

SOY EL PRIMERO: FIRST-GENERATION LATINO/A COLLEGE STUDENTS'
EXPERIENCES OF ACCULTURATIVE STRESS AND COPING
RESPONSE IN COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

First-generation Latino/a student enrollment in U.S. Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) is increasing. However, first-generation Latino/a students' ability to persist and graduate from PWIs has been and continues to be a pressing concern. The climate of the PWI campus caters to the prevailing norms and practices of white students and likely contributes to first-generation Latino/a students' experiences of acculturative stress on the college campus. This phenomenological research study explored the acculturative stress experienced by first-generation Latino/a students attending PWIs, as well as their subsequent coping responses to this stress. Study findings revealed several on- and off-campus causes of acculturative stress and several coping responses, some of which were more successful than others. Recommendation for PWI policy and practices are offered.

APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, have examined a dissertation titled “Soy el Primero: First-Generation Latino/a College Students’ Experiences of Acculturative Stress and Coping Response in College,” presented by Tracy Lynn Graybill, candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

United States higher education institutions are attracting, enrolling, and serving a much more diverse student population than ever before (Hurtado, Alvarado, & Guillermo-Wann, 2015; Navarro, Ojeda, Schwartz, Piña-Watson, & Luna, 2014; Quaye & Harper, 2014; Syed et al., 2013). These diverse students bring vastly different interests and needs with them to campus (Davis, 2012; Masterson, 2007; Smith, 2015). Further, once enrolled, each student undergoes very different experiences (Davis, 2012; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Stephens, Brannon, Markus, & Nelson, 2015). It is a constant challenge for higher education institutions to provide the appropriate type and extent of support services to support diverse college student populations (Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals, & Durón, 2013; Masterson, 2007; Reinartz, 2000), including those services targeting the needs of Latino/a students, whose numbers are rapidly increasing on U.S. postsecondary campuses.

Between 1993 and 2013, the number of Latino/a students enrolling in U.S. colleges and universities has increased 201% (Krogstad, 2016). However, Latino/a college students' graduation rates are consistently below that of their White peers (Cavazos, Johnson, & Sparrow, 2010; Kuh, Kinzie, Cruce, Shoup & Gonyea, 2006; Santiago, Gudino, Baweja, & Nadeem, 2014). In 2014, only 15% of Latino/a college students earned a bachelor's degree, in comparison to 41% of their White counterparts (Krogstad, 2016). While an increased Latino/a college student enrollment is a positive development, Latino/a students' ability to persist and graduate from a four-year, bachelor degree-granting college remains a pressing concern because earning a bachelor degree or higher is related to higher incomes, lower unemployment rates, and lower poverty rates (Caumont, 2014; Engle & Tinto, 2008). Even

more importantly, however, is that these low graduation rates indicate that that talent inherent within this growing college student population is not being well served by U.S. higher education institutions.

Study Background

More than a quarter of all Latino/a K-12 students in the U.S. live in poverty (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Latino/a K-12 students are also more likely to attend schools with low resources for student support, often resulting in academic under-preparation (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Not surprisingly, many Latino/a college students arrive at college facing a number of barriers and challenges that affect their college experience (Gloria et al., 2017). Beyond being more likely to be academically underprepared than their White counterparts (Boden, 2011), Latino/a students are often the first in their families to attend college (Reyes & Nora, 2012; Santiago, 2011), and as such, are referred to as “first-generation” college students (Boden, 2011; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004).

As of 2016, an estimated 50% of Latino/a students attending a two- or four-year college or university were classified as “first-generation” college students (Nuñez & Sansone, 2016). They are often the “first” in other ways beyond being a first-generation college student. They may be the first generation born in the U.S. to immigrant parents, or the first generation to come to the U.S. from their home country as infants, children, or as teenagers (Baum & Flores, 2011). First-generation Latino/a college students often lack access to college information and the “know how” needed to be successful in college (Baum & Flores, 2011; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012), and many have limited finances for college and work full-time while enrolling in college part-time (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Tym, McMillion, Barone, & Webster, 2004).

In addition to the challenges discussed above, many Latino/a students attend four-year colleges and universities that are Predominantly White Institutions (PWI) (Cerezo & Chang, 2013). PWIs are defined as institutions of higher education in which the population of White students is 50% or greater (Brown & Dancy, 2010). The climate of the PWI campus caters to the prevailing norms, culture, and practices of White students (Cerezo & Chang, 2013), with White cultural values of individualism and independence often emphasized (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012; Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014). Students from diverse backgrounds and first-generation students report experiencing stressors while attending PWIs that make their college persistence difficult (Castillo et al., 2006; Cerezo & Chang, 2013; Nuñez, 2009). The term “stressor” has been used to describe the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of challenges that Latino/as can experience (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000).

Stressors reported by first-generation Latino/a college students attending PWIs include feelings of isolation and discrimination, and feeling less understood and less affirmed than their White peers (Cerezo & Chang, 2013; Gloria et al., 2017; Strayhorn, 2008). Cultural incongruity between White and Latino/a culture also plays a large part in Latino/a students’ college experiences in that they must often make adjustments between their home and family life and their life in a college setting. Contending with different cultural values can foster a sense of being a “misfit” or cultural incongruity in college (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Vera Sanchez, 2006). In summary, Latino/a first-generation college students who are adjusting to the culture of a PWI often face multiple challenges as they strive toward bachelor degree completion.

One emerging explanation for lower Latino/a college graduation rates in four-year PWIs is related to acculturative stress (Lui, 2015; Santiago et al., 2014; Torres, Driscoll, & Voell, 2012). Acculturation is defined as the process of learning and adapting to a new culture (Berry, 2003; Santiago et al., 2014). As described in Banks and Banks (2009), “Culture [consists] primarily of the symbolic, ideational, and intangible aspects of human societies” (p. 8). Acculturative stress can occur when problems in adapting to a new culture, or acculturation, are experienced (Crocket et al., 2007). It can also occur when a person experiences a sense of imbalance or conflict between cultures (Burgos-Cienfuegos, Vasquez-Salgado, Ruedas-Gracia, & Greenfield, 2015; Lui, 2015; Navarro et al., 2014).

While a new immigrant can experience acculturative stress, so too can later generations (i.e., children of the foreign-born), who may experience it in the form of feeling caught between the values of their less acculturated parents and their more acculturated peers (Crockett et al., 2007; Santiago et al., 2014). When later generations (children of the foreign-born) attend a four-year PWI, they often experience acculturative stress very much like what a new immigrant would experience upon arriving in the U.S. (Yang, Byers, Salazar, & Salas, 2009). College is not just a campus, but an entirely new culture (Barzun, 1968; Gettman, 1992; Readings, 1996; Yang et al., 2009).

Experiencing acculturative stress often triggers a coping response (Kuo, 2014; Padilla, Cervantes, Maldonado, & Garcia, 2013). Coping responses, defined as cognitive and behavioral efforts to positively manage stressful situations, are problem-solving focused and adaptive (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Examples of coping responses might include talking to a family member or developing a plan to address a problem. The use of coping responses can mitigate the effects of stressful events, including stress related to acculturation (Lazarus

& Folkman, 1984) or college transitions (Crockett et al., 2007; Zea, Jarama, & Bianchi, 1995).

For first-generation Latino/a college students, coping responses involve learning to balance family expectations and cultural norms with potentially competing academic expectations and cultural norms (Gloria, Castellanos, Scull, & Villegas, 2009). This balancing act can cause stress, depression, and anxiety, and disrupt academic functioning (Crockett et al., 2007; Flook & Fuligni, 2008; Santiago et al., 2014; Zychniski & Polo, 2012). A large number of Latinos/as who enroll in college do not persist to graduation (Santiago et al., 2014). Acculturative stress may at least partly explain lack of persistence in attaining a college degree. As such, more insight into how first-generation Latino/a college students enrolled in a four-year PWI experience and successfully respond to acculturative stress is needed.

Problem Statement

Many Latinos/as attending PWIs find positive ways to cope with acculturative stressors by adopting a bi-cultural approach and identity (Schwartz et al., 2013), meshing elements of their home culture with that of the prevailing U.S. culture. Researchers (Coatsworth, Maldonado-Molina, Pantin & Szapocznik, 2005; Sam & Berry, 2010; Schwartz et al., 2013; Schwartz & Zamboanga, 2008) suggest that this is the most adaptive approach to acculturation. Individuals who can integrate the cultural aspects gained from their background culture with new ones gained from their larger/newer culture have more resources to use as they cope with acculturative stress (Sam & Berry, 2010).

Further, bi-cultural adjustment has been linked to a number of psychological benefits, such as managing emotions and positively reframing problems (Tadmor, Tetlock,

& Peng, 2009). Bi-cultural adjustment is also linked to well-being (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010; Yoon, Lee, & Goh, 2008). Broadly defined, well-being refers to happiness and overall contentment with life, as well as feeling able to cope with the daily demands of life (Vera et al., 2012; Yoon et al., 2008). In adolescents, research shows that well-being and happiness are linked to resilience (Garcia, 2011; Kobasa, Maddi & Kahn, 1982; Masten et al., 1999) and to educational persistence (Garcia, 2011).

