty. Some participants recalled practices in their LGLO chapters of reallocating work in which other members picked up the weight of chapter requirements and management (such as running events, recruitment, etc.) so that those experiencing academic difficulty could re-focus their efforts on their coursework. Others talked about deliberate programs that were largely created at the local levels of individual chapters often spearheaded by an academic chair position who was tasked with managing the chapter's academics. Gabby recalled that the "academic chair" was "a person who [was] monitoring your academics all the time and holding you accountable to them." She underscored the importance of this role in that poor academic performance could result in chapter suspension which in turn had ramifications for the livelihood of their organization, namely in being able to participate in recruitment activities and orientation which serves as the lifeblood in sustaining the organization, lest they go defunct and disappear.

In most instances the academic chair role was held by one of the active undergraduate members, but in a few instances the position was held by a chapter alumna who had since graduated. Olivia recalled that alumnae academic chairs at her chapter was preferred because the idea of an undergraduate having to manage their own academics plus that of their

peers felt too big a burden. Olivia commented, “if you think about it, an undergrad who does it, who’s checking them?” She continued, “I almost felt like, well, who am I to give advice on an academic plan? I'm not trained to do this.” Alternatively, she opined that alumnae offered advantageous perspectives of those who already graduated and figured out the so-called how-to’s of navigating through academic progress and offered guidance on things to do as well as pitfalls to avoid. The academic program Olivia outlined included regular check-ins throughout the semester so alumnae advisors always had a good gauge on where each of the members stood and thus could suggest when necessary if individuals should cut down on sorority involvement to re-focus on academics.

Professionalism

A key reason cited by participants for joining their LGLO was relative to the professionalism espoused by the organization. This also included the perception that in joining, they too would gain key professional skills. Sofia talked about how her sorority empowered her with tools to succeed in the professional world that she might not have been otherwise taught. For her, the development of professionalism took place through the learning of specific skills, such as how to create a resume, interview, dress professionally for an interview and for work, and engage in email etiquette. From her positionality as a first generation college student, Sofia underscored the importance of learning professionalism from her LGLO: “that whole world of professionalism is not anything that you or your family- that’s not even a conversation.” She continued that her sorority “allowed me to really understand, what is email etiquette? How do you come dressed when in an interview?. . .What is a resume? How do you interview?,” myriad behaviors, knowledge, and skills she summarized as knowing “how to…act professionally.” Ava also talked about professional skills and referred to them as “the basic skills that you need to be able to excel in this American work culture.” For her, that meant “the prioritizing, the planning, the organization, being able to put yourself out there and network and mingle, those type of skills is what I really took out of [membership].” Gladys added to this conversation in saying her sorority helped her learn how to code switch in knowing “what vocabulary are you gonna use in order to talk to certain leaders of an organization or certain offices” versus how you might conduct yourself with friends.

Many participants talked about how these skills were readily transferred to their careers and the world of work. Nancy spoke

extensively about how skills gleaned from her undergraduate experiences in her sorority continue to be applied to her career some 20 years later, such as learning how to "prioritize juggling so many different things" and "managing different personalities, having to work with people who you might not get along with or having to find solutions to problems." Through her experiences in her LGLO, Nancy said she learned both to "work[] with other people, or also being independent and getting something done on your own."

Leadership

Leadership was talked about across virtually all interviews as a benefit gained from LGLO membership, especially the specific skills of project management, time management, public speaking, and teamwork which I parse out below with a bit more detail. Perhaps one of the most fascinating examples of how leadership had a definitive positive outcome is Melinda's story. Melinda's experience is certainly unique in terms of leadership skills learned because shortly after becoming a member of her organization, she stopped out of school for 10 years. Melinda said she leveraged her way through various jobs and careers all the way up to her current role as a chief operating officer based upon the foundation of business skills she felt her sorority taught her. Melinda said,

> I got to learn how to budget things for an organization, budget forms, planning fundraisers, planning out what the semester looks like and planning goals, I got to do presentations. I got to learn what it really meant to network, I didn't even know what networking really was. But the business fundamentals I got from [my sorority] and even when I dropped out I took those skills and I made a pretty good career path for myself even without a college degree. I was doing work that someone with a college degree probably should have been [doing].

Melinda continued that because of those critical learned skills, she was able to continue to level up positions that "even my friends that had degrees they would talk to me like, 'how the hell did you get a director job without a graduate degree?'" Melinda's story highlights the absolute value that her sorority had in affording her important leadership skills that were successfully applied in the absence of a degree.

Project Management.

Leadership was further parsed out within a vector of developing the skill of project management. Project management was conceptualized as that which relates to being organized, multitasking, goal setting, event programming, prioritizing among various competing tasks, and seeing through to their successful completion. Glory said that because of her LGLO "I had to learn how to create events from scratch and see them through fruition." Jimena said, "I'm a great event planner…and I think that really started with [my sorority] and having to throw on all these programs, being able to work under pressure, all those kinds of things from running a chapter on my own."

Participants talked about using project management skills in the application to their academics as well as beyond just the scope of college in applying to jobs, careers, even to personal lives. Ariadna talked about learning project management that "carried on in my real life," skills that continue to present day in "working full-time and having a kid and having a husband and going to school full-time." Ariadna said that learning how to effectively manage projects "was a major help" in her current day to day.

Time Management.

Time management was a highly referenced take-away skill for multiple participants. Claudia said that in becoming a member of her sorority, she quickly learned that there was a delicate balance and juggle of competing interests of hosting lots of events and programs, being in charge of running the organization, having an internship, a part-time job, and managing her academics, and so prioritizing became the name of the game. Claudia opined that membership "showed me how to prioritize what I need to get done first and I learned that having a big load of work doesn't necessarily mean that I'm gonna fail."

Public Speaking.

A number of participants reflected on the importance of being able to take ownership of one's own voice and confidently speak in front of others. Public speaking was developed within the sorority, practiced in hosting programs and events for the campus community, and then further applied within the classroom as well as in various professional settings beyond the undergraduate sphere. Melinda talked about the benefit of learning public speaking which was developed in part because she "had to do programs and events in front of the whole student body, and we're

talking a couple hundred people and I was on stage speaking." Melinda felt that "I would have never been able to do that if I wasn't a part of [my sorority] and I don't think I would have been given the platform to do it." Jimena talked about developing a "love with public speaking" through the various opportunities she was afforded through her sorority. Yara said she learned how to speak publicly which in turn helped her "to articulate myself better in more serious situations" such as when she needed to talk with her professors.

Teamwork.

Another skill within the larger umbrella of leadership was in learning how to work cooperatively with others towards common goals, particularly when folks were from different backgrounds or had varying outlooks. Evelyn attributed her sorority as the conduit for learning how to be adaptable "to different work environments" and in "working with different people." Successful interpersonal skills were especially critical for managing conflict, such as Daniela's example who said that her undergraduate experiences serving in sorority leadership helped her become a problem solver, particularly because "things can get ugly." Daniela felt that developing strong skills of working with others empowered her to learn how to navigate successfully through conflict. Many talked about how this skill applied to coursework and to eventual careers, like Alicia who said that learning to work with others in a team setting was utilized both in her laboratory courses as an undergraduate and now in her job that is team-based in nature.

Connect/Reconnect to Latinidad

The desire to be in spaces with others from similar backgrounds and be among those who "would have similar struggles like having immigrant [parents], being first generation college students, that sort of thing" as Alicia opined, was expressed by a number of participants. For many, this desire to connect with others like themselves was catalyzed by a sense of culture shock they experienced on their college campuses. Claudia talked about the huge culture shock she experienced, particularly as a new transfer student, and after seeking out several potential spaces on campus felt like she finally found her niche in her sorority. She positively viewed her LGLO as being the catalyst for overcoming and mitigating that initial shock.

An even deeper layer of the theme of connecting and reconnecting to Latinidad is represented by those participants who talked about having

been systemically separated from Latinx peers within the sphere of education. Olivia, Noemi, and Lisette all seemed to talk about how prior to college, the higher they were placed within honors and Advanced Placement courses, the further removed they were from their ethnic and cultural peers. They all seemed to conceptualize their LGLOs as a way to reconnect to other Latinas who were also high achieving. Noemi said that her LGLO served as a space where she was able to un-pack her lived experiences of attending predominantly White schools. In a related vein, Blanca opined that her decision to join an LGLO was directly related to her K-12 educational experiences where she was in majority White spaces and often felt Othered for her ethnic identity and experienced alienating microaggressions.

Within this theme of LGLOs as a means to connect and reconnect to cultural heritage and community was a thread linking not knowing how to speak Spanish to a perception of somehow not being Latinx enough. Paula said, "my life was always like, never Spanish enough, but not American enough" but after feeling welcomed by her LGLO finally felt she "had a place somewhere" she belonged and fit. Melinda similarly said, while "I'm Puerto Rican, I don't speak Spanish" and that "not speaking Spanish makes me feel a little disconnected from my heritage." She said this disconnect was what prompted her to seek out LGLOs as a potential conduit she thought might "help me be more connected to my roots." Ariadna also was among this group of women who talked about her Latina identity as a source of questioning from others "cause I couldn't speak Spanish," and that external challenges to her ethnic and racial identities were doubled as an Afro-Latina. Ariadna said that her sorority was a way to connect to her cultures and furthermore validated "that I could be both."

Resilience and Perseverance

Perhaps one of the more powerful themes to come up from participants was an expression of the resilience and perseverance fomented as a direct result of their LGLO membership, particularly in the face of adverse circumstances. Participants talked about learning for the first time in their lives to speak up for themselves, to stand tall (both literally and figuratively), to take ownership of their lives and their trajectories, and as some said, to not take no for an answer. Stories like Sofia's epitomize the notion of their LGLOs teaching them how to be resilient. Sofia talked about how her long held dream of becoming an educator came perilously close to being unrealized when she was in danger of failing the course associated with her internship. Adverse experiences with her mentor

teacher instilled in her a doubt of her capabilities: “she's really making me be like, no this is not what I'm meant to do. Maybe I'm not cut out for this. She really made me doubt my identity.” She continued that this experience so shook her foundation of confidence that she recalled that it is “one of the things that still sticks with me to this day.” Some six years later into a successful and fulfilling teaching career, Sofia is still haunted by those memories that cut her down as an undergraduate. Sofia pointedly said it was her sorority and the lessons she learned from it that helped her persevere in that rather life-defining moment and ultimately prevail: “I feel like [my sorority] taught me to fight for my spot, don't just give up. You're so close to the finish line, use your resources. Figure out what you need to do. You got this.” With this mindset, Sofia “fought for my spot” and found creative working solutions to persevere and overcome. Sofia continued that

> at the end of the day [my sorority] taught me: Don't Give up. Use your resources. Figure out, like, when there's a will there's a way. You can do this. Don't give up. And so I feel like I learned that through the process I definitely was like, I’m a fighter. I'm not just gonna sit here and let you fail me.

A handful of other participants also talked about how their LGLO membership helped them develop a sense of perseverance and resilience. Blanca talked about how “when I felt like giving up it gave me a purpose and a reason to keep pushing.” She continued that this purpose and its related “reason to keep pushing” was the single ”most important factor for me” in graduating. Gladys expressed the sentiment that through the hardship endured in pledging and keeping her chapter alive single-handedly, she adopted a mindset that “if I can get through that experience, I can get through anything.” Alicia talked about the experience of needing to take extra time to earn her diploma than initially anticipated, and how her organization helped her stay motivated and keep her eye on the prize. Similarly, Vero said that when she had to add an extra semester because of a failed course, her organization helped sustain her “to really keep myself pushing.”

Networks

Several participants talked about their LGLOs as a network in being bonded with women through time, space, and distance where the tether was their shared sorority membership. Women who would otherwise be strangers were not because as Nancy said, “we have the

sorority in common." Emilia said that the connection that membership fosters a shared sense of closeness amongst all members in being "connected by this organization" that transcends how similar or different they are. Perhaps no one said it better than Claudia who in talking about the bond amongst women that is kindled through shared membership within the same network spoke about this ability to

> always find people in any chapter, in any area or region, or really anywhere, you're gonna find sisters that are going to motivate you because you have something in common with them, and that's the sorority, that's the organization…You may have come to it for different reasons, you may have had a different journey in coming to it, your story may be so different. You may not even be alike, but because you have [the sorority] as a common ground there's a natural responsibility to want the best for you as a sister.

A subtheme within that network of members who actively want to help each other out is that of connecting one another to job opportunities and helping career growth. Blanca opined unequivocally that her membership afforded her "the power of networking and how it can open doors of opportunities for jobs." She continued that "the first couple of jobs I've ever gotten were through sisters referring me, recommending me, being references." Glory also talked about landing her first job post-graduation because a sister shared her resume with her mother who worked in the same field. Glory said within the larger context of the 2008 recession, her sorority network allowed her a foot in the door to interview whereas nothing else she tried to do on her own came to fruition. Claudia and Ariadna shared very similar experiences of their first jobs post-graduation having been landed because of fellow members within their LGLOs.