Many Latino/a students may come to college already coping with the tension between the culture of their families and the prevailing culture of U.S. society. When they arrive on campus, they must also cope with a college culture that, as stated earlier, is new to them. Little is known, however, about how first-generation Latino/a students attending four-year PWIs describe coping, not just with college-related stresses and challenges, but also with simultaneously negotiating these various cultures (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012).

Study Purpose

The study aims are to identify (1) first-generation Latino/a students' reported acculturative stressors during college enrollment at a four-year PWI, (2) coping responses that these students report utilizing to cope with acculturative stressors, and (3) coping responses Latino/a first-generation college students perceive to be most successful in responding to reported acculturative stressors. Coping has been described by researchers as situationally dependent dynamic processes between the environment and the individual (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985; Lazarus, 2000). For example, coping could describe how a Latino/a first-generation college student is able to meld contrasting cultures (Gonzales, Jovel, & Stoner, 2004). Folkman and Lazarus (1985) also stress the importance of the "individual in how the coping process is shaped" (p. 154).

Researchers suggest that asking people to use personal narrative to describe stressful events and how they responded to these events can provide powerful insights into the dynamics of coping (Lazarus, 2000; Phinney & Haas, 2003). Therefore, first-generation Latinos/as' personal narratives of acculturative stressors encountered while in college, and their corresponding coping strategies, may provide valuable insight into factors affecting these students' college persistence in—and ultimately, degree attainment from—a four-year PWI.

The aims of this interdisciplinary research study were accomplished employing phenomenological inquiry to explore the recounted lived experiences of Latino/a first-generation college students when they encountered acculturative stress and employed coping strategies while attending a PWI. In Chapter 5, I provide in-depth description of the application of an interdisciplinary lens to explore first-generation Latino/a college students' acculturative stress and coping responses while attending a PWI. Briefly defined, interdisciplinary research is a process of addressing a topic or solving a problem that is too complex or too broad to examine through the lens of a single discipline (Repko, 2008). The focus of phenomenological inquiry is to discover what people experience in regard to a phenomenon or phenomena (in this case, acculturated stress and coping strategies), and how they interpret the experience, individually or as a group (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002; Van Manen, 1990). Bruner (1990) and Polkinghorne (1988) posited that narrative approaches such as phenomenology are interdisciplinary in that studying narratives and analyses of texts and talk are linked to psychology and literature, and focuses on the individual's lived experience (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In-depth interviews with Latino/a first-generation junior or senior college students enrolled at PWIs were undertaken to obtain rich, thick,

descriptions of the phenomena of stress and coping. The study sample was limited to college juniors and seniors because Latino/a college students who have persisted longer in college are likely better able to provide historical and holistic perspectives of their experiences, and to give insight into what “works” in terms of responding successfully to acculturative stress. Two different four-year PWIs served as sites for interviews. One site is a small, private faith-based college, and the other is a mid-size public university.

Campus representative interviews were conducted to provide insight into the types of services available to Latino/a students and to assist with identifying students who fit the requirements for study participation. For the purpose of this research study, the term “campus representatives” was defined as those individuals who support students in their college pursuits (Yang et al., 2009). More universities have begun to offer multi-cultural services and make available student affairs professionals whose job it is to support minority students for whom cultural and academic adjustment is more difficult (Zhang, 2011). The role of these services and student affairs professionals is pivotal because they provide support that can facilitate academic pursuits, help students develop social networks, and generally act as a safe place to go for students who are experiencing stress (Maruyama, Moreno, Gudeman, & Marin, 2000; Yang et al., 2009). The perspectives of these professionals was important in this study because their direct contact with Latino/a students and knowledge of available services on their respective campuses helped to provide a rounded understanding of Latino/a experiences, stressors and coping responses in college (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012).

Study Questions

Three research questions guided this study:

1. What acculturative stressors do first-generation Latino/a junior and senior college students report experiencing while attending a PWI?
2. What coping responses do these students describe using to respond to acculturative stressors?
 - 2a. Of the reported coping responses, which do students perceive as being the most successful in facilitating their ability to persist at four-year PWIs, and why?
3. Do student responses vary across institutions, and if so, how and why?

Conceptual Framework

This study utilized Berry's (1997) framework of acculturation, stress, and coping to guide research questions about Latino/a first-generation college students and coping within the multi-cultural contexts of home culture, dominant culture (U.S.), and college culture. Acculturation theory is deeply rooted and grounded in the broader context of coping and of stress (Berry, 1997, 2006; Ward, 2001). It views acculturation and cultural adaptation as a process that people undergo in an effort to reconcile, adapt, and cope with the changes that arise from learning to function in a new culture. Acculturation theory has a well-established relationship to a wide variety of psycho-social outcomes among immigrant populations, including identity development (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000; Szabo & Ward, 2015), and sociocultural adaptation (Ward & Kennedy, 2001).

Coping is a useful framework to delineate the processes of cultural transition (Kuo, 2014). Lazarus and Folkman's seminal work (1984) defined coping as "the constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (p. 141).

Within psychological research, coping is studied because of its complex relationship with protective factors, such as social support, resilience, positive outlook, and feelings of contentment and happiness, all of which, this study posits, might also lead to persistence in a college setting (Aldwin, 2007; Kuo, Arnold, & Rodriguez-Rubio, 2014).

Study Significance

Although researchers have examined the personal and social factors that help Latino/a students succeed academically, little attention has been paid to coping responses that help these students successfully address acculturative stress and adjust to college (Cavazos et al., 2010; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Zalaquett, 2006). However, available research suggests that the most successful coping response to address acculturative stress while adjusting to college is to undergo a process of creating a new bi-cultural identity that incorporates characteristics from the personal cultural and the new culture (Organista, Marin, & Chun, 2010, Yang et al., 2009). Large-scale quantitative studies of the bi-cultural identity creation process among Latino/a students have produced findings about the measurement and dimensions of bicultural adjustment (Iturbide, Raffaelli, & Carlo, 2009; Schwartz et al., 2013). However, Alegria (2009) stated that more attention should be given to how the bi-cultural identity creation process and accompanying acculturation (and subsequent stress) unfolds in differing contexts. This study is one of the first to direct attention toward Latino/a first-generation college students' bi-cultural identity creation process as it relates to acculturative stress incurred during these students' enrollment at four-year PWIs as they pursue a bachelor's degree.

Study Limitations

To conduct a qualitative research study that prevents possible threats to the results (validity) and minimizes bias (reliability), I identified potential limitations before the research began. The first limitation is my own background (I am white, American-born, and not a first-generation college student), which significantly differs from the background of the individuals I studied. This significant difference in backgrounds is a limitation because it could prohibit me from picturing the problem under study as it exists to those who are being investigated (Patton, 2002). The second limitation is the role and influence that I, as a researcher, might have on the group of students I would be studying. Kvale (2006) stated that there is a power differential in the qualitative researcher-to-research-participant relationship. This power differential includes the researcher's hidden agendas, the enacting of one-way dialogues which suit the researcher's needs, and interpreting interview data to fit the research parameters (2006). Creswell (2007) advised qualitative researchers to spend time thinking about their role and influence as researcher before the study begins. As a researcher, I worked to minimize any influence on participants' autonomy in the interviews to allow their perceptions to guide the research (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014).

Strategies inherent in qualitative research can also serve to address validity or reliability threats described above. For example, extensive time spent in the field can help to establish a researcher relationship with participants that is built on trust and participant autonomy (Creswell, 2007). Thus, it is a strategy to address my identified limitation of researcher role and influence on research participants and on the study. Spending time in the field also helps to identify misinformation from participants. Most importantly, field time

helped me identify and avoid my misinterpretations of the data and allowed participant data to drive the research (Creswell, 2007; Polit & Beck, 2012). The use of thick, rich, description is also a strategy that could address the limitations of my bias and my interpretation of the research study. Thick, rich, description allows for authenticity of research because it helps to ensure that the feeling and tone of participants' lives are being reported rather than that of the researcher (Polit & Beck, 2012).

Further, phenomenological inquiry, which focuses on what is known about people and descriptions of human experiences (Polit & Beck, 2012), has built in "steps" that can address the study limitations I have identified. These four steps (which are discussed in greater detail in the methodology chapter) include bracketing, intuiting, analyzing, and describing (Polit & Beck, 2012). While each step is equally important to phenomenological inquiry, the process of bracketing is an important way to address limitations of my background and my interpretation of events. Additionally, it could help to reduce any influence as it relates to my role as a researcher, or on any misinterpretation of data. Bracketing is a process of identifying, and then letting go of, one's preconceived notions and beliefs about the phenomenon being studied so that the issue under study might be seen from the lived experience of the research participants (Polit & Beck). Many phenomenological researchers keep a reflexive journal as the study unfolds, which helps the researcher to bracket out their emerging feelings (Creswell, 2007). According to Polit and Beck (2012), a journal is a way for me to identify issues that I take for granted. It can also serve as a means for me to clarify and identify areas in which I know I am biased and help me to identify areas where there might be conflicts around the role of the researcher and the role of the study participants. Finally, keeping a journal could help to identify my feelings or beliefs

which might affect my neutrality towards the study. In this manner, I ensured that I was allowing a space for phenomenological inquiry to occur, and also ensured that I could address the limitations that I have identified which might have an effect on the validity and reflexivity of this study.