For some, membership in their LGLO afforded participants access to a larger network of "Greek Life" (which was almost exclusively referred to by participants as that which is comprised of Black, Latinx, and other multicultural organizations, not mainstream ones). Emilia recalled the interview for her first supervisory position where she was up against a candidate who had the requisite in-field experience. Emilia's experience- though transferable- took place within the scope of her sorority leadership. Emilia recalled saying to the interviewer, "Well I've never supervised at a job, but for my sorority I'm responsible for maintaining four schools in the area, follow protocol, procedure, that they understand expectations, that

they're following mandates with paperwork, I ran down the whole thing." Emilia said that the interviewer was herself a member of a historically Black Greek Letter Organization that there was a shared paradigm of being members within this larger network of Greek Life. This in turn meant there was also a shared understanding that the work and leadership experiences Emilia had through her LGLO were valid, thus netting in her securing the job.

Support

The last key significant theme was that of the support that was beget as a direct result of LGLO membership. Participants talked about feeling supported by their sisters both in accepting and welcoming them for who they were, as well as feeling like others within the organization had "their back" when times were hard (this was a commonly used expression among participants). Ava talked about viewing her sorority as having gained a squad of "ride or dies," a sense of having unconditional support that she feels has been maintained "still up to this day." She said this support was particularly important in the face of alienation on campus where she did not feel she belonged on campus. Ava continued that "because we've always had each other, that feeling never really lasted long." Gabby said her sorority empowered her in "knowing that I had a core group of people who had my back and I wasn't alone." For Gabby, support meant being "around other women who were like myself, the first person to go to college." Sofia also talked support from her sorority in her identity as a first-generation college student. She appreciated being in community with others from similar backgrounds, who were also the first in their family to go to college and who like her did not always fully understand its bureaucracy. Sofia said it was so important to be able to rely on one another for navigating things like FAFSA, financial aid, registration, etc.

Within the larger theme of support felt, some participants talked about feeling particularly supported by their LGLOs when they experienced struggles with their mental health and wellbeing. Olivia recalled experiencing some "pretty serious mental health issues my last semester." She said that it was because of her sorority that fostered a "strong social connection that I had built over the years, there was always someone to be with" which she felt helped her get to the finish line of graduating. Vero went so far as to say she did not believe she would have graduated had it not been for the support she received from her fellow members, particularly when she was struggling with her mental health.

Alicia similarly said that "I went through some mental health stuff and it was really hard. Had I not had the support that I got from sisters that I was particularly close with, maybe I wouldn't have made it through those dark times." Blanca also talked about "the sense of community" and support from her sorority when "I struggled with depression in college."

This sense of support is one that a handful of participants felt was a community that they continued to depend on well beyond the undergraduate experience, particularly for participants who became members of their organizations 10+ years ago. Glory talked of the continued support gleaned from her organization as having compounded over time, and mostly through the lens of family-like relationships where her sorority sisters were "tias" to her children. Emilia also talked about the staying power of support from her organization through various life chapters and phases. Emilia reflected in thinking about "the way that I have had people literally have my back" through "the things that life throws at you that you just don't expect."

Membership Drawbacks

In reflecting on the ways in which participants felt their LGLO membership was not beneficial, a clear theme of pressure emerged across interviews. In fact, the challenges that were discussed centered almost exclusively around a sense of pressure felt. Pressure manifested in a number of different ways and included the pressure caused in not having enough members; a sense of having to invest everything into one's organization; alumnae pressures via expectations to perform while simultaneously not having enough alumnae support; the perception of needing to be excellent; pressure from the national organization; and pressure from the university, namely through unsupportive OFSLs. The consequences of the pressure in all its iterations largely resulted in negative impact on one's academics and missed opportunities, as well as a sense of acute burnout that required stepping back or away.

Too Few Members

Participants talked about the structural pressure that was specifically brought about in not having enough active undergraduate members. Pressure resulted because expectations were not necessarily tempered to take into consideration chapters or organizations with lower member numbers, and individuals expressed the hardship of having to divvy up the same amount of work among less people which resulted in a heavy lift for all. Lisette talked about the pressure of having to perform at

a high level in that "it was stressful trying to do everything with being a smaller chapter and also trying to survive." Alicia alluded to a similar necessity in that immediately upon becoming a member of her organization, there was a need to "hit the ground running" in taking "on multiple different leadership positions within the chapter….because there just wasn't enough of us." Aracely recalled that as an undergraduate she and her chapter sisters "had three positions a piece…we were carrying the chapter by ourselves for two years." Paula likewise talked about "the workload of running" a chapter that in terms of membership had "smaller numbers compared to others." She continued that the pressure "to keep the chapter alive" with so few members meant that "sometimes chapter business overtook my school priorities." Gladys also talked about the pressure of being one of two or at times the sole member to hold down the chapter and having to complete various requirements. As a transfer student, she had to do this twice: once at the chapter she founded at her first college, and then all over again at the institution from which she earned her degree. Gladys talked about the pressure of having to do it all on her own and with limited funding and resources to boot.

Need to Invest All

The pressure created because of having only a few members to manage the chapter relates directly to a linked subtheme of participants who felt like they had to pour their whole selves into the maintenance and survival of their organization via their chapter. Jimena's story particularly exemplifies this notion of an internalized pressure of feeling compelled to devote one's entirety into the organization, even if it was to the detriment or outright sacrifice of academics (which is counter to the very espoused purposes of these organizations as all claim being ones where academics are prioritized). As the sole active undergraduate on her campus, Jimena talked about the blood, sweat, and tears that she invested in trying to uphold the chapter all by herself, one that she herself established as a solo founder. She pointedly recalled a session with her therapist in which she was asked, "do you want to graduate or do you want your chapter to survive" and without a hesitation Jimena immediately responded: "my chapter." Jimena talked about harboring very mixed feelings about her undergraduate experience and said "I still am very proud of what it means to be a member, but I burned myself out." When asked to further expound upon why Jimena thought she was driven to a point where she reflexively articulated that she was more invested in the survival of her chapter at the expense of her academics, she answered that her LGLO "was my legacy."

She continued that "who I was became very entwined with my letters and what I represented on campus" where she was not just Jimena but "part of something bigger."

Gladys' story was parallel to Jimena's in a number of ways in that she also was a founder for her chapter, establishing it where her organization did not yet exist at that college. Gladys was one of two founding members, but when she transferred schools, she found herself as the sole member and thus all on her own in needing to lay the groundwork all over again in establishing a chapter there, as well. Gladys talked about having little support with the closest nearby sisters being in New York while she was in Pennsylvania. She recalled, "I didn't have anybody near me." Like Jimena, Gladys talked about prioritizing the chapter above her academics and even her wellbeing at times. When asked why she thought she did that and felt that carrying the chapter was so vital, Gladys said that in pledging "she made a commitment" to her organization. Similar to Jimena who lamented joining an organization for the purpose of having community and then feeling cheated that her undergraduate experience really did not really consist of that, Gladys also said that she desired and felt she missed out on "that sisterly type of bond." She often felt lonely "cause I didn't have anybody around, and that really, it sucked."

Alumnae Pressure

Another iteration of the pressure felt by participants was expressed as having come from within the chapter itself, particularly from alumnae members who had since graduated. The relationships with alumnae certainly seems complicated. Some participants stated pointedly that they joined their organizations because of the alumnae and what they represented as potential mentors and teachers. However, there was also a very real expression by participants who talked about alumnae being involved in their undergraduate chapters to such a degree that there was a perception of being held to their expectations of excellence and needing to perform at a level which at times felt overbearing or hard to live up to. Daniela reflected particularly from the vantage point of having served as the president of her chapter and having to navigate the pressures of alumnae who regularly voiced their opinions on how they felt the chapter should be managed.

Another way in which alumnae were perceived to be unhelpful and adding pressure was through a lack of constructive support, or not being there at all. Lisette spoke frankly about a lack of support she felt from her alumnae sisters in that "a majority of our alum at the time were

more critical. So they weren't really providing support but they would say, 'you did this wrong,' or 'why didn't you do this,'...so the support was very limited." Paula reflected on a similar sentiment in feeling like alumnae solely offered criticism when they felt like the undergraduates erred, that alumnae were "quick that if something went wrong, they were so quick to be like, '[Undergrads], how did you let this happen?' and it's like, well, we're handling so many other things. We ask for your help but we barely get it."

Internalized Pressure to be Excellent

A somewhat more nebulous permutation of pressure felt was an internalized sense of a perceived expectation to be excellent. Some said these expectations started well before college and began within their families in how they were raised, like Alicia who talked about familial values that prioritized academic excellence. Alicia talked about "coming from a Latina background" where "there wasn't room for mistakes, you had to be perfect, you have to put your best foot forward." Alicia said "that there's a perfectionism that is expected, and anything less is like, 'oh you're a bad daughter,' or 'you're a bad student.'" She continued that this unrealistic ideal of "always hav[ing] to have this perfect image" compels one "to put on a show"..."even if things are not perfect."

Gabby talked about a slightly different sense of internalized expectation from her family, that of the "pressure being the only person in my family to go to college" where she "had to be excellent." She connected this expectation of excellence as also represented within her organization that likewise "demands excellence and exceptionalism." She continued that this expectation at times insists upon "being excellent and exceptional without recognizing the human that is going through it." Gabby said that this pressure in part came from the expectations of feeling like she had to represent her organization at all times, regardless of if she was wearing her letters or not. Sofia also talked about internalized expectations of feeling the need to represent the Latinx community well vis-a-vis her sorority and to strive for excellence because of that. In the absence of other LGLOs on campus when she was an undergraduate Sofia said, "at that time we were like, we wanna be the best, we wanna strive for gold. We wanna make sure we are top notch and that really helped push us." Emilia talked about a very similar internalized sense of expectation that came from being the first multicultural Greek lettered organization on her campus. She said there was an expectation and responsibility for the future sisters of this chapter she was seeking to establish as a founding member, as well as an

internalized sense of responsibility to other future Greeks that would come after her.

Pressure from the Overarching Organization

Beyond the micro layer of pressure from one's individual chapter, many talked about pressure that came from their larger organization from a top-down perspective. Some talked about how "nationals" or "HQ" (as they were variously referred to) were perceived as being rather out of touch with the happenings and challenges on the local chapter level. Daniela said that she felt her organization at the national level focused solely on "business, business, business" to the detriment of other aspects like the "sisterhood" and academics. She felt that this "emphasis" on business prioritized "national deadlines getting met" above all else. Paula understood the prioritization of business from the national perspective for the livelihood of the organization, but questioned, "how are we supporting our members fully to also be college students?" She continued that "running a chapter is like a business and it's hard." Daniela was particularly critical of the overarching organization sharing her belief that "they want sisters to have better grades and they want them to have an academic wellness plan and they want them to be involved in [the sorority]" but that the sorority "relies on sisters to basically figure out your academics on your own." Daniela continued that "even though one of the first things we're told is [our sorority] was based as an academic sorority, where? I don't see emphasis on any academics, I don't see any proper help." She opined that having a top-down national program or system for academic success and accountability is necessary but lacking.

Sometimes pressure from the overarching LGLO was expressed through a pressure or outright mandate to host orientation to bring in new members. Maite talked about having been told by the overarching national organization that her chapter needed to have back-to-back semesters of orientation in order to maintain good standing with regard to a required minimum number of active undergraduate members. She felt that because her chapter was navigating through growing pains that they were not well positioned to do so, but they were required to comply. Similarly, Samantha also talked about her chapter having been mandated to host a line "or you're gonna lose your chapter charter," she recalled. Samantha talked about how disappointing it was to not have their national organization advocate for them. In the absence of support, Samantha said they were forced to host "five lines back to back to back because of needing active members." She recalled that "we didn't feel like we're ready to go on line,

but at this point we needed numbers and I will say they are great sisters but they weren't really ready."

In another vein, Samantha talked about the strains she experienced as an undergraduate because as a national entity the organization does not "have enough time or manpower to check in on every single chapter." She said this is particularly challenging when so many chapters have unique needs and "need extra attention." Emilia acknowledged that these pressures are in large part due to a lack of sufficient infrastructure and "internal support" as a result of the relative youth of these organizations as compared to others that have been around for much longer: "we're still really new, we haven't been around hundreds of years, we don't have access to financial resources like other orgs do, we don't have access to alumni networks like other orgs do." She continued that the lack of an extensive alumnae network often results in relying on leaders to drive forward the organization who are barely out of college themselves.

Pressure from University

Yet another form of pressure was derived from the university, particularly as manifested through the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life (OFSL). OFSLs are charged with being a resource and support for managing the various Greek letter organizations on a particular campus, but some participants talked about the challenging relationships they had with their OFSLs. Isabela, Fernanda, and Nayeli's stories taken together offer great insight into this perspective of pressure experienced from one's university.

Isabela said the challenges began in having a revolving door of OFSL staffers, many of whom had little to no knowledge of the unique particularities of non-mainstream Greek organizations like her own. Isabela continued to say this was a huge burden on her organization in making "them struggle even more because now we're trying to prove ourselves on campus…we had to constantly be educating other people."

Isabela's linesister Nayeli spoke in her interview of feeling taken advantage of and tokenized by the OFSL and university at large. Nayeli felt that her institution used her sorority as proof that they were a diverse and inclusive campus but without actually doing any of the work of helping to support them to thrive. Nayeli said that overall she and her linesisters felt a burden of being "'the Latinas on campus' [pantomimes air quotes], that was our label…they tried to give us…the burden of educating people on diversity and inclusion and cultural sensitivity and cultural competence and cultural humility and cultures." Nayeli continued

that the OFSL would often volunteer her organization for various DEI initiatives and she felt they "had to bear the responsibility to educate these people as to what we do, as to who we are… it was an added burden like, 'Okay, now educate everyone at [university] as to what diversity is.'" Without a doubt, these are certainly embarrassing examples of institutions using students of color to tick a box to demonstrate performative diversity without putting in actual work toward the ends of promoting and supporting inclusion and equity while also placing the burden on students to do that work.

Fernanda talked about learning that there were very specific discrepancies as it related to money and funding between her LGLO and mainstream historically White organizations. She said that relative to students of color it seemed "there was always a lack of [money] when it came to events" that they wanted to host. Fernanda said she recalled that when they "would come up and advocate for themselves, there was always a backlash because of the way that the staff perceived them advocating for themselves when it came to funding." Because of her unique position of being the president of the council that oversaw the various multicultural organizations plus having an insider within the college that allowed her "access to knowing how much everybody else was getting funding," Fernanda learned the true extent of the funding discrepancies by organization in that her and other multicultural organizations received far less funding than the historically White Greek letter organizations.

In addition, incentives were skewed to favoring organizations that boasted more members (which tended to also be the mainstream White organizations). Within the "points packet" requirements that served as a standard from the OFSL for the Greek organizations within their purview to be measured as a way of assessing performance, organizations were often rewarded when they surpassed the set standards, notably by being awarded with extra funding. This is a hard system to excel in as a chapter of five active members going up against organizations that boast 50+ active members, where larger organizations clearly have advantages in winning coveted extra funding. Fernanda readily recognized that members of those organizations "were able to do a lot more stuff because they had a pool for …members," and that metrics and incentives that were tied to rewarding more populous organizations was an inherently unfair system.

Maite also talked extensively about the lack of support she received from the OFSL at her institution when she was an undergraduate. Similar to Fernanda, Maite had friends who were members of mainstream organizations and was able to see the discrepancy in treatment and

resources allocated. Additionally, Maite recalled that whereas her ideas on behalf of her LGLO seemed to be routinely dismissed or rejected, "my friends from IFC and Panhellenic…their ideas weren't shut down because the system was made for them and they had the resources *because* of that." She attributed this to a desire on the part of the OFSL "to make us fit in that system that clearly wasn't working."

Ramifications of Pressure

As a result of the varying iterations of pressure felt through LGLO membership, two main consequences were discussed by participants. First, that pressure caused a negative impact on academics and often precluded pursuing opportunities outside of membership, like other co-curricular involvement, internships, and study abroad experiences. Second, sustained pressure caused a burnout so intense that many participants talked about having to step away from their organizations for an extended period of time in order to prioritize their wellbeing and health.

Impact on Academics and Other Opportunities.

Gladys attributed her trying to do it all by herself as definitely having had an impact on her overall academics, her course performance and grades, and ultimately extended the time it took for her to graduate. She also talked about how she feels like she missed out on a number of quintessentially collegiate experiences because she was so singularly focused on maintaining her chapter. Gladys said these missed opportunities included substantive involvement in other on-campus organizations, pursuing internships, and engaging in study abroad which she recalled she "was too involved in the organization to even put forth the effort to apply." Nancy similarly talked about how if there are regrets she has, they are related to opportunities she was not able to pursue because of the heavy lift of managing her chapter. Paula reflected that the hardship of "struggling sometimes academically" due to prioritizing chapter business was at times difficult for her to reconcile being part of "an academic sorority."

Emilia spoke from the perspective as a long-time alumna advisor to her undergraduate chapter and having seen the negative impact that pressures for involvement had relative to members' academics. Emilia said acknowledging the very real pressure to perform has influenced the ways in which she mentors her chapter undergraduates in emphasizing the

absolute priority of school, even if that is to the direct detriment of the chapter she herself founded:

> Many times I've told my own undergrads and my chapter, let the chapter go, let it go, let it go, because [the sorority] is not gonna give you your degree and they're not gonna give you a job or a career. They only help, [the sorority] helps you, supports you, connects you, but at the end of the day if it's between you failing and you getting some kind of chapter award, I don't care about that chapter award. I need you to be a success, because at the end of the day that's what we founded this chapter for, was for your success…And it's a hard place to come from as a founder, like no one wants to ever say, 'don't keep my chapter running.' But I know that you have to put yourself in focus, and school is your job. You came to this university for a reason, many times with other people's dreams on yours, on your success. So yes [the sorority] is here and yes we started this chapter for people just like you and yes I want you to be successful and yes I want you to have a network…and I want you to experience all of the things but I need you to remember what your job is…it is to graduate.

Emilia concluded that "at the end of the day you are one person and you can't sacrifice your academic career for the success of this chapter."

Burnout and Disengagement.

Related to pressure from various forms and iterations, some participants talked about having experienced such an acute sense of burnout that they needed to step away from the organization altogether to rest. Ariadna talked about how she often saw burnout among chapter sisters, and recalled a linesister who stepped back in her final semester before graduation to focus on finishing strong which she felt "was completely understandable because you've been under this pressure for so long." Ariadna believed that burnout was almost inevitable, especially if you joined the organization early on in college and said "the younger that you join, the more quickly you get burned out." This belief also colored the way in which she mentored younger chapter sisters in essentially giving them permission to prioritize their academics by stepping back if they needed to, mostly because this was not a message she felt she herself had received. Ariadna recalled advising them, "you might not wanna be active at some point and that's okay because you started when you were so young, you're going to get tired quick."

Jimena talked about needing time to heal from her undergraduate experience and did so by stepping away from her organization after graduation. She said, “it's been almost 10 years and I think I still have a little bit of bitterness about it.” Jimena has since reconciled her undergraduate experience in making new memories and new experiences as an alumna, but it seems like her healing process is ongoing. Gladys also talked about experiencing burnout after her undergraduate experiences of investing her all into trying to maintain her chapter singlehandedly. Her efforts and sacrifices resulted in feeling exhausted and lonely, and she felt she needed to take a break after graduation. Nancy similarly talked about stepping away from her organization, in her case for nearly 20 years before coming back to help her undergraduate chapter get back in active standing in supporting a long anticipated revival line. Her chapter continues to be active now, but she talked about it being a constant struggle to stay in good standing because of myriad requirements and continued challenges. Ava voiced a similar perspective of being so tired from the grueling years of her undergraduate experience that she needed to step away before she felt comfortable coming back to be engaged and involved in her organization again. Vero, too, recalled that shortly after graduating that “I was burned out, I don’t have the capacity to do this.”

DISCUSSION

Recommendations for Practice and Policy *Reevaluation Within OFSLs*

One of the most logical and necessary first-step recommendations is that university Offices of Fraternity and Sorority Life reevaluate their current policies, processes, procedures, and practices relative to the LGLOs they are charged with supporting on their respective campuses. As Garcia (2020) wrote relative to her study on Latinx belongingness at PWIs, “institutions should carefully consider whether ethnic-based organizations including Latina/o sororities and fraternities are provided supports necessary to ensure these groups not only exist on campus, but that they can thrive” (p. 191). Delgado-Guerrero and Gloria (2013) similarly wrote that “institutions should welcome Latina-based sororities into the university environment as legitimate and of equal stature with other student groups” (pp. 375-376). Participants in this study represent five distinct LGLOs, and while all talked about the invaluable benefits, nearly all also talked about the pressure they felt via membership, some to the point of burnout that necessitated stepping away to restore and heal. Participants in my study demonstrably shared that necessary supports were not provided on their college campuses, and a few explicitly discussed

understanding that their organizations were not just given inadequate support, but were given diametrically less than mainstream organizations. LGLOs do not and will not (in the immediate future, anyway) have members on campus in the hundreds like their historically White counterparts (nor do they seem to desire this, as articulated in Estrada et al.'s (2017) study). Accordingly, OFSLs must pay special attention to assessing the ways in which they support or fail to attend to "the needs of multicultural Greeks [that] are very different than those of traditional mainstream Greek organizations" with respect to "governance structure, recruitment of prospective members, the membership intake/educational process for initiates" (Guardia & Evans, 2008, p. 178). These unique aspects should be taken into consideration when making recommendations and mandates for its members to ensure that a one-size-fits-all standard is not employed.

This study can certainly serve as a starting block for universities and OFSLs, specifically, to consider: what do we know about LGLOs and how are their needs the same and/or unique from mainstream organizations? Ultimately, it would behoove offices to engage in formalized evaluation processes to consider what the unique needs of LGLOs are, and how those are currently being met or not. Evaluation should include areas in which LGLO members feel are strengths as well as areas of challenge and pain. Just as colleges and universities submit to regular assessment through accreditation processes to ensure what they are doing aligns with their stated mission, purpose, etc., so should be expected of OFSLs. It was a striking revelation that the stories of participants who became members of their LGLOs 20 some years ago recounted nearly identical stories to those relatively newer members from four years ago in terms of challenges faced. This finding suggests there have not been any substantive reevaluations within OFSLs especially as it relates to support and resources allocated to LGLOs. Participants from this study do not necessarily seem to be advocating for a blanket abolishing of standardized practices for assessment, but rather an opportunity to revisit expectations to allow for "some leniency" as opined by Isabela who felt that standards helped chapters excel, grow, and advance. She felt that standards were a good source of accountability, but that it was important for these standards to be created in a way that took into consideration that each campus and organization is unique and "different so they can't be held to the same standard."

Given the diverse needs of LGLOs, specifically, applying a one-size-fits-all model of benchmarks for all Greek organizations to adhere to

does not work. Greater nuance is required to promote the success of all students where equity, not equality, is the goal. A call for developing new standards that are culturally-specific and culturally-embracing and validating will be necessary. In the creation of these standards, LGLOs and their national overarching leadership bodies should be invited to participate in a co-constructive process done together and not for them and then imposed onto them.

Reevaluation within LGLOs

LGLOs from the perspective of the larger organization would also stand to benefit from engaging in similar evaluation practices as was suggested for OFSLs. Despite time and space, members of their organizations are reporting almost identical stories relative to pressure felt that is engendered by expectations of having to perform despite having very few members to rely on, or feeling like academics is not actually prioritized in truly meaningful ways from a national perspective. This suggests a misalignment of values with which formalized processes of evaluation can certainly assist. Such an evaluation should consider, what is it that organizations say they prioritize, and what are they actually prioritizing in practice and allocating resources towards through actions and policies? The participants in this study suggest an incongruence, of a focus on business at the expense of sisterhood and academics which should serve as a jumping-off point for organizations to engage in meaningful evaluations of where they are at and charting out their futures via visioning.

Specific to the focus of this particular inquiry and based on participant commentary, there is a suggestion that LGLOs would do well to include in their evaluation processes considerations on how to establish and better support top-down academic programs and initiatives. Those participants who reported on robust academic programs all said those were locally created and maintained, that nothing of substance came from the overarching organization other than a standard for minimum GPA requirements (which, it is worth noting, several participants talked about those being inadequate or easy to achieve and thus implemented their own). Both the participants whose chapter had local-level academic programs and those who did not said they felt their overarching organization should have more meaningful involvement in supporting academic initiatives rather than expecting individual chapters to manage this on their own. In this way, LGLOs should in their evaluation processes pay close attention to their current practices and resources around academic support, specifically.

Recommendations for LGLOs to Move Forward

In addition to the recommendation that both OFSLs and the larger structures of LGLOs engage in much needed reevaluation, a number of other recommendations should be considered for the vitality and continued existence of LGLOs. As such, I have outlined a handful of recommendations on how to move forward toward a stronger future. These include connecting with or fortifying partnerships with existing university resources on college; considering options of consolidation namely through metropolitan chapters; and evaluating the true value of continued partnership with universities that are unable or unwilling to adequately support these organizations.

As part of the interviews, participants were asked about support and resources they felt positively contributed to their academic journeys and the process of graduating that were external to their LGLOs. A whole swath of amazing feedback came up, and across interviews clear patterns emerged including: pre-matriculation summer orientation programs that were tailored to minority, low-SES, and first generation college status students; minority mentorship programs that partnered participants with near peers and in some cases faculty and staff of color; key faculty relationships largely within one's major or field of study; campus academic resources like Writing Centers and Tutoring Centers; and cultural resource centers like those for students of color and occasionally for Latinx students specifically. These findings suggest that LGLOs and universities would do well to create new partnerships therein or fortify existing relationships for the ultimate benefit of Latinx students.