Delimitations

The aim of this research as described in the purpose section was to explore how first-generation Latino/a college students experience acculturative stressors and cope with these acculturative stressors encountered while enrolled in four-year PWIs. First-generation college students in this study were defined as those students whose parents or guardians never attended either a two- or four-year higher education institution. Because this study focused specifically on Latino/a first-generation college students, those individuals who identify as first-generation students, but not as Latino/a, were not included within the bounds of this study. Additionally, those Latino/a students who were not first-generation students were also not included in this study. I did not include freshman or sophomore first-generation college students because I posited that those who are closer to bachelor degree attainment (i.e., juniors and seniors) would be better able to provide a deeper description of the phenomena under study. I have also limited this study to the experience of first-generation college students attending four-year institutions. Thus, those attending community colleges or other two-year colleges were not included in this research.

Summary

Key components presented in Chapter 1 included the study background, problem statement, study purpose, research questions, study significance, limitations, and delimitations. An overview of the study's conceptual framework was also provided. Chapter

2 presents the literature relevant to this research study, including literature on Latino/a first-generation college students, the acculturative stress these students experience in college, and students' subsequent coping responses to these experiences. Chapter 2 also fully describes the study's conceptual framework. Chapter 3 presents a detailed description of the study method, including study sample, data collection, and data analyses techniques.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of the literature as it relates to Latino/a first-generation college students' experiences of acculturative stress and their subsequent coping responses to this stress while attending a PWI. The literature review first offers a historical and contextual background of the term "Latino/a" and Latino/a culture in the U.S. It then provides a historical overview of Latinos/as' experiences in the U.S. and their acculturation experiences in the U.S. educational system. Berry's (1997) conceptual framework of acculturation, stress, and coping guided this study and is presented. Berry's framework links the process of acculturating to a different culture with the experience of stress and subsequent coping. Because Berry's framework links acculturation processes to stress and coping, it is a useful lens through which to view the experiences of Latino/a first-generation college students' acculturative stress and subsequent coping responses while attending a PWI. The literature review concludes with a description of how this framework directly informed the study research questions.

Latino/a Culture

For the purpose of this research, the broadest definition of the term Latino/a was used; it includes all people living in the U.S. whose origins are of Spanish-speaking regions, including the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico, and South America (Cartaret, 2011). It is important, however, to understand the context of the term "Latino/a," which is a relatively new term developed by the U.S. government in the 1970s to establish a common denominator for large and diverse groups of individuals (Cartaret, 2011). It can be an ambiguous term, as pointed out by Suárez-Orozco and Pérez (2002), because it does not

encompass any one racial signification. Many diverse subgroups are considered Latino/a (Gandara & Contreras, 2009); they can be white, black, indigenous, or a broad combination of any of the above.

Latinos/as have varied histories, cultures, languages, and social issues. It would require a long dissertation to describe all of the various different peoples whose origins can be traced to the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and Latin American cultures. However, an overview of Latino/a culture and cultural characteristics most common among Latinos/as is provided. Additionally, the overview includes those facets of Latino/a culture that may lend themselves to further understanding of acculturation, stress, coping, and development of a bi-cultural identity.

Latino/a culture and interaction styles differ from the dominant culture and interaction styles found in the U.S., especially in terms of how children are socialized (Lorenzo-Blanco, Unger, Baezconde-Garbanati, Ritt-Olson, & Soto, 2012; Zayas, Lester, Cabassa, & Fortuna, 2005). Cartaret (2011) identified the following Latino/a culture dimensions: familismo (family), collectivism, respecto (respect), and fatalismo (fatalism).

In Latino/a culture, high emphasis is placed on family closeness (familismo) and close interpersonal relations (Cartaret, 2011; Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2012). The family is a source of identity and protection. Familismo emphasizes an orientation to the family, family loyalty, and trust among family members (Rivera et al., 2008). Family harmony is also an important aspect, and deference to family decisions is more important than deference to individual decisions (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2012; Darder & Torres, 1998). Decisions are not made by individuals, but collectively as a family.

Latino/a family cohesiveness has been found to be a protective factor against external stress (Rivera et al., 2008; Unger et al., 2009). However, some studies have found that the Latino/a emphasis on family responsibilities can be a burden to Latino/a student success in college (Dayton, Gonzales-Vasquez, Martinez, & Plum, 2004; Hernandez, 2002; Hurst, 2009). As described by Medina and Posadas (2012), family closeness or family responsibility might take the form of feeling pressure to live close to home, or to work and provide for family, while also trying to attend school full-time. Regardless of how the family is described in the literature, knowing how Latino/a students describe their family closeness and responsibilities to their families is key to informing college and university professionals about how they can better support these students (Arana, Castañeda-Sound, Blanchard, & Aguilar, 2011).

“Respecto,” which is literally translated in English to “respect,” is closely tied to familismo (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2012). While familismo emphasizes trust among family members, respeto promotes positive interpersonal relationships, dictating deferential behavior between family members and thereby helping to maintain harmony (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2012; Darder & Torres, 1998). A study of parenting styles of Mexican and Dominican mothers revealed that “respetto” was highly valued in Latino/a culture, and that it was important for children to learn respect from their parents early on (Calzada, Fernandez, & Cortes, 2010).

Familismo and respeto are tied to ideas of hierarchy within society (Calzada et al., 2010). Latinos/as place high value on demonstrating respect and deference to others they perceive to be authority figures. This can be based on age, gender, social position, or title, such as a doctor or a teacher. It can lead to a hesitancy to ask questions or to speak up to a

doctor or a teacher (for example), because these are perceived authority figures who should not be challenged (Antshel, 2002; Cartaret, 2011). Hierarchy also comes into play generationally (Cartaret, 2011). Often, the oldest male in a family holds the greatest power. This person makes many of the decisions for the family. Other role expectations are based on gender hierarchy, in that men are traditionally viewed as providers for the family, and women are expected to be respectful and submissive to their husbands (although this varies from individual to individual).

As a cultural dimension, fatalismo encompasses the belief that a person has very limited or no power in changing the course of life events (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2012; Unger et al., 2009). Fatalismo has been found to promote coping responses to negative life situations (Cuéllar, Arnold, & Gonzalez, 1995). For example, a person may believe that his or her health problems and a cure are in the hands of God. Because the issue is out of his or her hands as an individual, he or she may not be motivated to seek information in regard to health status, or may have a passive stance towards health care (Bennink, 2013). Fatalismo may also come from past negative experiences in which an individual felt socially disempowered. In this instance, fatalismo may be used as a coping mechanism for problems over which the individual feels he or she has no control (Abraído-Lanza et al., 2007). Because fatalism is tied to religious values, it can promote emotional support within Latino/a culture (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2012). However, this life approach can put Latino/a individuals at risk for depressive symptoms (Lorenzo-Blanco et al., 2012; Neff & Hoppe, 1993).

History of Latinos/as in U.S. Higher Education

The story of Latino/a students in the U.S. has long been one of struggling to gain legitimacy and visibility (MacDonald, Botti, & Clark, 2007). Unlike Black students, Latino/a students have never been segregated based on laws and policies legally mandated and acted out by government (referred to as *de jure* law). Much of this had to do with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) which established that Mexicans in the newly acquired U.S. territories would be racially classified as White. However, *de facto* segregation of Latinos/as was widespread (Macdonald, 2012; Montoya, 2000), meaning that segregation happened regardless of the fact that it was not legally mandated. Thus, segregation in schools and other actions denying Latinos/as equal access were based on local or community attitude and had only the appearance of being legal, but in reality were not (Macdonald, 2012).

As an example of the above, Texas and California constitutionally mandated separate schools for Black and White students (Delgado Bernal, 2000; Montoya, 2001). However, these states did not mandate the segregation of Latino/a students (Macdonald & Garcia, 2003; Montoya, 2000). Unlike the legislation and statutes designated for Black students, many Latino/a children in the Southwest and Midwestern states of the U.S. (such as Iowa and Kansas) were placed in “Mexican” classrooms or schools as a result of local custom (not by law). Quite often, they were segregated not because of race, but because of perceived language or educational deficiencies (Delgado Bernal, 2000; Espino, 2016). Local and community control of Latino/a schooling and education, and the lack of federally mandated laws recognizing these students’ needs, would provide the backdrop for the education of

Latinos/as until well into the twentieth century (Delgado Bernal, 2000; MacDonald & Garcia, 2003).