Another low-risk solution to help fortify existing LGLO chapters, particularly where there are habitually low member numbers and/or known campus obstacles, might be to partner within the organization, namely through metropolitan chapters. Metropolitan chapters seem like a viable example of how LGLOs can promote better long term outcomes of partnering, especially in spaces and campuses where there are low numbers of ethnic and racial minority students in general and low numbers of Latinx students specifically where recruitment of new members can be challenging. This is a practice that several historically Black National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) organizations engage in, especially in geographic areas and colleges where campus demographics, enrollments, and support structures are not strong and might hinder chapter success. It offers an ability to partner together to divide the work and weight of carrying a chapter so they can continue to exist and serve as a positive

helpful space and community for those who might most need it and benefit. These kinds of chapters could help continue the longevity of the organization especially where support is limited or non-existent.

In the event that OFSLs are unable or unwilling to re-evaluate their practices in meaningful ways that help to offset or otherwise eliminate the pressure that is experienced by undergraduate members, LGLOs should begin to consider redefining their relationships with their university hosts. Namely, if their host colleges and universities are not willing to relook at and genuinely revise practices that result in real pressure on LGLO members that LGLOs in turn replicate in order to maintain active charters to continue to exist on those campuses (a burden that is most heavily carried by the undergraduates), these organizations should reevaluate the pros and cons of maintaining this tenuous partnership. I recognize that this is a seemingly radical recommendation and one that is likely to be outside the limits of what would ever be reasonably considered as a first, second, or third solution by LGLOs. However, given the current landscape of higher education and the continued calls for the abolishment of Greek Life as a supposed increasingly outdated vestige of college life, coupled with the real threats to culturally-specific subspaces as a result of the present day persecution and elimination of DEI objectives nationwide, LGLOs would be wise to proactively consider a reality in which Greek Life (particularly multicultural Greek Life) ceases to exist on college campuses in the ways we currently understand them. Insofar as LGLOs maintain that they are diametrically distinct from mainstream organizations in their purpose, mission, values, and outcomes, it might make sense to proactively and officially separate from universities and consider other ways to fortify them from within their existing organization structures while building new ones to still be in service to their original missions of providing support, resources, and community for Latina college students.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study marks the start of what should continue as critical investigation and inquiry within the larger conversation of LGLOs. This study would do well to be offset by future ones from additional qualitative as well as complementary quantitative paradigms to investigate and further substantiate their value. This includes but is not limited to longitudinal studies following members over an extended period of time; comparative studies like those that might compare the experiences of individuals who became members of their LGLOs during their

undergraduate experiences versus those who gained membership post-baccalaureate degree conferral; studies from a specifically systems or organizational theory orientation (particularly as it relates to the LGLOs through the lens of their overarching, national entities and the OFSLs that host them on campuses); and studies that offer more robust and varied representation of several LGLOs as well as institution types in the Mid-Atlantic beyond Predominantly White Institutions such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic Serving Institutions. Potential future inquiries that seek out these specific perspectives would be crucial in adding to the robustness of legitimizing the true value of LGLOs.

LIMITATIONS

There are a number of limitations in this inquiry. As with any study, we only know as much as participants are willing to share with us, and there is a real limitation in not knowing the stories of those who did not want to participate. While the majority of participants talked about the majority positive benefits gained from their membership and seemed open and honest about the real drawbacks and limitations, perhaps we do not know the full extent of the story that might have been furnished from individuals for whom they do not feel LGLO membership was beneficial-academically or otherwise. Additional for consideration is my positionality as a cultural insider on two points: that of being a Latina-identified woman and member of an LGLO. I viewed these memberships as a value add in this study on the grounds of increased insider cultural understanding, but can also be viewed understandably as a limitation. Time and, relatedly, the number of participants involved in this research inquiry were also limitations. Ideally, numerous accounts of Latina-identified women who are members of various LGLOs would take part in constructing a narrative around the experiences of the academic skills, behaviors, and opportunities fostered in relation to their LGLO membership. In a perfect study this would include women from multiple LGLOs from all across the country who went to varying institutional types and represent different statuses in relation to immigration status and race (which too often is incorrectly conflated with ethnicity or assumed that all Latinx people share similar racial experiences). There is great plurality that exists within this subgroup of Latina LGLO members and much could be gleaned from additional inquiries to supplement this one which was most concerned with producing depth and rich, thick description.

CONCLUSION

The perspectives of the 28 participants that make up this study corroborate the value of LGLO membership relative to their academic experiences in college. Previous literature about LGLOs include the findings that within its members LGLOs help foster a critical sense of belonging and mattering in the face of marginalization, isolation, and alienation on college campuses; they promote the development of leadership skills and professionalism; they inculcate a sense of responsibility, civic engagement and service to the community; and they foster academic achievement, all of which is infused by strong underpinnings of familismo. Through a narrative inquiry methodology, the participants' counter stories were collected and re-presented to convey the themes that emerged about experiences and benefits that extended well beyond the realm of college achievement and success. The benefits they talked about were principally around academics, accountability, leadership, an ability and opportunity to connect and reconnect to Latinidad, resilience and perseverance, networks, and support. Their stories are tempered by accounts of membership drawbacks that are largely couched within an overarching theme of pressure. This includes: the pressure from having too few members, a felt need to invest their all into their organizations, alumnae pressure, internalized pressure, pressure from the overarching organization, and from their universities. Participants also talked about the ramifications of these various iterations of pressure which largely resulted in adverse impacts on academics and the ability to seek out other opportunities, as well as in the development of a sense of burnout and disengagement.

These findings are best viewed and contextualized from within a CRT lens which affords a macro investigation and interrogation of the power structures that foster the conditions for the necessity of LGLOs and serve to undermine their continued existence. This inquiry should serve as a catalyst for the necessary reevaluation of practices and policies within universities, namely within the Offices of Fraternity and Sorority Life that are charged with supporting LGLOs, as well as within the larger structures and organizational bodies of the LGLOs themselves. It should also be a jumping off point for future academic inquiries about LGLOs within the overarching examination into Latinx college student success.

The reality of increasing Latinx representation within the landscape of college enrollment seems to be a new constant, and institutions would be wise to assess where success and challenges are with regard to the achievement of their Latinx students. I believe this study

taken within the larger literature can serve as validation that LGLOs do indeed help support students in their achievement and success within their undergraduate careers and beyond, while also taking into account the challenges they present. It is not enough that universities simply let these minoritized spaces exist. Institutions have a responsibility to help them do well by offering genuine support and endeavoring to reduce barriers and obstacles for success.

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"At the End of the Day…the System Should Be Supporting": Latina Undergraduates Share How Higher Education Professionals Can Support their Success

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ABSTRACT

In this study grounded in a LatCrit framework, 11 Latina undergraduates at a Predominantly White Institution in the Western U.S. share the systemic institutional barriers inhibiting their abilities to reach their goals and graduate from college. Through their testimonios, they revealed challenges navigating their higher education institution, including lack of validation, racism, and discrimination. They also share potential solutions to support them as they navigate higher education, including bolstering sense of belonging through affinity groups, validation from faculty & staff, and recognizing their labor to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. By listening to Latina undergraduates, higher education professionals can be encouraged to develop more equitable and culturally enhancing practices that support Latina undergraduates in navigating higher education and reaching their goals.

Keywords: Latina undergraduates, LatCrit, sense of belonging, student success, testimonio, validation

INTRODUCTION

Over recent decades, the enrollment of Latinas in higher education has grown and continues to do so (Espinosa et al., 2019). To navigate higher education, Latina undergraduates draw on their family and community support and their own resilience and persistence (Acevedo et al., 2021; Aragon, 2018; Kiyama, 2018; Liou et al., 2023). In addition to graduating from college, many Latinas aim to honor family sacrifices, serve as role models, and give back to their communities (Conchas & Acevedo, 2020; Corona et al., 2016; Storlie et al., 2016). However, at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), Latina undergraduates encounter challenges, including racially hostile environments with microaggressions and dismissal of their cultural knowledge (Acevedo et al., 2021; Perez Huber et al., 2023; McCabe, 2009; Yosso et al., 2009), leading to feelings of non-acceptance, marginalization, isolation, stress, and depression (Arbona & Jimenez, 2014; Von Robertson et al., 2016; Thornhill et al., 2023).

To better understand the systemic barriers preventing Latina undergraduates at PWIs from achieving their goals, I asked 11 Latina undergraduates to share their *testimonios* detailing the challenges they faced at their institution that were inhibiting their abilities to thrive. Grounded in a LatCrit framework, I centered the voices of Latina undergraduates in this study and asked them to share how they believe their PWI can better support them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many Latinas aspire to attend college, yet only 18.5% have completed a bachelor's degree or higher (Espinosa et al., 2019). Several researchers have documented how Latina undergraduates still face unique challenges in college, including racially hostile campus environments and a misunderstanding of their cultural values, which create barriers to completing their college degrees (Carales & Nora, 2020; Garriott et al., 2019; Liou et al., 2023; Rodriguez et al., 2022). At PWIs, Whiteness embeds itself in the institutional structures, creating an environment where Latinas do not feel safe, welcomed, or comfortable at their institution (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2022; Gusa, 2010; Perez Huber et al., 2023; Yosso et al.,2009).

Furthermore, Latinas experience interpersonal and institutional racial microaggressions, which question their academic abilities, demean their ethnic identities, and dismiss their cultural knowledge (Perez Huber et al., 2023; McCabe, 2009; Yosso et al., 2009). These experiences have an adverse impact on Latinas' sense of belonging, well-being, and academic success (Arbona & Jimenez, 2014; Carales & Nora, 2020; Thornhill et al., 2023). Thus, it is important to further investigate the experiences of Latinas at PWIs and what is hindering them from

thriving in these institutions, as well as the ways in which they believe their PWIs can better support them.

Latinas experience oppression at the intersection of their race, ethnicity, and gender in the college environment (Acevedo et al., 2021). Traditional Latina gender roles complicate the Latina undergraduate experience in higher education. The concept of *marianismo*, which emphasizes that Latinas are spiritually superior to men, humble, submissive to the demands of men, are to make sacrifices for their families, and are expected to embody the characteristics of the Virgin Mary, shapes Latina gender roles (Castillo et al., 2010). As such, during college, Latinas may experience dissonance created by their families' pressure to adhere to traditional gender roles and obtain an education (Torres et al., 2019). Additionally, Latinas are more likely than Latinos to mention gender as an issue of inequality in the U.S. (Conchas & Acevedo, 2020). For example, Latina undergraduates were more likely than their Latino counterparts to share how they anticipated many barriers and challenges to college, including a lack of resources, lack of peer and family support, and systemic barriers to completing higher education (McWhirter et al., 2013). As a result of their multiple marginalized identities, Latina undergraduates report being viewed as docile, hypersexualized, lacking goals, and not capable of academic success (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2020; Kiyama, 2018; McCabe, 2009). These stereotypes are often held by their faculty and peers, who have low expectations for them (Acevedo et al., 2021; Deeb-Sossa et al., 2022; Rodriguez et al., 2022). Latina undergraduates explained how gendered racial microaggressions contributed to feeling unsafe, disrespected, isolated, and excluded (Garriott et al., 2019; Liou et al., 2023; Rodriguez et al., 2022). Furthermore, researchers found Latina undergraduates internalized stereotypes about themselves, contributing to self-doubt (Arbona & Jimenez, 2014; Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2020).

Many higher education professionals continue to view Latinas from a deficit perspective (Ching, 2022; Liou et al., 2023). Ching (2022) found even faculty who did not outwardly discriminate against Latinas still believed they were academically underprepared for college. Furthermore, when Latinas enter college, they navigate two incongruent worlds: their Latine culture and community and their college (Thornhill et al., 2022; Triana et al., 2020). This collision is pronounced at PWIs, where there is an increased lack of understanding of Latine culture, values, and experiences (Torres et al., 2019). Latinas attending PWIs often feel forced to adopt White American norms and values, such as competition, independence, individualism, and worldliness, to succeed in college (Cano & Castillo, 2010; Castillo et al., 2015). Latine values, which emphasize *familismo*, the importance of and loyalty to family, and *comunidad,* which emphasizes collectivism, collide with White American values at PWIs (Castellanos & Gloria,

2007; Triana et al., 2020). Latinas adapting to a higher education environment that does not align with their values can cause distress (Castillo et al., 2015; Mayorga et al., 2018). While previous researchers have suggested infusing Latine values into curriculum and pedagogy, there needs to be more research to understand how faculty and staff are integrating these perspectives.