The laws of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries mandated the segregation of Black students (for example), but at the same time, the federal government and some missionary groups were also creating opportunities for some minority groups to have access to higher education. The Morrill Act of 1862 established historically black colleges and universities to serve Black students. Colleges such as Mount Holyoke, Vassar, and Wellesley were created by missionary and church groups to provide women (who also experienced segregation) with a college education. In comparison, no special considerations were made at the time for the post-secondary education of Latinos/as (Gonzales, 2010). In fact, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) were not established until the 1980s and are still emerging today (Santiago & Andrade, 2010).

Catholic colleges and institutions played a very important part in allowing Latino/a students access to higher education (Contreras, 2016; MacDonald & Garcia, 2003). These institutions did not prohibit the speaking of any other language but English. Additionally, many Catholic schools and colleges were accepting of bilingual and religious traditions (MacDonald & Garcia, 2003). The Catholic Church continues to play a part in providing higher education to Latino/a students. Of the 50 colleges ranked as “best serve” for Latino/a students, eight are private Catholic colleges (Contreras, 2016). These colleges serve large populations of Latino/a students. As one example, 55% of the student population at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, Texas, is Latino or Latina (Contreras, 2016).

Between 1930 and 1950, more Latino/a students gained access to college as more philanthropy-driven scholarships became available (San Miguel & Donato, 2010).

Additionally, a Latino/a middle class was slowly beginning to emerge; middle class Latino/a families could now afford to send their children to college (MacDonald & Garcia, 2003). However, while Latino/a college students' experiences with segregation were not as delineated as those experienced by Black students, the road to U.S. higher education was still fraught with roadblocks. Many Latino/a students were prevented from reaching the 8th grade because of racism and segregation in the classroom, poorly executed attendance regulation, and language issues (MacDonald, 2012). Even with these barriers, the attendance of Latino students continued to grow, if at a very slow pace (San Miguel & Donato, 2010).

The passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (commonly referred to as the "GI Bill") paved the way for many individuals to access higher education, including returning Latino/a veterans (MacDonald & Garcia, 2003). However, Latino/a access to higher education on a larger scale did not gain momentum until the Civil Rights movements, Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society programs, and the Higher Education Act of 1965 (Garcia, 2009; Valencia, 2008). These federal acts focused primarily on the Black population, but inspired Latino/a students to seek similar rights and opportunities that would help bring to light their unique educational needs (MacDonald, Botti, & Clark (2007). The Latino/a fight for access to better education was tied up in recognition that they were an ethnically identifiable group (MacDonald, 2012). Without this recognition, it was difficult for Latino/a students of any provenance to have their needs met. One significant piece of legislation which came on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement was the passage by the U.S. Congress of the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (BEA) (Valencia, 2008). This was the first federal piece of legislation to recognize the needs of students with limited English-

speaking ability (Valencia, 2008). The passage of this act made slow inroads into recognition of Latinos/as as a definable minority group (MacDonald et al., 2007).

Dissatisfied with the lack of a national agenda around the economic, social, and political issues faced by the Latinos/as, activists began to push hard (Muñoz, 1989). An example of this was the Chicano and Puerto Rican youth movements of the 1960s and the 1970s, which began demanding better access to higher education (Muñoz, 1989). These movements demanded better curricula that reflected the changing diversity of college campuses, faculty members who could serve as mentors and role models, Hispanic research centers, and access to financial aid. In many instances, these demands were granted (Hernandez, 2015).

The 1980s to the present have been times of contradiction and paradox for Latino/a college students (MacDonald et al., 2007). While Latinos/as' access to college increased, they were concurrently experiencing stalls in policies related to college access (Hernandez, 2015). Reagan-era changes included a focus on loans rather than grants for low-income students, which hindered many Latinos/as from enrolling in college because of a traditional unwillingness to take out loans (MacDonald et al., 2007). Latinos/as' discomfort with taking out loans prompted changes in the Higher Education Act's compensation programs, including more funds allocated to colleges whose student population consisted of 20% or more Latinos/as.

An important movement forward was the adoption of a strategy to unite Latino/a-serving institutions under one umbrella to improve access to quality higher education for Latino/a students. The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU, 2019) was created in 1986. The HACU's initial group consisted of 18 two- and four-year

universities. By 2003, the number of Hispanic Serving Institutions had risen to 112 (MacDonald et al., 2007). By 2017, the number of eligible Hispanic Serving institutions was 523 (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2019).

The Latino/a relationship to higher education remains complicated. Much progress has been achieved, including increased access to higher education and federal policies that recognize the needs of Latino/a students. More campus services specifically dedicated to assisting Latinos/as are now available (MacDonald, 2012). However, the Latino/a story of education has never been straightforward. Latinos/as still continue to fight for access, visibility, and educational resources.

Acculturative Stress, Coping, and Latinos/as

I next examine the research on acculturative stress and coping responses in relation to Latino/a first-generation college students. First, however, it is important to acknowledge and understand the broader, overlapping structural, cultural, and psychosocial conditions that influence Latinos/as as an overall group. Immigrant families, many of whom are Latinos/as, often face multiple challenges as they attempt to navigate the U.S. culture, which can lead to mental health difficulties (Rogers-Sirin, Ryce, & Sirin, 2014). The process of acculturation is a complex and multi-faceted one of change (Sirin et al., 2014). Many contexts, including family, community, and individual, can exacerbate acculturative stress (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Rogers-Sirin et al., 2014). Acculturative stress may also be tied to pre-immigration experiences, such as expectations of what life is going to be like in the U.S. When expectations are not met, or disappointments are encountered, acculturative stress can be triggered (Negy, Schwartz, & Reig-Ferrer, 2009).

Acculturative stress can also be brought about by post-immigration stressors related to language barriers, difficulties in adapting to new beliefs, values, and norms, and having to broker between Latino/a ways of daily life and the predominating culture/ways of life (Araújo, Panchanadeswaran, 2010; Ibanez, Dillon, & Villar, 2015). Other factors that contribute to acculturative stress as described in the literature related to Latinos/as include the perceptions of inferiority and discrimination, and separation from family and friends (Berry, 1997; Ibañez et al., 2015).

The literature also suggests that experiencing acculturative stressors can lead Latinos/as to experience high levels of anxiety and depression (Crockett et al., 2007; Torres, 2010). Discrimination plays an active role in acculturative stress, which in turn might affect forms of psychological distress (Torres et al., 2012). This relationship has been documented in other communities of color as well. For example, a study of the experiences of Blacks and discrimination found that discrimination contributes to higher levels of other stressors such as negative life events (Ong, Fuller-Rowell, & Burrow, 2009). In a study of Latino/a adults who experienced acculturative stress (mainly in the form of pressure to learn English), these adults were over two times more likely to experience other depressive symptoms than their non-immigrant counterparts (Torres, 2010).

Immigration is also a radical life change for children because it reshapes their lives and their patterns of relating to other people (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009). Immigrant youth might experience immigration in some of the same ways that adults experience it, such as isolation, learning English, and adjusting to family life in a new country. Additionally, the process of adjusting to a new school can lead to stress (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2009). Acculturative stress can be a barrier for

immigrant youth in terms of achieving academic success (Santiago et al., 2014; Zykinski & Polo, 2011).

Later generations—that is, children of the foreign-born—can also experience acculturative stress and other psychological issues related to acculturation (Crockett et al, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2013). This is because they often grow up in homes where the culture of heritage, rather than the new culture, is practiced (Schwartz et al., 2013). Acculturative stress might also be due in part to living with their families in ethnic and linguistic enclaves with relatively little exposure to the predominating culture (Conway, 2009; Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008; Robarge, 2002). Acculturative stress for the children of the foreign-born (later generations) can be experienced as incongruent cultural beliefs; for example, experiencing discrimination, navigating the two different cultures of home and academe. Acculturative stress has been linked to depression and anxiety (Crockett et al., 2007).

The Latino/a College Student Experience

The section above provided a review of the literature on acculturative stressors and coping responses that influence Latinos/as in the general population. This section is about how Latinos/as experience college participation. Specifically, this section examines the factors identified in the literature as influencing or related to acculturative stressors and coping responses experienced by Latino/a first-generation students in a four-year college setting. These include a sense of being invisible within the educational system, academic expectations, Latino/a cultural influence, the prevailing culture of four-year colleges and universities in the U.S., cultural congruity, Latino/a exposure to prevailing U.S. culture, and supports in college.

Invisible Students

Although Latinos/as have made inroads into college enrollment and graduation, they are still identified in the literature as “the invisible students” (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012, p. 83). As noted earlier, Latino/a college students are often the first in their families to attend college (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). However, they still lag behind other groups in earning a bachelor’s degree (Vasquez-Salgado, Greenfield, & Burgos-Cienfuegos, 2015). These students also face racism and language-related stigma throughout their educational experience (Caldwell & Siwatu, 2003; Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2015). In comparison to their White counterparts, Latino/a students are more likely to be tracked into vocational and lower ability coursework (Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2015; Zuniga, Olson, & Winter, 2005). Thus, Latino/a students may not receive as rigorous an education as their White counterparts (Crisp et al., 2015; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012).

A disproportionate number of Latino/a students come from low-income families and neighborhoods (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). They are therefore more likely to attend schools that lack resources to provide an adequate education (Contreras, 2006; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Additionally, some Latino/a students have few financial resources (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Young, 2007), and often, parents lack knowledge about the college process and how to help their children navigate the path to a bachelor’s degree (Baum & Flores, 2011; Castellanos, Gloria, Herrera, Kanagui-Munoz, & Flores, 2013; Downs et al., 2008). Scarce financial resources also means that once students get to college, they may be relying on school loans or grants to pay for college (Santiago & Cunningham, 2005). They may also be working full-time and attending college on a part-time basis to make ends meet (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012).

Low Academic Expectations

Latinos/as are one of the most segregated racial or ethnic groups in the U.S. in terms of school enrollment (Hill & Torres, 2010). As previously noted, they are also the most likely to attend schools in impoverished school districts (Hill & Torres, 2010). These schools are poorly equipped in terms of educational materials and experienced teaching professionals (Conchas, 2001; Hill & Torres, 2010). Poorly equipped schools do not foster linkages between academic success and mobility.

In school, Latino/a students are often segregated into less academically rigorous courses based on race and ethnic background, and this contributes to feelings of intellectual inferiority in comparison to their White peers (Torres, 2009; Walton & Spencer, 2009). For example, Latino/a students are underrepresented in Advanced Placement classes, and they are more likely to be placed on vocational tracks rather than college preparation tracks. This is regardless of their ability or their academic background (Hill & Torres, 2010).

Students also experience low expectations from K-12 teachers and school staff that they perceive as directly related to their Latino/a heritage (Hill & Torres, 2010; Pizzaro, 2005; Torres, 2009). Teacher attitudes toward students can guide teacher behavior toward students (Glock, Kneer, & Kovacs, 2013). More subtly, teacher attitudes can affect how students perform (Glock et al., 2013). For example, one study found that teachers praise Latino/a students less and are more likely to penalize them for lower levels of proficiency in English (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007). When students experience such discrimination in schools, it lowers their academic motivation (Perreira, Fuligini, & Potochnick, 2010). On a related note, Latino/a students are less likely to have teachers who are Latino/a themselves,

which might also contribute to students' feelings of lowered academic expectation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

Studies have found that academic and social success in college begins early in the educational pipeline (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Clark, Ponjuan, Orrock, Wilson, & Flores, 2013). For example, institutional support at the high school level often plays a part in the promotion of better academic achievement of Latino/a students, which can carry on into college (Lozano, Watt, & Huerta, 2009). Clark and colleagues' (2013) study of male Latino college students found that many students reported receiving inappropriate advisement and minimal attention from guidance counselors prior to attending college. Often Latino/a students are not well informed about the realities and processes that are involved in preparing for life after high school (Sciarra & Whitson, 2007). When Latino/a first-generation students are not supported and encouraged in the early years of school, the barriers they face in college become that much more challenging (Clark et al., 2013; Constantine, Kindaichi, & Miville, 2007).

Latino/a Cultural Values and Support in College

As noted earlier, Latinos/as often experience a home culture that is different from the culture of American colleges and universities. This home culture often includes family influences, respect, and fatalism, which can be at odds with the prevailing campus culture. For example, a study on Latino adolescents and the effect of fatalismo on coping strategies found that the belief that one could control or fix a situation versus fatalismo (events are not within a person's control) was a predictor of higher grades, and subsequently, aspirations to attend college (Basáñez, Warren, Crano, & Unger, 2014).

Family support and expectations can also promote protective factors in the decision-making, resilience, and persistence of Latino/a college students (Cavazos et al., 2010). In a study on factors related to resilience, Latino/a students described how their parents supported them to push through difficult parts of the college journey, but in some cases, also discouraged them from attending colleges that were far from home. Latino/a families can support students in a number of ways: by encouraging them to go to college, by reassuring them that they will find ways to help, and encouraging them to continue, but also in everyday ways, such as, “Making me a little breakfast every day before I go out” (Zell, 2010, p. 36).

Additionally, studies have identified relationships between certain aspects of traditional cultural values and greater academic engagement (Gonzales et al., 2008; Neblett, Rivas-Drake, & Umaña-Taylor, 2012). Notably, traditional cultural values can serve as a protective factor in terms of promoting greater academic engagement (Gonzales et al., 2008), and as a risk reducer between the stress of discrimination and academic functioning (Berkel et al., 2010). For Latino/a adolescents, maintaining close bonds with family members predicted fewer classes missed and increased academic effort (Esparza & Sanchez, 2008).

In summary, the literature shows that Latino/a traditional values can contribute to the acculturative stress of Latino/a students as they transition to and attend a college whose culture is different from their family values. However, much research provides evidence that these traditional values, especially that of familismo, can also serve as a protective factor against stress and increase academic functioning and college persistence.

The Culture of American Colleges and Universities

Predominantly white institutions (PWIs) adhere to the values of the white, middle-class American cultural values (Stephens et al., 2012). Banks and Banks (2009) described these values as equality, individualism, opportunity, and expansion. These authors noted that in America, cultural values are contradictory. While there are strong beliefs in equality, for example, these beliefs exist alongside institutionalized racism. Equality as it was understood by our forefathers was limited to White men who owned property (Banks & Banks, 2009).

Individualism, in which the desires of the individual are valued more highly than loyalty to family or commitment to community, is a cornerstone of White American culture (Stewart & Bennett, 1991). Individualism is related to the Protestant work ethic, the belief that hard work by an individual is morally good, and laziness is a sin. Individualism and opportunism are the second contradiction. Hard work brings more opportunity. However, opportunity in the U.S. is very much based on one's social class, ethnicity, and gender groups (Banks & Banks, 2009). The individualistic beliefs of Americans can often contrast with other countries' beliefs that center on groups rather than on individuals. For example, families in America often reinforce individualistic beliefs, expecting older parents to live independently rather than with children. In other countries, however, individualism is viewed negatively. One is expected to be committed to family first, and then to oneself. Another cultural construct in American society is that of expansionism. Americans value expansion, material goods, and consumption. Again, this construct is contradictory because it exists alongside racism toward certain groups, such as Native Americans whose lands were taken.

Most PWIs adhere to these cultural values. Individualism might take the form of expecting students to act independently; for example, to find answers to their problems by themselves, without bothering their professors with questions. However, many students enroll in PWIs who have been socialized differently to value interdependence. This can mean adjusting to and responding to each other's needs, or working with others to solve problems (Stephens et al., 2015). These students can have a different experience of the university, and supporting literature suggests that these campus environments can influence college student experience and outcomes (Museus, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Stephens et al., 2015). Museus (2008) described the experience of students of color on PWI campuses as being problematic because these environments can convey to students that they do not matter, or that they are unimportant.

Despite a dearth of research demonstrating the importance of positive interactions, many Latino/a students attending a PWI tend to experience interactions with their peers and professors differently than do their white peers. Rivas-Drake and Mooney (2008) found that on PWI campuses, Latino/a students often report encountering deficit perceptions related to their academic potential, racism, discrimination, and isolation.

Harwood, Hunt, Mendenhall, and Lewis (2012) reported that although student diversity has increased at PWIs, support for student diversity in “teaching practices, student support services, and overall campus environments” have not (p. 159).

Cultural Congruity in College

Another psychosocial factor that provides context to acculturative stress and college going is the level of cultural congruity or of mismatch between Latino/a students and White school norms (Brown, 2008; Gloria, Castellanos, & Herrera, 2015). Latinos/as may enter a

university or college context with values that are incongruent to that of the institution, and this exacerbates the difficulty in adjusting to college (Jones, Castellanos, & Cole, 2002; Lopez, 2013; Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005) and in persisting in college (Pizzaro, 2005). For many, this is an emotionally taxing experience because students feel pressured to give up their cultural identities to better cope with and navigate the college experience (Gloria, Castellanos, Segura-Herrera & Mayorga, 2010). Latino/a students who attend PWIs also describe experiencing more challenges transitioning into college life because they perceive racism and being disconnected from campus life (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013) Thus, they may feel less comfortable and more isolated in White college environments (Lopez, 2013). Their perception of the PWI campus climate can influence their self-esteem and sense of belonging (Cerezo & Chang, 2013; Nuñez, 2009).

Conversely, evidence suggests that a positive sense of “fit” in a university may have positive associations with perceptions of the university environment and a sense of belonging within it (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005). A feeling of cultural congruity has also been associated with increased persistence in the university and psychological well-being for both male and female Latino/a students (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Gloria et al., 2009).