To cope with challenges at college, Latinas embrace their identities and see them as strengths, such as lessons learned from home, their cultural values, and being bilingual (Conchas & Acevedo, 2020). In particular, they draw from *familismo* by valuing the role their families have in their education, and they gain strength from their support (Matos, 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2013). Latinas are motivated to pursue higher education because of their parents' advice and stories of how they could not complete their own education (Aragon, 2018; Matos, 2015). Additionally, Latinas report being motivated to persist in college because they wanted to set an example for younger family members (Kiyama, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2013). Latinas also attributed their ability to cope with discrimination while attending PWIs to their commitment to *familismo* (Sanchez et al., 2018). Additionally, Latinas embrace communities at their higher education institutions that adopt aspects of *familismo*, honor and celebrate Latine culture, and provide access to resources and networks that assist with navigating college (Liou et al., 2023; Lopez et al., 2019; Matos, 2015).

Furthermore, Latinas take a planned and active approach to learning about resources to successfully navigate their college (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). They also seek out community with other Latinas. Liou et al. (2023) found Latinas supported one another in resisting racial and gender discrimination at their institution. When connecting with others with similar experiences, Latinas experience microaffirmations, which Perez Huber et al. (2021) defined as "the subtle verbal or non-verbal strategies People of Color engage that affirm each other's dignity, integrity, and shared humanity (p. 5). Racial microaffirmations are a protective response to microaggressions that make Latinas feel heard and seen, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging (Perez Huber et al., 2021).

Researchers have highlighted the importance of affinity groups in supporting Latinas at PWIs (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Lopez et al., 2019; Lucero et al., 2017). These groups, which celebrate and value Latine cultural assets, enhance Latinas' sense of belonging (Garcia, 2020; Lopez et al., 2019; Lucero et al., 2017). They also create safe spaces where Latinas can find support from peers with similar experiences (Cerezo et al., 2018; Garcia, 2020; Rodriguez et al., 2022). Despite their critical role, affinity groups and cultural centers are often underfunded, under-resourced, and understaffed (Linder, 2019). There is a need for further research to demonstrate the significant impact these programs have in

the lives of Latinas at PWIs so that they can be further supported by their administration.

Latina undergraduates also find belonging through relationships with faculty and staff who provide validation (Carales & Nora, 2020; Ching, 2022; Hurtado et al., 2015; Lucero et al., 2017). Validation, defined by Rendon (1994), involves the importance of culturally diverse students feeling supported and affirmed by college administrators, faculty, and staff. Faculty and staff have an important role in conveying that the college is welcoming and inclusive of Students of Color (Carales & Nora, 2020; Hurtado et al., 2015). These relationships can counter the negative racialized experiences of Latinas and empower them to continue college (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2020). While not necessary to be Latina to provide validation, researchers note that Latine faculty, due to shared cultural understanding, have been particularly effective (Ching, 2022; Perez Huber et al., 2021). Further research must seek to understand how both Latine and non-Latine faculty create inclusive and welcoming environments for Latinas.

Moreover, Latinas are often put in the position to be activists because they feel like they must take on the responsibility to challenge racism and injustice at their PWI to survive (Linder, 2019). By challenging injustices, Latina undergraduates inspire, motivate, and empower their peers (Rendon et al., 2018). Latines contribute to their higher education institutions by creating inclusive spaces for other historically marginalized students (Ramos & Sifuentez, 2021). Unfortunately, their "educators and peers frequently expect students with minoritized identities to address oppression as part of their daily experience rather than seeing it as a form of activism, involvement, engagement, or leadership" (Linder, 2019, p. 19). Ramos and Sifuentez (2021) argued this activism should be seen as a form of success because it contributes to the retention and recruitment of students.

While there has been significant research on the challenges and barriers Latinas face in PWIs, there has been little research to ask Latinas what they would like to see implemented within their PWIs to better support them. However, Latina undergraduates have agency and a vision for their futures and are embracing their voices to demand higher education institutions change to better support them (Kiyama, 2018). This research seeks to fill this gap by asking Latinas their perspectives with the goal of putting responsibility on the institutions to make changes versus Latinas adapting to their PWIs (Rendón et al., 2018). The research questions guiding this study were: What institutional challenges have Latina undergraduates faced at their PWI to achieve their goals? What support do Latina undergraduates recommend their PWI provide them to help them reach their goals?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

LatCrit, derived from Critical Race Theory (CRT), operates under similar tenets (Valdes, 1996). In developing and applying a LatCrit framework to education, Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) argued both CRT and Lat Crit acknowledge racism is endemic in U.S. society and that it intersects with other forms of oppression. Further, they argued that "class and racial oppression cannot account for oppression based on gender, language, or immigration status. It is at this intersection of race, class, gender, language, and immigration status that some answers to theoretical, conceptual, and methodological questions related to Chicana and Chicano student resistance might be found" (p. 313). As such, scholars developed LatCrit to account for the unique experiences of Latines in U.S. society. In research, LatCrit scholars account for the language, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality of Latines (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Villalpando, 2004). LatCrit researchers also examine the intersections of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression, which allows for the concerns of Latinas to be addressed (Hernández-Truyol, 1997; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

LatCrit scholars challenge dominant ideologies within U.S. society and the education system, including objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, and race neutrality (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Furthermore, LatCrit scholars recognize deficit frameworks and racially discriminatory practices and policies enacted in higher education to subordinate Latines. Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) argued these ideologies exist to ensure dominant groups in the U.S. maintain their power and privilege. Through LatCrit, researchers can expose and dismantle these practices (Villalpando, 2004).

LatCrit scholars also emphasize the experiential knowledge of Latines as "legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 26). As such, Latine narratives, counterstories, and *testimonios* are essential for understanding their oppression (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). LatCrit researchers center Latine experiential knowledge and view it "as an asset, a form of community memory, a source of empowerment and strength, and not as a deficit" (Villalpando, 2004, p. 46). Villalpando (2004) called on higher education professionals to utilize LatCrit to acknowledge Latines enter college with their own strengths and have their own agency.

By utilizing a LatCrit framework, higher education professionals can understand how higher education institutions perpetuate race-neutral programs and policies that benefit the dominant White student population while minimizing Latine experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Villalpando, 2004).

LatCrit scholars argue for utilizing an interdisciplinary perspective to examine the historical and cultural context in which policies and practices are developed and how they are connected to race and racism (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Villalpando, 2004). By examining this context, LatCrit scholars "expose the ways in which so-called race-neutral institutional policies and practices perpetuate racial or ethnic subordination" (Villalpando, 2004, p. 42). As such, LatCrit scholars account for how Latines have struggled in U.S. society and how that shapes their higher education experiences.

LatCrit scholars also strive towards social justice and ending all forms of oppression, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, and oppression based on language and immigration status (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Villalpando, 2004). Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) argued, "Critical race researchers acknowledge that educational institutions operate in contradictory ways with their potential to oppress and marginalize coexisting with their potential to emancipate and empower" (p. 313). With this understanding LatCrit scholars must continuously seek to create programming and policies that are socially just and empower Latines.

In this research study, I centered Latina undergraduates attending Mountain University (MU), a PWI, to better understand their goals for higher education and how their institution supports them in reaching those goals. I utilized LatCrit to challenge the structure of MU, which is centered on Whiteness and consistently has grappled with racial and gender discrimination. Similar to other PWIs, Latinas at MU have experienced racial and gender discrimination and do not feel that MU is set up to support their goals (Perez Huber et al., 2023; McCabe, 2009)

RESEARCH METHOD

Testimonio, "a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else" (The Latina Feminist Group 2001, p. 13), gives voice to those who are often silenced. As a methodological tool, the one sharing their *testimonio* is the holder and creator of knowledge, while the researcher is an "outside activist and ally" who shares the story (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 365). In her research with undocumented Latina undergraduates, Perez Huber (2009) connected *testimonio* to LatCrit to reveal how their experiences had been shaped by racial, gendered, classed, and nativist oppression. Further, Perez Huber found by sharing their experiences her participants were able to find healing and empowerment. Similarly, the Latina undergraduates in this study shared their *testimonios* to reveal the challenges they faced reaching their higher education goals and were empowered to offer solutions for PWIs to consider. As the researcher, I was called to share these stories to incite change.

My Testimonio

I'm a Queer Latina with Mexican-American roots who has navigated PWIs as both a student and practitioner. I've often found myself in a state of nepantla, living between two worlds, that of the U.S. and Mexico, and that of a dominant heteronormative society as a Queer person (Anzaldua, 1987). Encouraged to excel academically and attend highly selective institutions that were PWIs, I quickly realized these institutions were not designed for historically minoritized communities like those I am a part of. My cultural heritage, knowledge, and values often went unrecognized or framed from a deficit perspective. Through my resilience and support from faculty and peers, I navigated these PWIs and earned a Ph.D. Now, I aim to uplift Latina voices to create more equitable and inclusive higher education spaces.

Participants

This research occurred at MU, a private PWI in the Western U.S., during Fall 2021. Among 5,900 undergraduates, 70% were White, 13% were Latine, and 8% were Latina. Using criterion sampling, I selected 11 testimonialistas (Latina/Chicana/Hispanic women) for their ability to provide in-depth insights. The participants were current MU undergraduates, had completed at least one year of college at MU and were willing to discuss their goals. I recruited participants by contacting the Cultural Center and Latine student organizations. I also utilized snowball sampling to identify those with rich information within existing networks (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Of the participants, 90% were first-generation college students, some were low-income, and they represented diverse ethnic backgrounds and immigration patterns to the U.S. (See Table 1).

Data Collection

Testimonios require the researcher to establish trust/confianza, respect/respeto, and collaboration/colaboracion with their participants (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Furthermore, *testimonios* reveal life stories that many may not have shared before. Thus, I collected participant data through two individual *testimonios*, a group *testimonio*, and a vision board. During the first individual *testimonio*, I built rapport and confianza/trust. I asked open-ended questions about past educational experiences, goals for completing a college degree, and how their Latina identity has shaped their experiences and goals. The first individual *testimonio* sessions lasted between 48 to 86 minutes. In the second individual *testimonio*, I asked the *testimonialistas* to reflect on the support they have received from MU to achieve their self-defined goals. I also asked them to provide any recommendations they may have for MU to better support Latinas. The second individual *testimonio* lasted between 59 to 83 minutes.

Between individual *testimonios*, I had the *testimonialistas* create vision boards to express their ideologies of success and future goals, reflecting on how their experiences as Latinas shaped these aspirations. Before the group *testimonio*, they were asked to craft either physical or digital vision boards, using images, text, drawings, and other forms of expression to depict their academic, personal, and professional goals. All 11 *testimonialistas* completed a vision board and discussed them during the group *testimonio* or their second *testimonio*. A 79-minute in-person group *testimonio* was conducted with six *testimonialistas*, as five could not attend due to other commitments.

Data Analysis

As the witness to my participants' *testimonios*, I was responsible for transcribing, editing, and translating their lived experiences (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). The data analysis was guided by Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE), which enabled me to contemplate my own history and that of my Latina participants—a history shaped by social, political, and cultural conditions (Delgado Bernal, 1998). CFE also sheds light on the historical oppression faced by Chicanas due to their intersecting identities and promotes social justice and equity. Cultural intuition, a key element of CFE, encompasses the unique perspectives Chicana scholars bring to the research process, shaped by their memories, existing literature, professional experiences, and the research process (Delgado Bernal, 1998). By embracing CFE, my background influenced how I understood, interpreted, and made sense of the data (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

After completing the first individual *testimonios*, I edited the transcripts for clarity and followed the same process for the second individual *testimonios* and group *testimonio*. During the second individual *testimonio* session, I asked the *testimonialistas* to reflect on their experience in the first individual *testimonio* session and group session if they attended and shared themes that emerged in the group session with those that did not attend. Subsequently, I uploaded the transcripts and vision boards to NVivo 12 Pro Software for further analysis. In NVivo, I noted themes that emerged from the data and highlighted quotes that related to the emerging themes. Utilizing NVivo, I ran queries to learn the most common themes that emerged for each *testimonialista*. I then created a spreadsheet with tabs for each *testimonialista* highlighting the major themes that emerged from their *testimonios* and vision boards. Aligned with CFE, to establish trustworthiness I developed themes in *comunidad* with my participants by consulting them throughout the research (Perez Huber, 2009). My analysis aimed to identify common themes that conveyed the collective story of the *testimonialistas* (Delgado Bernal, 1998; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). To ensure accuracy, I shared the emerging themes and relevant quotes with each participant via email, seeking their

confirmation and feedback on how well they reflected their experiences. I incorporated participant input to refine the themes and made final selections. Furthermore, as this was part of my dissertation research, I had a qualitative methodologist and two experts in Critical Theories, including LatCrit and Chicana Feminism, review my study to ensure the methodology and framework were applied appropriately.

Limitations

I interpreted the findings of this study through my own lens, which may limit what is shared in this study. Another limitation of the study is the sample is specific to one private, 4-year PWI in the Western U.S. Participants in this study may have different views from students who attend other higher education institution types, including Hispanic Serving Institutions, community colleges, and public institutions, in various parts of the U.S. This study may have also recruited students with similar stories that are not representative of the entire Latina undergraduate population. Additionally, the group *testimonio* session occurred in person during the COVID-19 pandemic, limiting participation to six *testimonialistas.* I did have an option for the *testimonialistas* to join the group session via Zoom, but no one did. This limited the opportunity for additional data and themes to emerge. All the participants in the group session attended in person and followed COVID-19 protocols by wearing face coverings and observing social distancing.