Latino/a Exposure to Prevailing Culture

The more familiarity Latino/a students have with the prevailing culture, the less stress these students experience while attending an American college or institution (Collatos, Morrell, Nuno & Lara, 2004; Jones et al., 2002; Lopez, 2013). Though many first-generation Latino/a college students in the U.S. were born and educated in this country, they often attend schools in ethnically and racially isolated communities, suggesting limited exposure

to the prevailing American culture before going to college (Lopez, 2013). In a study of how pre-college exposure to the predominant culture affected Latinos/as' transition to a PWI, Lopez (2013) found that students who attended high schools that were less diverse experienced more stress due to social interactions in an unfamiliar environment.

Interestingly, as the academic year advanced, these students found ways to cope. For example, they learned to use resources such as talking to family and friends. The same study also found that students from more diverse high schools found college transition less stressful, as it was easier for them to make friends and to interact in a college environment where the prevailing culture was American.

Many Latino/a students enroll in community or junior colleges or attend Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) (Page, 2013; Torres, 2004). A majority of these students (between 50% and 87%) desire to go on to a four-year college (Martinez & Fernandez, 2004; Page, 2013). However, attending community college first appears to have an adverse effect on persistence in a four-year institution (Martinez & Fernandez, 2004). Additionally, in 2014, 60.8% of all Latino/a college students were enrolled in a Hispanic Serving Institution (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities Fact Sheet, 2016). These institutions must maintain a 25% Latino enrollment to gain/keep status as an HSI (Page, 2013). While this means that the institution can be more culturally congruent to Latino/a students, it might also mean that students are not as exposed to diverse cultures or experiences that are more characteristic of what they might encounter upon graduation or transfer to a non-HSI four-year college or university (Page, 2013).

College Supports

A substantial amount of research identifies the importance of mentors and advisors (for example, student affairs, faculty, and other college staff) in supporting Latino/a students' college persistence (Crisp et al., 2015; Torres & Hernandez, 2009). Mentors may play a role in helping first-generation college students develop support-seeking and active coping skills (Jenkins et al., 2011). Role models, mentors, parents, and Latino/a communities on campus have been cited as having a positive impact on Latino/a students' persistence in college (Arana et al., 2011.) Supportive peers have also been linked to higher grade point averages and successful college adjustment for Latino/a students (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco; Jenkins et al., 2011). Further, supportive and caring relationships with staff and faculty can positively impact Latino/a students' experiences as they matriculate into and persist within a four-year PWI (Barnett, 2011; Tovar, Simon, & Lee, 2009).

Faculty, peer, and familial support all have beneficial effects on academic success and retention among Latino/a college students (Cerezo, Lyda, Beristianos, Enriquez, & Connor, 2013). In fact, Baker (2013) found that for students of color in particular, support from peers and faculty significantly influenced the success students have in classrooms, with both Latino/a and Black students benefitting from receiving support from their teachers, especially teachers of the same race. More generally, multiple studies have demonstrated the advantages of substantive student-faculty interaction for college students of any background, in terms of students' positive perception of academic self, motivation to succeed, probability of persisting academically, and improved learned outcomes (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Kim, Rennick, & Franco, 2014; Kim & Sax, 2009).

Latino/a Coping Responses in College

Coping in relation to acculturation, and the resulting acculturative stress, as defined by Berry (1997, 2006) were described in Chapter 1. Briefly, coping responses are the cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage and adapt to situations in life that have been appraised as stressful (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus et al., 2000). This section explores what is known about coping responses of Latinos/as. Research suggests that students use different coping responses to manage situations in college that cause them stress (Cavazos, Johnson, & Sparrow, 2010).

Studies have found that employing high effort in which the stressors far exceed one's coping resources can lead to depression (Merritt & Dillon, 2012; Neighbors, Lee, Lewis, Fossos, & Larimer, 2007). However, the use of appropriate coping strategies can serve as a protective factor by promoting college adjustment (Crockett et al., 2007; Zea et al., 1995). Just as acculturative stress has been linked to other forms of stress, evidence exists to show that coping strategies promote positive mental health outcomes (Aldridge & Roesch, 2008; Keicolt, Hughes, & Keith, 2009). For example, evidence from a study on Mexican American college students and well-being reveals a relationship between coping responses, the reduction of depression, and the moderation of acculturative stress (Crockett et al., 2007).

Coping strategies have been defined several ways. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) framework identified problem-focused and emotion-focused coping; that is, using active strategies to cope such as confrontation, or seeking out support versus passive acceptance of a problem and the use of distractions to avoid the problem (Basáñez et al., 2014). Coping strategies have also been categorized as active versus inactive coping (Seiffge-Krenke &

Pakalniskiene, 2011). In a review of studies of Latino/a adolescents, Aldridge and Roesch (2008) found a combination of active and inactive coping strategies had observable positive outcomes in terms of psychological health.

Phinney and Haas (2003) identified five coping responses/strategies that students of color used to overcome stress during an academic semester. These included, first, proactive responses; for example, using a strategy designed to solve an academic crisis and second, seeking support; for example, solving the problem by seeking out others. Seeking out others and the use of social supports as a coping response might be more even more important for Latinos/as because family and community ties are already an integral part of the culture (Hawley, Chavez, & Romain, 2007). Third, avoidance or distancing oneself from the problem was used as a strategy, as was acceptance or acknowledging that the problem is a part of life. Lastly, students in this study used positive reframing of the problem to an optimistic viewpoint and belief that one could solve the problem.

Another study specifically exploring Latino/a college students and their descriptions of overcoming personal challenges (Cavazos, Johnson, & Sparrow, 2010) also identified reframing of problems encountered to find positive aspects and acceptance that certain tough life situations are a part of life (but students can get through them). In terms of active coping strategies, these students described the importance of taking actions that would help them persist in college:

I quit my work, and I focused, and I did. I got 100's in my assignments that were worth 25%. That helped me up. Instead of being an 80, it went up to 88. I focused more, and if you have a situation, why run away from it if you can tackle it? (p. 311)

The students in Cavazos et al.'s study (2010) also described the support that they sought, including faith-based assistance and support from peers, siblings, teachers from school, and parents:

I hated my first years [of college] and I was going to come back and say, "Forget it. I'm done." But my parents said, "You're going to go." I was like, "It's too hard" and my dad was like, "No, that's why it's good. You're going to go, and you're going to succeed, and you're going to show them [college professors]." (p. 312)

Bi-cultural Adjustment

Coping responses can also help to facilitate a "bi-cultural identity integration" (Chen, Benet-Martinez, Wu, Lam, & Bond, 2013; Lui, 2015). Bi-cultural identity integration can be defined as the degree to which some individuals perceive their personal cultural identities as integrative versus other individuals who find their culture incompatible or difficult to integrate with the host society (Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002; Berry, 1997; Chen et al., 2013). Coping strategies may help to navigate the juxtaposition of two different cultures (Lui, 2015; Torres, 2009), thereby making it easier for individuals to adapt on a bi-cultural level. The Latinos/as who participated in Torres' (2009) study on delineating the features of bi-cultural (inter-cultural) competence identified coping strategies such as applying an achievement-oriented outlook to the acculturation process, communicating either by ability to speak English or being bi-lingual. Many participants highlighted the importance of building and establishing relationships and developing the ability to relate to different kinds of people as a way to become bi-culturally competent. As one person described (Torres, 2009):

I think a lot of it is the relationship part of it. This person kind of knows both ends of it. The culture of the U.S. and the culture of Mexico and so he has meshed it together. He is able to relate to the U.S. culture and also the Hispanic culture. So I would say, yeah, just that relationship building with different types of people. (p. 6)

In summary, a bi-cultural/integration strategy is used by a number of Latino/a individuals during the acculturation process. Coping strategies have been linked to successfully adapting in this manner (Lui, 2015). It is hoped that college students use coping strategies to successfully adapt to college, meshing their own personal cultures with that of the institution, and in turn, helping them to persist.

Skills Related to Coping and Adjustment

However difficult the process of acculturation and subsequent coping in college might be, many Latino/a students already bring to college the skills they need to employ successful coping strategies to alleviate stress and become bi-culturally competent (Kouyoumdijan, Guzmán, Garcia, Talavera-Bustillos, 2017; Yosso, 2005). According to Yosso's (2005) six-part cultural wealth model, students can bring aspirational capital, which Yosso defines as students' ability to hold on to their hopes and dreams despite the barriers to achieving them. As noted earlier, familial capital can provide students the support, encouragement, and motivation to persist through college. Echoing earlier descriptions in this chapter of social networks and support, Latino/a students describing their experiences in college identified how important social networks (social capital) were in helping them through college (Luna & Martinez, 2012).