FINDINGS

In this study, 11 Latina undergraduates shared in both their individual *testimonio sessions* and the group *testimonio* session how they have been supported by their higher education institution to achieve success and reach their self-defined goals. They also shared challenges they encountered at their institution that hindered their success. Within the group *testimonio* session, they affirmed the challenges they faced and provided resources of support to help them with navigating MU. The emerging themes were lack of representation and sense of belonging, racism, and discrimination, and the pressure to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. The *testimonialistas* also shared they received support from affinity groups and validation from faculty, staff, and peers. In the findings, I share a challenge indicated by the *testimonialistas* and a solution they provided in response to that challenge. This resulted in three overarching themes, including *Bolstering Sense of Belonging Through Affinity Groups, A Need for Validation,* and *Recognizing the Labor of Latina Undergraduates.*

Bolstering Sense of Belonging Through Affinity Programs

In this study, the *testimonialistas* revealed the impact of intersectional oppression based on their gender and racial identities. They described the challenges and culture shock they experienced transitioning to college. Finding a supportive community on campus that understood their unique experiences and goals was a struggle. This absence of social support and connectedness led the *testimonialistas* to feel like they didn't belong at MU. During her individual *testimonio,* Sarah shared more about how she struggled to find community at MU,

> I was living in [a residence hall], and I was in this [living community] …literally, everybody was white. And it was really hard for me to connect with them…I feel like they didn't really know what adversities were, so the very first quarter…we had to talk about adversities and a lot of them had such; I thought they were silly examples. I did not think they were being serious. So, it made me feel really left out, and it made me feel like I wasn't White enough to be here…I hadn't found my community, and as much as I tried to make it my community. I just couldn't…I didn't build connections with them at all. So, it was hard for me. And then, because I didn't have any connections. I feel I didn't have any support from students at [MU] or from the [MU] community.

Due to the lack of connection with her peers, Sarah felt like she did not belong at MU and did not have resources to support her in navigating MU. Sarah even questioned being at MU because of these experiences. As a STEM major, finding connections was particularly important to Sarah because of the lack of Latine faculty and students in STEM at MU. In an individual *testimonio,* Camila also spoke to the struggle of finding community in STEM at MU. She shared,

> In terms of structures in the school, they're very cold. They're so used to being how they are, especially being in the sciences; I'm a STEM major, so I'm gonna call them out. Sometimes, they're just really not good at making connections because there's no component where people are forced to learn how to socialize. I think when you're in a lab or with robots all day, you lose that. And when they talk to someone that looks like me, they're not gonna be able to learn that, and they are probably not taking a sociology class. Very much it's been a struggle. But people in the College Access Office they're amazing. They should get more pay, something, for keeping people here.

When Sarah and Camila could not find support in the residence halls or their STEM classes, they felt out of place, and as though there was no one at MU they could connect with. Sarah and Camila also shared these struggles within the group *testimonio* session, which Ana, Jessica, and Luna agreed with. Nina, who was not a STEM major, shared her experience was different because she was about to quickly connect with mentors and affinity groups, including a First-Generation Program and a Leadership Program. Sarah, Camila, and the other *testimonialistas* shared that eventually, they found support at MU when they became involved in affinity programs, including the First-Generation Student Program and a STEM Support Program for historically marginalized students. In particular, Sarah found affinity programs allowed her to connect with other Latinas. She shared,

> I met two Latina STEM majors, and I didn't know about [the STEM Support Program] yet; I went for the [First-Generation Student Program] orientation, but they were all together…And I remember they went around asking the mentors their majors. And two Latina undergraduates started talking about how they were Latinas in STEM. And they were doing the Biology major how I wanted to. And it was the first time that I saw somebody that looked like me in the STEM field.

Sarah highlighted the role affinity programs had in connecting her to Latinas pursuing STEM. Sarah desired more spaces on campus that affirmed her ethnic identity because these groups contributed to her academic goals and sense of belonging. Like Nina, Jessica, a History major, found affinity programs were crucial to her belonging at MU. She shared,

> The College Access Office and the multicultural sororities, I think it's really platforms of representation here at MU that have supported me because it really does it make you feel less lonely. And it's not even that sensation. Because I feel when people say 'lonely'. It's like, 'Oh, well, then just make friends.' It's going beyond that loneliness. Because it really is nice to talk to other people who are going through the same. And talking to them. It gives you advice because they might have more insight because they're a third-year. And it goes beyond loneliness. It goes to, 'I can talk to you about what I'm feeling,' and I don't have to feel uncomfortable. I don't have to worry about making you feel uncomfortable because you're obviously going through the same thing.

Jessica underscores the value of affinity programs for Latina undergraduates, giving her a sense of belonging and support. In contrast, Sarah felt

disconnected from her residence hall peers due to differing life experiences, leading to feeling like she had a lack of support at MU. On the contrary, Jessica and, eventually, Sarah felt supported at MU because of their experiences within affinity programs where they met others with whom they could relate.

A Need for Validation

During both their individual *testimonios* and the group *testimonio,* the *testimonialistas* often mentioned how they experienced self-doubt and imposter syndrome at MU because of stereotypes held about Latinas. While the testimonialistas had earned their spot at MU through the admissions process, once they were there, they still doubted if they were worthy enough or smart enough to be there. In her individual *testimonio* session, Jessica shared,

> I have to remind myself constantly, 'I'm here because I put in the work to be here,' but then, sometimes, I'm getting into these different stereotypes. It's hard because it's a double-edged sword, but I do constantly have to remind myself, 'I'm here one because I do have privileges in ways that have got me here' because working hard isn't always going to get you to where you need to go. But yeah, seeing the disparities from MU to my high school. It's hard because I feel for a lot of, I don't know, like it's the Latina, its first gen, or if it a mix of both or if it's all of them intersecting, but it's just you're kind of made to feel you're the one at fault for not having learned these things when you never had a background into them or you're made to feel dumb in a ways because sometimes in classes I honestly don't even know what is going on. This is not something that I'm used to, or it can be so confusing sometimes and there is internalized self-blame that occurs. Sometimes I'm like, 'Dang, am I just dumb or something?' but I'm like, 'No, I just have not been exposed to this.'

The self-doubt that Jessica experienced came from internalizing beliefs others had about Latinas, first-generation college students, and people who came from under resourced high schools. Throughout her individual *testimonios*, Jessica mentioned how White teachers in her high school had questioned her capabilities and even discouraged her from attending MU. While no one at MU told her she did not belong, she still internalized stereotypes others held about her capabilities. During the group *testimonio*, Jessica shared with the other *testimonialistas* how she wished she had more people to "hype" her up than discourage her. The other *testimonialistas* agreed and wished for more affirmation and validation from faculty, staff, and administration at MU.

Some *testimonialistas* shared blatant instances of racism and discrimination at MU, particularly from faculty and administrators. They shared how there were faculty and staff who practiced microaggressions and doubted their capabilities. These faculty and staff became hindrances to the *testimonialistas* in achieving their goals and caused some participants to consider transferring to different institutions. In her individual *testimonio,* Ana shared a specific incident of racial discrimination with a White faculty member,

> So, everyone is taking their test...I was just sitting down, minding my own business. And I guess my eyes wandered somewhere. I don't know what the professor was thinking; he gave me the nastiest look ever. And I'm like, 'the audacity for you to look at me that way, I am not doing anything wrong,' and I still scored pretty good on that test. It's disgusting when you think about it because you're like, there's no way that even the professor is looking at you like that.

Ana believed this incident was racially motivated and that White students in the class did not experience the same scrutiny. Latina undergraduates at MU endured harm, racism, and discrimination that their White peers did not. While Ana was determined to continue her education at MU, these experiences contributed to her feeling as though she did not belong at MU.

Alternatively, some *testimonialistas* shared how supportive faculty and staff contributed to their academic achievement and well-being. The testimonialistas shared how both Faculty and Staff of Color and White faculty and staff supported them. In her second year of college, Gabriela changed her major and felt unsure about it. Gabriela, who did not attend the group *testimonio* session, shared how a White professor helped her feel confident about this change and validated her experiences. She stated,

> I remember the first meeting I had with him…I explained my background and explained my goals, and he was very invested, he was very supportive, he still is, that's even in like the struggles, generally speaking, in my undergrad of, I went from being a top student to having to file incompletes because I can't get my work in on time because I'm struggling mentally, but I don't want to admit to myself that I'm struggling mentally so trying to navigate everything. And he noted that, and I told him about it. And we had a Zoom meeting over winter break, and he was like, 'I'm rooting for you, you are a very impressive person, you just gotta do it,' and I'm like, 'I know, I'm trying.'

Gabriela received immediate validation and encouragement from her faculty member upon changing her major, fostering a sense of care and support at MU. Other *testimonialistas* also highlighted similar experiences where faculty provided them with resources and validation at MU and within their fields of study. While faculty played a vital role in supporting students, the *testimonialistas* also underscored the significance of staff. For instance, in her individual *testimonio,* Camila shared how Raymond, a Black admissions counselor at MU, assisted her with her decision to apply and attend MU. She shared,

> I applied to MU, and then Raymond was in admissions. He's a big person within the College Access Office. Raymond was a big convincing factor. Just because, they're really good at like connecting you with just the greater part of the POC [People of Color] network at MU because Raymond was also from the area around MU and he's been through his own struggles. He can relate to us and so, it was an easy person to talk to. Camila emphasized the importance of finding someone who could relate to her as a Person of Color and connect her with other People of Color at MU, which influenced her decision to attend MU.

During the group *testimonio* session, the *testimonialistas* mentioned forming relationships with supportive staff members who shared their backgrounds. However, they also noted that these staff members were often overworked, undervalued, and underpaid despite their vital role in supporting historically marginalized students at MU. The *testimonialistas* believed these staff members deserved more recognition and support for their contributions.

The validation Camila and Gabriela received transformed their experiences at MU. The support prevented them from internalizing stereotypes and experiencing self-doubt. As evidenced by Ana and Jessica, this is not always the experience of Latina undergraduates.

Recognizing the Labor of Latina Undergraduates

While not a theme that emerged in the group *testimonio* session, in their individual *testimonio* sessions, several of the *testimonialistas* shared they felt pressured to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at MU. While they wanted to provide a supportive community to their peers through affinity groups and critical conversations about race, they did not feel it was fair to have this added pressure. In her individual *testimonio* sessions, Camila spoke about the burden she experienced in advocating for historically marginalized students at MU,

> They [MU administration] leave a lot of the pressure to the students. I know for a fact that I as a student, if I'm trying to reach equality or equity, I shouldn't; the White student next to me isn't advocating, doesn't need to advocate for themselves as much as I do…because they are a part of the majority and…that's a lot of pressure on one person, on the group of people.

As a Latina, Camila felt pressure to advocate for racial justice and equity at MU. While she wanted MU to improve its DEI efforts, she did not think it should fall entirely on the students. She also shared how she attended an event demanding more support for Native American students and historically marginalized students at MU, where the MU administration was present. At this event, Camila shared more about her experiences as a Student of Color at MU. When discussing this event, she shared,

> I think starting off with funding programs that help bring in their so-called diversity into MU. They're trying to increase those numbers, but you're not doing anything once the student is here to retain and support them. The fact that when I told the Chancellor these are important things for us and they're not investing in it. The fact that we got the Cultural Center is that it's as small as a room. It should be a whole building; that's what it is at a lot of institutions already.

Camila believed there is a need for additional funding and more concerted efforts on behalf of the administration to support programs that are retaining and supporting historically marginalized students. However, when she brought up these concerns, she felt the administration did not listen and did not act in a way that aligned with its espoused values.

In her individual *testimonio* sessions, Gabriela also noticed how MU was not taking action to support DEI on campus and left it in the hands of student organizations. As a leader of the Latine Student Group (LSG), she was part of organizing events to support historically marginalized students, and she noted the impact they had on providing a place where historically marginalized students felt they belonged and their concerns were addressed. She shared more about the experience at one of these events,

> One of the questions was, 'Are you seen as a statistic?' and a lot of people, most of them, including myself, said 'yeah' or 'lean towards yes', which I know MU tries to be more culturally inclusive, but a point that was brought up at that event was that most of the diversity and inclusivity events that are put on are run by students, whether that be undergrad or graduate. So,

> like the LSG, we're all undergrads. We're the ones that put on those events together so that the community can have a safe space. It's not MU administration doing it. It's the students have to take into their own hands to create that space for each other, which I think that's pretty cool, but at the same time, we shouldn't really have to do that.

While Gabriela appreciated the ability to create events for historically marginalized students at MU, she questioned why students had to be responsible for this. She also noted that if MU wants to be more culturally inclusive, they should also create spaces of belonging for historically marginalized students. Gabriela shared how she thought MU could support historically marginalized students and why she felt this was important. She stated,

> They [MU] recognize their history, and they recognize a lot of things, but I think actually putting it into action would be more helpful. I don't like that they put the 'it's up to you' type of thing on the cultural groups, all of those institutional organizations. It's good in the sense that we can create that space and design it the way that we want to have it in the way that we want. But it would be nice to have some of that stress alleviated from us because even though we know more than the White man on what it's like to be a person of color. We don't have as many resources as them, and even if we do ask, it would be nice to have some of that stress alleviated from us when we ourselves are trying to really solidify who we are, in our cultural identity.

Gabriela called on the MU administration to take concrete steps to support historically marginalized students. Being a private institution with significant financial resources, she advocated for allocating more funding towards cultural groups and programming. She believed that this financial support would ease the burden on historically marginalized students who were trying to figure out their own cultural identity and how to navigate MU.

Similarly, Jessica, who was involved in a committee to implement DEI on campus, discussed the stress experienced by students to advocate for equity and create an inclusive environment. She shared,

> I'm part of [the DEI committee]; a conversation that we've been having a lot is that for so long, [MU] has put advocacy in the hands of students; students are always the ones who are forced to be these changemakers. And kind of how a lot of students are getting burnt out by this point. A lot of students really want to do this work, but at the end of the day, it shouldn't

> have to be students' work to do. Because the system should be supporting…I think the main thing is just resources and…just more staff support…it'd be nice to have multiple coordinators for these [cultural and access] programs. I feel a lot of the work typically gets put onto one person. And that can feel overwhelming…for them as well.

Jessica emphasized the need for MU to allocate greater resources and support for Students of Color to prevent them from bearing the sole responsibility of promoting DEI on campus. While Latina undergraduates remain committed to DEI efforts, there is a pressing need to alleviate the burden on students. Jessica called for the MU administration to hire more staff and provide financial support to prevent burnout among students, staff, and faculty engaged in DEI efforts.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study, Latina undergraduates at MU shared their *testimonios* reflecting on the support they received to reach their self-defined goals. By grounding this study in LatCrit, Latina voices were brought to the center from the margins to better understand their experiences with racial, ethnic, and gender oppression (Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Villalpando, 2004). Higher education institutions purport to provide equal opportunities that allow all students to achieve success. However, through this study, I found there are still many challenges Latina undergraduates face in pursuit of their self-defined goals, including a lack of sense of belonging, blatant racism and discrimination, and the pressure to enhance DEI. While several previous studies have also found that Latinas experience discrimination and inequitable campus environments (Garriott et al., 2019; Liou et al., 2023; Rodriguez et al., 2022), fewer researchers have asked Latinas to provide recommendations to their PWIs to better support them. To fill this gap in the research, the *testimonialistas* shared their solutions to improve MU for Latinas in addition to the barriers they experienced at MU.

Through LatCrit, researchers reveal how higher education policies and structures are created to benefit the dominant White student population while marginalizing Latinas' experiences (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Villalpando, 2004). Similar to the findings of previous researchers, the t*estimonialistas* were exposed to racially hostile campus climates that did not acknowledge their assets (Acevedo et al., 2021; Kiyama, 208; Rodriguez et al., 2022). Quantitative researchers have found that Latina students are subjected to racism and discrimination, which leads to increased stress, exhaustion, and depression (Arbona & Jimenez, 2014; Thornhill et al., 2023). The findings of this study provide greater insight into why Latinas may experience stress, exhaustion, and depression as the *testimonialistas* shared the hostile racial climate at MU, and the

inaction by MU administrators to support them was detrimental to their college experiences. Furthermore, the *testimonialistas* shared they were often taxed with creating spaces that promoted DEI –forcing them into a student activist role. Building on research by Linder et al. (2019), which focused on minoritized students more broadly, this research demonstrated that Latina undergraduates, in particular, feel forced into activist roles and as thought their PWI should not solely leave this responsibility to them. These responsibilities are costly to Students of Color because they isolate them from their peers, lead to decreased academic performance, and cause physical and emotional exhaustion (Linder et al., 2019). The barriers shared by the *testimonialistas* created an inequitable higher education experience for them, as White students at MU did not face these same barriers.

Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) used a LatCrit framework to show how higher education institutions can both empower and oppress historically marginalized students. Similar to previous research, the *testimonialistas* shared student support programs (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Lopez et al., 2019; Lucero et al., 2017), and validation from faculty and staff empowered them to reach their goals (Acevedo et al., 2021; Rendón, 1994). Affinity groups and cultural centers provided a community, sense of belonging and were often the reason why they remained at MU. Even though the research well documents the benefits of cultural centers and affinity programs, the *testimonialistas* noted these programs were under-resourced, placing a heavy burden on them by hindering them from finding supportive communities or thrusting them into roles where they create spaces for themselves and their peers. Thus, this research further illuminates the need for cultural centers and affinity groups for Latinas to not only exist but also be appropriately staffed and funded. Similar to previous research, the *testimonialistas* were able to find a sense of belonging at MU through relationships with both Latine and non-Latine faculty and staff who provide validation (Carales & Nora, 2020; Ching, 2022; Lucero et al., 2017). This research further demonstrated the importance of faculty and staff building relationships with Latina students and seeking to understand their cultural backgrounds. Additionally, through their examples, the *testimonialistas* demonstrated how validation is beneficial from the admissions process through graduation.

IMPLICATIONS

The goal of LatCrit researchers is to strive towards social justice and end all forms of oppression (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Villalpando, 2004). To do this, higher education researchers and practitioners must continually seek ways to create more socially just structures, policies, and programs. While previous research has documented the impact of affinity groups (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Lopez et al., 2019; Lucero et al., 2017) and validation (Acevedo et al., 2021; Rendón et al.,

2018), higher education research and practitioners should listen to the insights from the *testimonialistas* to further support affinity groups, enact validation and to enhance DEI, especially during a time when these efforts are under scrutiny.

As highlighted by the *testimonialistas* and previous research (Cerezo et al., 2018; Lopez et al., 2019; Lucero et al., 2017), affinity groups and cultural centers are critical to supporting Latina undergraduates, yet they are often underfunded, under-resourced, and understaffed. As such, I recommend higher education institutions continue to create and support organizations that affirm Latine culture and ethnic identity and provide resources, including funding and staff, to them as they contribute to Latina undergraduates achieving their goals.

Previous research stresses the importance of supportive faculty and staff in meeting students' academic and emotional needs (Lucero et al., 2017; Rendón et al., 2018). The *testimonialistas* also highlighted the crucial role of supportive faculty and staff in their academic success. Therefore, I recommended providing training and support for faculty and staff to practice validation. Implementing validation can help Latina undergraduates heal from self-doubt and lack of support in higher education (Acevedo et al., 2021). I recommend integrating validation into all phases of students' interactions with the institution, starting with admissions and orientation (Rendón et al., 2018). Some *testimonialistas* shared how positive experiences with admissions counselors led to scholarships, early support program connections, and a feeling of support at MU.

Furthermore, I found Latina undergraduates often become activists to enhance DEI on their campuses. To support them, higher education professionals should provide resources and funding to programming that supports Latina undergraduates' DEI efforts. Higher education professionals can offer workshops on navigating the institution and how to implement change (Linder, 2019). Faculty can also assign projects and provide academic credit for their activism, which "contributes to better self-care for these students because their engagement becomes cocurricular, rather than extra-curricular, and it allows them to see themselves and their work as legitimate and important" (Linder, 2019, p. 24). Additionally, compensation for these efforts is essential, as it often competes with academics and paid work.

I initiated this research on Latina undergraduates due to their rapid growth in higher education (Espinosa et al., 2019). It's crucial to hear their voices and amplify their experiences, bringing them from the margins to the center. By doing so, higher education professionals can work toward creating more equitable and just college experiences for Latina undergraduates. I recommend more studies adopt LatCrit to prioritize Latina voices, as their narratives can inspire change within higher education institutions. Future studies should also continue to share the stories and experiences of Latina undergraduates from all backgrounds,

including those who identify as LGBTQ, immigrants, and first-generation college students, and in all institutions, including Hispanic-Serving Institutions and community colleges.

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Un Mentor Positivo: Supporting Latine & Indigenous First-Generation Doctoral Students

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ABSTRACT

Doctoral completion for first-generation Latine students in the United States is minimal. In 2021, 9% of the doctorates confirmed belonged to those identified as Latine, and 41.3% of that population identified as a first-generation college student. This phenomenological study used content analysis to understand the experiences of 15 doctoral students of color at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). This paper draws from that larger study highlighting the voices of four first-generation Latine and Indigenous doctoral students. Findings share experiences specific to the population and the importance of having a faculty mentor of color who understands the multiple intersections of marginalized doctoral student identities and the support needed for a truly equitable academic experience for first-generation doctoral students of color at PWIs.

Keywords: Doctoral Student of Color**,** Faculty of Color, First-Generation Student, Latine, Indigenous, Mentor

INTRODUCTION

The system of Higher Education was built for the elite and designed for the privileged traditional student. The original system perpetuated white dominant thought and catered to white males ages eighteen to twenty, who had the time and money to spare (Vanwagoner, 2018). This original system design created barriers to access postsecondary education, particularly for students of color and individuals from low-income backgrounds and served to perpetuate the widening educational equity gap and systematic oppression for those who do not belong to said privileged groups.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 was this system's first attempt at educational equity by reducing barriers to postsecondary education via offering ways to subsidize the cost of education with funding resources to qualifying student populations. This act opened the door and offered access to higher education for various students, including low-income, non-traditional, and underrepresented students. However, providing resources to subsidize the cost of higher education is not enough, as there is still a significant disparity in outcomes in educational attainment between nontraditional and underserved students compared to traditional students (Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2007; Hossler & Bontrager, 2014).

Students who identify as first-generation (FGS) are considered both nontraditional and underserved. As a result, they are much more likely to carry multiple marginalized identities, including being low-income, adult learners, women, and a person of color (Hossler & Bontrager, 2014; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Schuyler et al., 2021). This intersection of multiple marginalized identities impacts the population's experiences more significantly given the various socio and economic disadvantages over those with multiple privileged identities (Crenshaw, 1991). The experiences of intersectional erasure, including microaggressions and lack of academic navigational support result in first-generation students lacking mentorship and experiencing deficit-based models of thinking and programming in their education- missing out on access to academic opportunities like scholarships and internships (Dickson & Zafereo, 2021; Phu, 2020). This disparity in educational attainment is concerning for FGSOC and is demonstrated in minimal completion for first-generation Latine and Indigenous doctoral students in the United States. We use the gender-inclusive term Latine throughout our paper to equitably represent the majority of our participants rather than the more commonly used identifiers of Latino/a/x; however, some participants also identified as Indigenous, and we want to honor their identity and self-representation in this work by acknowledging both identities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature surrounding first-generation students of color is scarce at the undergraduate level (Sarcedo, 2022; 2020; Tate et al., 2015; Wallace, 2022) and even less exists on the experiences of first-generation students of color at the doctoral level (Wallace, 2022); however, the literature that does exist separates first-generation doctoral students (FGDS) from first-generation doctoral students of color (FGDSoC) (Wallace, 2022). Failing to analyze FGDS using a racial lens is perplexing considering "issues of race and gender often amplify the challenges facing first-generation doctoral students' (Holley & Gardner, 2012, p. 8).

First-generation doctoral students of color struggle to find a sense of belonging because they cannot see others who look like them or see their culture represented on campus. As a result, FGDSoC end up experiencing isolation (Wallace, 2022; Wallace & Ford, 2021). The feelings of isolation are compounded by faculty devaluing or minimizing FGDSoC class contributions or refusing to acknowledge the student (Wallace, 2022; Wallace & Ford, 2021). This sense of isolation led to FGDSoC experiencing the phenomenon of "intellectual phoniness," coined as imposter syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978). Imposter syndrome or impostor phenomenon (IP) is a psychological experience among high-achieving individuals who disbelieve their intellect, skills, or successful accomplishments. Wallace and Ford (2021) note that "[t]hese students do not innately have imposter syndrome but experience this phenomenon as a response to an environment that does not support nor center their need" (p. 522).

It is no wonder that FGDSoC experience isolation and imposter phenomenon, as a prominent finding in the literature, is that FGDSoC experience racism (Jaeger & Haley, 2016; Wallace & Ford, 2021; Wallace, 2022), with women of color articulating the most extreme experiences (Gardner et al., 2011; Wallace, 2022). Microaggressions embedded in deficit-minded social constructs have been related to experiences of “othering” for FGDSoC. Specifically, Latine doctoral research students have described sentiments of cultural and identity-based imposter syndrome due to the alienation or isolation encountered from their experiences of underrepresentation and tokenism (Chakraverty, 2022). Narratives of doctoral students of color have echoed greater strain in relation to academic burnout, psychological distress, college self-efficacy, and academic engagement in their higher education institutions (Chakraverty, 2022; Phu, 2020). Students have noted negative experiences of unwelcoming faculty, blatant favoritism of white counterparts, and gatekeeping of research and related educational opportunities (Espino, 2014). These examples could be related to how FGDSoC experienced their training and transition.