Yosso (2005) also stated that students come to college with navigational capital—the skills needed to navigate through an institution like a college that was not designed with Latino/a students in mind. Yosso defined this as the social and human resources that students have drawn from family and community networks. These skills can be leveraged to use within the communal environment of a four-year college and facilitate positive

experiences. Many Latino/a students come with linguistic capital as well. We often view these students through the English as a Second Language lens (ESL), a deficit view (Yosso, 2005). However, Latino/a students who are learning English are bi-lingual. Not only are they bi-lingual, but they also possess the ability to communicate across different cultures (Yosso).

Lastly is resistance capital, which consists of behaviors and actions learned that resist inequality. Rather than causing students to resist against schooling, this capital might actually motivate Latino/a students to perform well academically and to persist when discrimination in a school setting is encountered (Liou, Antrop-Gonzales, & Cooper, 2009). Additionally, resistance capital might also help students successfully utilize their own ethnicities to make successful transitions between the worlds of home and school (Liou et al., 2009). In summary, the point of Yosso's (2005) Cultural Wealth Model is that while Latino/a students might experience stress as they acculturate to a college environment, they also may bring many strengths to college that can help them cope and adjust between worlds.

Berry's Framework of Acculturation, Stress, and Coping

Berry's framework was chosen after conducting a thorough review of the literature on Latino/a first-generation students, stress, and issues that might lead to success in college (i.e., persistence). Acculturation is defined as the changes which occur when a person interacts with a different culture, people, and social influences (Gibson, 2001; Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). It is a process of learning, adapting to, and coping with a new culture (Berry, 2003; Santiago et al., 2014). According to Berry's framework, individuals use different strategies to acculturate in relation to two major issues. The first

issue is cultural maintenance, which is identifying what cultural characteristics are important to keep and maintain. The second issue is in relation to contact and participation, which is identifying the extent to which they want to become involved with other cultural groups or remain among others of the same culture.

Berry's framework (1997, 2006) offers four acculturation strategies that can be used to respond to the above two issues. The first strategy is *assimilation*. This strategy is used by individuals who are interested in seeking daily interaction with different cultures but do not wish to maintain their own cultural identity. The second strategy is in direct contrast to assimilation. Using the *separation* strategy, some individuals choose to hold onto their culture, but also do not choose to interact with other cultures. Individuals who want to both in maintain their own culture and participate in the dominant culture use the *integration* strategy. The last strategy, *marginalization*, is used by those individuals who have little interest or little possibility of maintaining their own culture and have no interest or opportunity to interact with other cultures or participate in the dominant culture, either.

Berry (1997) noted that different contexts might affect the acculturation strategies that people choose. Different contexts might also be the deciding factor for opportunities to acculturate. For example, in societies that are multicultural in outlook, individuals may choose integration because this strategy is supported by the society around it. Another example is when an individual chooses an assimilation strategy to fit into a society that is more rigid in its toleration of multicultural individuals. Individuals may be constrained in their choice of acculturation strategy, and when this is the case, it may lead to stress. Berry also suggests that over the course of an individual's development, he or she may try different strategies and will usually settle on the one that works best for him or her.

Acculturative Stress

Berry (1997, 2006) stated that for people to adapt to a new culture, a level of “cultural shedding” (p. 13), or an unlearning of previous habits and a learning of new ways of doing things, must take place. The learning of new habits and new ways of doing things may be accompanied by feelings of conflict, which can then become acculturative stress. In Berry’s framework, acculturative stress is closely linked to other mental health issues, such as depression. Berry preferred the term “acculturative stress” over the term “culture shock” because acculturative stress does not possess as negative a connotation when it comes to intercultural interactions. Many individuals experience only moderate acculturative difficulties because they engage in the psychological processes of problem appraisal and coping strategies.

Berry (1997) described problem appraisal as a process of considering the meaning of the problem and then acting on it. For example, when an individual experiences acculturation and judges the acculturation process to be non-problematic, then it is less stressful to adopt habits from a new culture that allow him or her to better fit within the new society. This process is often termed as adjustment (Berry, 1997; Ward & Kennedy, 2001) to signify that the adaptive changes taking place are within the acculturating individual, and not within society as a whole.

Coping

As a part of his framework, Berry (1997, 2006) noted that individuals engage in coping responses to deal with experiences they appraise as stressful or problematic. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) identified two major coping functions: (1) problem-focused coping, which is a strategy used to change or solve a problem, and (2) emotion-focused coping,

which is a strategy used to regulate the emotions associated with the problem. Coping strategies have also been described as active coping or passive coping strategies. Active coping strategies are closely aligned with problem-focused coping strategies. An example of an active coping strategy would be developing a plan of action to address an issue. At the opposite end of the spectrum, passive coping can best be defined as strategies which might rely on others to resolve a problem or avoidance of a problem as a means of coping.

Application of Berry's Framework to Study

In this research study, I used Berry's Framework (1997, 2006) to ground my exploration of how Latino/a first-generation college students attending a PWI experienced acculturative stressors, and the coping responses they reported using to address these acculturative stressors. Numerous studies have employed Berry's framework to situate their research studies, which suggests that it is a relevant theoretical framework. For example, this framework has guided research on the relationship between acculturative stress, coping, and substance abuse in Latino/a adults and youth (Buchanan & Smokowski, 2009; Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler, Caetano Vaeth, & Harris, 2007; Kulis, Marigilia, & Nieri, 2009). It has also been used as a means to understand the relationships between acculturative stress, depression, and well-being in Latino/as (Padilla & Borrero, 2006; Revollo, Qureshi, Collazos, Valero, & Casas, 2011; Torres, 2010; Torres et al., 2012).

Berry's Framework (1997, 2006) of acculturation, stress, and coping has also served as the guiding theoretical framework for a number of research studies on college students, acculturative stress, and coping. It has been used to understand the acculturation and coping experiences of international students in U.S. colleges (Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wei, Liao, Heppner, Chao, & Ku, 2012; Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, & Todman, 2008). It has also

formed the theoretical framework in understanding the relationships between acculturation, psychological distress, and well-being in international students (Crockett et al., 2007; Kim & Omizo, 2006).

At present, few studies have explored how coping strategies might be used by Latino/a college students in college to successfully overcome barriers and challenges (Rodriguez, Lu, & Bukoski, 2016). A review of the literature leaves questions, not about the quantitative snapshot of factors which might be related to acculturative stress, but of *how* Latino/a college students describe encountering acculturative stress, and most importantly, *how and what* coping strategies they describe using to successfully overcome and ultimately persist in college. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping processes refer to “what the person actually thinks and does in a particular encounter and to changes in these efforts as the encounter unfolds during a single episode or across episodes that are in some sense part of the common stressful encounter” (p. 224).

Berry’s Framework (1997, 2006) of acculturation, stress, and coping was useful for this research, because it helped to identify experiences of acculturative stress and coping responses that have been successful for students in adjustment to college. Trying to identify successful coping responses is difficult because acculturation and coping processes are very reliant on personal reactions to stress and to the different contexts surrounding the situation (Rodriguez et al., 2016). The multi-faceted nature of stress and coping have thus far made it difficult for researchers to measure and define coping (Lazarus, 2000; Rodriguez et al., 2016). Thus, many scholars and researchers are emphasizing the use of qualitative research methods to capture the many complexities of coping (Phinny & Haas, 2003; Rodriguez et al., 2016).

In the review of the literature, few articles focused specifically on Latino/a students attending predominantly White four-year institutions. As described in this chapter as well as the previous one, Latinos/as may have different experiences, and feel an extra burden while attending colleges that are PWIs (Jones et al., 2002). Therefore, it is important to understand the experience of stress and of coping specifically, as might be experienced in a four-year PWI college setting. I argue that experiencing acculturative stressors in this type of setting is more intense than what this group of students experience if they are attending a HSI or a community college environment. Berry's framework acted as a guidepost to understanding what Latino/a students view as stressful in their encounters in the college environment. It is imperative that we understand how acculturative stressors are experienced and how Latino/a students attending PWIs successfully cope with stressors in four-year PWIs in order to support Latino/a students and to facilitate their persistence in college.

Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

This research study aimed to understand how Latino/a first-generation college students experienced acculturative stressors while they were attending four-year PWIs and how they coped with stressors. Therefore, the research methodology was qualitative in nature. Using Berry's framework to guide the development of questions for this research study, three questions led the study:

1. What acculturative stressors do first-generation Latino/a junior and senior college students report experiencing while attending a PWI?
2. What coping responses do these students describe using to respond to acculturative stressors?

- 2a. Of the reported coping responses, which do students perceive as being the most successful in facilitating their ability to persist at four-year PWIs, and why?
3. How do student responses vary across institutional affiliations?

Summary

In this chapter, I described the background contexts related to the experiences of Latino/a first-generation college students, acculturative stress, and coping responses. This included a description of the dimensions of Latino/a culture and a history of Latinos/as in the U.S. education system. I then provided an in-depth examination of the elements of acculturative stress and coping as they relate to the Latino/a population, as well as an in-depth examination of the experiences related to acculturative stress and coping that are specific to Latinos/as' experiences in the college setting. I ended with how Berry's Framework of Acculturation (1997, 2006) was applied to this research and how the questions for this research study were developed.