While many of these students can persist by carefully navigating the system, many more are not so lucky. Ultimately, doctoral completion for first-generation students of color is on the decline (Gardner & Holley, 2011; Hoffer et al., 2003; Mitic, 2022) and this decline has implications beyond the individual

students which impacts educational equity for the majority at institutions of higher education around the United States.

The disparities in educational outcomes for FGDSoC contribute to the perpetuation of poverty in the population (Berg, 2010). With socio-economic and educational barriers in place, it remains nearly impossible for FGDSoC to see themselves as successful graduates in their field and thus able to rise out of their initial social class. The pressing issue of FGDSoC and educational equity has implications beyond the student and their socioeconomic class because it directly impacts academia and the institution they attend (fo, 2015). The lack of diversity at the doctoral level in the United States perpetuates the systemic issues of higher education, which is demonstrated when Pasztor and Wakeling (2018) suggest,

> (A) lack of diversity among the doctoral student body may have serious long-term consequences by leaving segments of society without a voice in scholarship or representation among future higher education faculty, thus reserving key positions in the society of the already privileged. (p. 983).

Understanding the experiences of FGDSoC is vital because doctoral confirmation for this group is on the decline (Patel, 2015). Data shows an 8.7% reduction in doctoral confirmation between 2000 and 2019 for those identified as first-generation college students (Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2021). In 2021, only 9% of the doctorates confirmed belonged to those who identify as Latine, which 41.3% of that population identified as a first-generation college student and 0.3% of the doctorates confirmed in 2021 belonged to Indigenous graduates. Twenty-five point nine percent (25.9%) of that population identified as a first-generation college student (Survey of Earned Doctorates, 2022).

The complexity of multiplied marginalized identities is represented even in the frame of this publication to present new findings and breakthroughs related to Latine/Hispanic participation in higher education. The Survey of Earned Doctorates does not separate Hispanic and Latine but utilizes it as a pan-ethnic term and offers the optional demographic choice of Indigenous/Non-Hispanic or Latine. Martínez and Gonzalez (2020) explain that “Policymakers, the public, and members of these groups often use these terms synonymously, however, each possesses a unique history and describes different ancestral origins' (p. 366). The term “Hispanic” refers to those from Spanish-speaking countries, including Latin America, but the term, “Latino” omits those of Spanish origin outside of the Western Hemisphere. Colonization and the perpetuation of internalized oppression in the United States have caused many to value European and Spanish aspects of their identity while excluding Indigenous elements (Martínez & Gonzalez, 2020). How participants in this study and of these subgroups identify is important, and because they have roots embedded in the Western Hemisphere and are Indigenous to the land, the term Latine alone would not reflect this participant group.

Theoretical Framework

The lens used to explore the experiences of FGDSoC is an anti-deficit achievement framework developed by Shaun R. Harper (2012) to better understand how students of color successfully persist through the STEM pipeline. Harper's theoretical framework considered three points along the educational journey and explored factors related to student achievement (Harper, 2012). This study uses this anti-deficit achievement framework to counter the multitude of negative narratives surrounding students with multiple marginalized identities (Harper, 2010; Sarcedo, 2022) and explore anti-oppressive methodologies often used with the population (Sarcedo, 2020).

Furthermore, this framework disrupts deficit-based thinking that blames students of color for their lack of success, removing the responsibility from the system centered on whiteness (Reyes & Duran, 2021, p. 9). This framework is operationalized by inverting deficit-based questions. For example, instead of questioning the lack of mentoring that prevented the student from having a successful experience, the anti-deficit framework questions asked the student to describe mentor qualities that supported a successful experience and what contributed to a successful environment. Thus, utilizing an anti-deficit framework serves to reframe the lens through which students are often viewed and explore how aspects of their identity are strengths. Lastly, this framework contributes to advancing a positive narrative surrounding the target population looking toward solutions that build upon one's strengths and talents not accumulated through formal education but through lived experiences and life challenges (Rendón et al., 2014; Reyes & Duran, 2021).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research study aims to understand the experiences of four current students and one alumnus Latine/Hispanic and Indigenous first-generation doctoral students at a predominantly white institution in a Western state. This study draws upon a larger qualitative team-based project conducted in 2022 titled "Elucidating Doctoral Students of Color Experiences." The larger project collected the experiences of 15 Doctoral Students of Color (DSoC), while considering another layer of marginalized identity, this study highlights the experiences of three Latine and one Indigenous doctoral student who identify as first-generation by investigating the previously collected narratives of DSoC in their School of Education, and isolating the participants who identify as Latine, Indigenous, and first-generation to explore their experiences. Our research questions included:

1) Who do FGDSoC identify as their academic mentors?
2) What mentor qualities and additional academic supports do FGDSoC look for in a successful program?

Data Sources

Recruitment of participants occurred through email and snowball sampling to recruit from a wider network and obtain additional referred participants (Kumar, 2019, p. 309). Thus, the original participants were recruited by emailing students within the school and emailing the affinity group DSoC and inviting them to participate.

All participants were invited to a 45-minute interview, which was conducted over Zoom and researchers utilized semi-structured interview questions based on student status including current students and alumni. An example of a difference in wording includes tenses, for example, a current student was asked where they were in their doctoral journey. In contrast, an alum was asked when they graduated with their doctorate.

Each interview was audibly recorded via Otter, transcribed by the researcher conducting the interview, and placed on a secure and encrypted university drive. The de-identified transcriptions were uploaded into Atlas.ti, and participants who identified as Latine and Indigenous were isolated from other participants. Data was coded and analyzed using constant comparison analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), including eight specific codes: Faculty Mentor, Faculty/Person of Color, Mentor Qualities, Faculty Building Relationships, Imposter Syndrome, Mentor Longevity, limitations, and No mentor.

Participants

Diego is a first-generation low-income Mexican American and first-generation college male student, who grew up in a small rural town with nothing but oil fields, a refinery, the railroad, and the State Penitentiary. If it were not for the Railroad's need for cheap labor to maintain the train tracks through Wyoming and Utah, his ancestors would not have moved their large Mexican American families from the mountains of New Mexico to the flat lands of southern Wyoming. Both of his grandfathers migrated from northern New Mexico to take jobs as section workers on the Union Pacific Railroad. Because he stuttered and was also a low-income Mexican American, it was assumed that he was not intelligent and could not learn the same as other children, so he was placed in the Learning Resource Center track at his elementary school. He is not ashamed of growing up a low-income Mexican American, whose parents were high school dropouts. He is glad that he grew up on the south side, the brown side because if he had not gone through that experience, he would not be the person that he is today.

Blanca identifies as a Latina female and a first-generation college student who grew up in rural Colorado. Her family came to Colorado to work in agriculture from all parts of New Mexico and Brownville, Texas. Blanca shares how the erasure of her family's native language was a form of protection from

discrimination when she was growing up. She shared her struggles of feeling not enough or too much of one thing.

Esperanza was born and raised in Houston, Texas. She is a first-generation college student who identifies as Mexican American or Latine as a larger umbrella term. She shares how she rejects the term Hispanic, as it reminds her of a racial slur she often heard growing up. Esperanza shares that her family has always been on the same land that they currently reside on, it was the border that moved on them. She shares her struggle with Imposter Syndrome, as it has been a constant reality whether in personal, professional, or academic life. She shared the importance of having a Latina mentor and Latine colleagues in academia who encouraged her to keep pushing herself to grow, learn, break glass ceilings, and to remember the responsibility that she must mentor others who come after her.

Javier is Indigenous and a first-generation college student. He shares that he was born in Guatemala. English was not his first language, and he grew up with his grandparents. His grandfather is Maya Pokomchi, and his grandmother is mixed. He moved to California for a few years, then Colorado until 2022 and he now resides in Quakertown, PA. Javier shares the reason as to why he identifies as Indigenous and moves away from the Latino/a/x/e terminology based on how this term erases the Indigenous identity. He offered the following quote from Kurly Tlapoyawa, an archaeologist, author, filmmaker, and ethnohistorian. He is the founder of the Chimalli Institute. He states, "No matter how you slice it, terms like ‘Latin,’ ‘Latino,’ ‘Latina,’ and ‘Latinx’ represent a racist-colonialist mindset that actively erases people of Indigenous and African origin. Why should we continue to promote a term that privileges whiteness at the expense of Brown and Black people?"

RESULTS

Participants described the need to see faculty that looked like them, as this created the initial connection. Participants further described how faculty of color communicated with them and worked to build connections as a vital piece of their experience. Participants discussed at length how faculty spoke to them encouragingly, intentionally creating connections with them, and providing out-of-classroom opportunities that allowed them to feel seen and developed their professional and academic skills beyond the classroom. As a result, participants felt validated, which created a successful student experience. This is demonstrated by the verbatim quotes below.

Esperanza shared, “The initial connection is really physical, as a woman of color, she (referring to her Latine mentor) was always really transparent with what that experience has looked like and the obstacles and barriers that have come up, how to navigate those and get her voice to the table.”

Javier expressed in reference to faculty of color, “She would look for opportunities for me to present my work. Eventually, I was able to be a Teacher

Assistant and then teach my own course. This was good guidance to understand how Academia works".

Blanca articulated, “When I was in (professional) meetings or statewide events, I would see the faculty (of color) there. They would message me on zoom, that’s where everything was at that time, and they would say hi and check in with me. They may not have been my mentors, but they would show me that they remember who I am and that I mattered, even with a simple hello.”

Diego expressed, referring to a faculty of color, “She was someone I could go to and talk with a lot, she served as the chair of my committee.”

DISCUSSION

This research study utilized an anti-deficit achievement framework to explore the experiences of FGDSoC. In addition, this study sought to illuminate who the population identifies as academic mentors and what mentor qualities, and additional academic supports students look for in a successful program. To explore the under-researched topic, data was extrapolated from a more extensive mixed-methods study. Our findings, along with the literature, suggest that Latine and Indigenous FGDSoC identify one positive academic mentor by finding faculty who look like them and are from their ethnic and cultural background.

Faculty mentor qualities include positive communication and connection to other opportunities vital to a successful student experience. Participants shared that how faculty spoke and interacted with them helped to validate their experiences which made them feel seen and increased their self-efficacy. In conclusion, participant responses indicated that faculty of color provided positive faculty communication, connections, and opportunities as vital to their educational attainment.

IMPLICATIONS

Nationally, the incremental number of doctoral confirmations for FGDSoC has large implications for institutional equity and their students. Enhancing diversity and understanding of broad experiences and backgrounds in all programs helps to create a culture where students of color believe they are more than a representation. Most research surrounding the population is focused on undergraduates, what the population lacks, and how aspects of their identity hinder the student (Gardner & Holley, 2011; Harper, 2012).

While research has yet to focus explicitly on the experiences of Latine and Indigenous doctoral students, voices from our First-Generation Latine and Indigenous students echoed, although challenging to locate, the vital and positive impact of access to one faculty mentor of color.

Findings were derived from an anti-deficit framework which counters the multitude of deficit-based narratives and disrupts deficit-based thinking that blames students of color for their lack of success, removing the responsibility from

the system centered on whiteness (Gardner & Holley, 2011; Harper, 2012, Reyes & Duran, 2021). These findings are essential, as competing cultural perspectives between PWIs and FGDSoC often give rise to disproportionate levels of social, economic, and cultural hardships this group of students faces.

As institutions continue to serve a growing number of diverse students, it is imperative for institutions to increase the number of opportunities FGDSoC has to interact with others from their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. First, these opportunities must come in the form of faculty of color; thus, ensuring to increase the number of faculty of color when hiring as well as prioritizing their retention. Second, offer navigation support in their academic environment, for example, by creating an affinity group, "Doctoral Students of Color" (DSoC).

When FGDSoC have access to FMoC throughout various phases of their academic journey, representation is improved and centralized around a culture of highly valued academic relationships. FMoC has been shown to disrupt oppressive forms of thinking and challenge traditional forms of teaching by embracing cultural identity, indigenous language, and familial relationships as counter-narratives to traditionally Euro-centric models of success within the education system. They take the time to build strong and trusting relationships with faculty members and students. This is important for policy and practice because they are willing to share their knowledge and experience and then use this information to inform evidence-based decisions for systemic improvement in the classroom and throughout the university.

Because of their guidance, shared expertise, and insights, mentees acquire new skills and knowledge that are particularly valuable to their career development and educational experiences. Subsequent research would benefit from analyzing these opportunities - including access to new research opportunities, professional networks and learning experiences, and some honest, sound advice that helps FGDSoC advance in their chosen field. FMoC encourage mentees in matters both personal and professional which has helped many overcome self-doubt and even imposter syndrome. Because the way FMoC care is so evident, their students and mentees move through the academic process with a sense of empowerment that prepares them for the next steps and beyond.

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