Chapter 3 provides a thorough explanation of the methodology used for this research study. It includes a rationale for use of qualitative research and the theoretical traditions of phenomenology. Information about the study setting, stakeholders, and sampling techniques are also included. Additionally, an explanation of the data gathered, questions developed, and data analysis are a part of Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN AND METHODS

This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to identify the acculturative stressors that first-generation Latino/a students experience during their attendance at four-year PWIs. Additionally, this study aimed to identify the coping responses to acculturative stressors that Latino/a first-generation college students employ in their attendance at PWIs and to identify which responses Latino/a first-generation students perceive as helping them persist while attending a PWI. Very little is known about how Latino/a first-generation college students experience acculturative stressors while attending PWIs or what kind of coping responses they successfully use to navigate through attendance at a PWI. This phenomenological study of the lived experience of Latino/a first-generation college students will provide a deeper understanding of how students cope with acculturative stressors and successfully adjust between the cultures of family and college.

I chose to include Latino/a first-generation students who were juniors and seniors at PWIs as study participants because these students have persisted in college for at least two academic years. In doing so, they were more likely to be able to provide rich, thick descriptions of their college experiences. The study sought to answer:

1. What acculturative stressors do first-generation Latino/a junior and senior college students report experiencing while attending a PWI?
2. What coping responses do these students describe using to respond to acculturative stressors?

- 2a. Of the reported coping responses, which do students perceive as being the most successful in facilitating their ability to persist at four-year PWIs and why?
3. How do student responses vary across institutional affiliation, and how are they common?

This chapter begins with a rationale for a qualitative phenomenological study research approach. It next presents the research design including sites chosen, participants, sampling techniques, and plan for data collection. Lastly, this chapter presents the data analysis plan and study limitations.

Rationale for Research

Creswell (2007) defined qualitative research as “The study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to social or human problems” (p. 37). In conducting my research study, I wanted to know what acculturative stressors Latino/a first-generation college students reported experiencing during college attendance at PWIs and how they coped with these stressors. The use of a qualitative method allowed for a broad understanding of the study of the social phenomena in question (Rallis & Rossman, 2012). Qualitative research has great value in its ability to elicit insight into events and how people experience them. Rossman and Rallis (2012) identified the components of qualitative research as:

- Taking place in the natural world;
- Drawing on multiple methods that respect the humanity of the participants in the study;
- Focusing on the context;

- Is emergent and evolving, rather than tightly controlled research;
- Fundamentally interpretative. (p. 8)

The cornerstone of all qualitative research is “thick description” (Patton, 2002, p. 437). Thick description has the potential to transport the reader to the situation being described (Patton, 2002). For the purposes of this qualitative phenomenological research study, my overarching aim was to obtain deeper, holistic stories of how first-generation Latino/a students experience acculturative stressors while attending PWIs, and how they successfully cope (and persist) in such a college environment.

Theoretical Traditions of Phenomenology

Creswell (2007) stated that any individuals who commit themselves to a phenomenological study are remiss in duties if they do not spend some time discussing the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology in their writings before turning to the methods of the proposed study. The purpose of the following few paragraphs is to describe the provenance of phenomenology and its undergirding philosophical approaches.

Phenomenology arose in Germany as a philosophical framework developed by Edmund Husserl (1913). As Patton (2002) noted, the basic philosophical assumption of phenomenology is that people know their experiences and know what their experience means. Interpretation of an experience, how people live it, experience it, and interpret it is valid, meaningful, and important to know. Thus, phenomenological study focuses on how people interpret their experiences and the ways in which they make meaning of these experiences.

A further elaboration of phenomenology is that individuals participate in many different contexts in the world, whether social, cultural, or historical (Heidegger, 1962). As

Munhall (2012) observed, “To be human is to be in the world” (p. 129). The lived experience is infused with cultural, social, and linguistic patterning that is intrinsic to the experience (Munhall, 2012). The interpretations that we make of our lived experiences are our background, which provides the context and conditions for our perceptions and our actions (Heidegger, 1962). Lived experiences are conscious experiences (Patton, 2002) and consist of the way the person talks about, remembers, describes, perceives, and makes sense of the experience. Lived experiences are what phenomenology studies. Data are collected from study participants who have experienced a particular phenomenon, and descriptions are reduced to the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2007).

The next sections discuss the common methodological approaches for a phenomenological study. Two common methodological approaches are described in Creswell (2007) as hermeneutic and transcendental. Van Manen (1990) viewed phenomenology as hermeneutic; that is, research is about the lived experience and how life texts are interpreted. In hermeneutic phenomenology, there is no set procedure; however, certain activities as prescribed by van Manen (1990) do need to take place: 1) the phenomenon is chosen based on the researcher’s interest, 2) themes that are felt to constitute the nature of the phenomenon are identified, 3) a description is written, and 4) most importantly, the researcher maintains strong ties to the research and their own interpretation of the phenomenon.

Whereas van Manen’s phenomenological research is based on the interpretation of the lived experience, Moustakas (1994) focused on describing the lived experiences. This version of phenomenology is usually referred to as transcendental or psychological phenomenology. Moustakas also focused on the concept of bracketing (or interchangeably,

epoche), first developed by Husserl. Bracketing is a key distinguisher of phenomenology. It means that the researcher sets aside any preconception or thought about the phenomenon under study, so that a fresh perspective may be gained (Creswell, 2007; Dowling, 2005; Patton, 2002). Another key component in the bracketing process is the breaking down of the phenomenon under study into separate pieces in order to analyze and define it (Dowling, 2005; Patton, 2002). I chose Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology to guide my study because my interest was in describing the phenomenon of Latino/a first-generation college students' experiences of acculturative stressors in a PWI and the coping responses they perceive as successful in addressing acculturative stress.

In summation, phenomenology is the study of the lived experience (Patton, 2002). These experiences are known best by those who have lived it, and it is important to me as a researcher to always know the perspectives of individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon. As I developed this study, one of my first tasks was to decide which qualitative research approach was the best fit for what I wanted to understand. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of first-generation Latino/a college students and the acculturative stressors they encountered when attending PWIs. Most importantly, I wanted to know how Latino/a first-generation students successfully coped with acculturative stressors experienced in PWIs. Because this was my research interest, a phenomenological research study was the best approach. This approach will lead to a deeper understanding for higher education professionals of the stressors experienced by Latino/a college students in college and how they report successfully coping.

Research Design

Two PWIs in a Midwestern region served as the research setting. The institutions are of varying sizes and focus: One is a small private college, one a medium size state college. I chose these varying sized and varying foci colleges in order to have a multi-perspective view of the questions.

Participant Selection

The participants in this phenomenological qualitative study were Latino/a first-generation college students attending four-year PWIs. Additionally, interviews with campus representatives helped provide a more holistic understanding of Latino/a experiences, stressors, and coping in the college environment. The major sampling technique for this study was purposeful sampling, which was described by Maxwell (2005, p. 88) as a “strategy in which particular settings, persons, or activities are selected deliberately in order to provide information that can’t be gotten as well from other choices.” Purposeful sampling focuses on choosing cases that will be rich enough in information in order to reveal, clarify, or provide insight into the research questions (Patton, 2002). Criterion and chain sampling were the specific types of purposeful sampling used in this research study.

According to Merriam (1998), a criterion-based selection requires the researcher to choose the units of study based on the elements that are deemed essential to the research. The first criterion for this study was that students were Latino/a and were the first in their families to attend college. The second important criterion was that they were juniors or seniors in college, because I believed they were better representatives of students who were persisting in college. I also believed that they would be better able to describe their overall experiences of college and would have more experiences to share.

As stated above, campus representatives who are providing services and working with Latino/a students also provided perspectives for the research. The criterion for this group of key informants was that they must be in a current position of service working with Latino/a college students. This could mean that they were working in student affairs, or student success, or in a counseling position.

After student affairs professionals were identified using criterion sampling, chain sampling was used as a specific strategy to identify information rich cases (i.e., students). Chain sampling (also called snowball sampling) was described by Patton (2002) as an approach for finding information-rich informants or cases. The process for finding the best participants or cases is asking people who know where to find them. In the instance of this research, campus representatives who were currently working with Latino/a first-generation students, would know which students would be the best fit as key informants with their descriptions of stressors encountered in college and the ways in which they coped with the stressors. Once these students were identified, I worked with campus representatives to recruit students to the study.

Student Participant Description

Thirteen students from two differing PWIs participated in in-depth interviews for this study. The students came from diverse cultural backgrounds including Mexico (70%), El Salvador (15%) and Guatemala (15%). A majority of the students were juniors (77%) and 23% of the students were seniors. Students reported diverse educational majors: electrical engineering, nursing, health studies, education, sociology, and youth and family ministry. A majority of students were first in their families to attend college (69%), but four students (31%) reported having parents who attended college in their country of origin.

Data Collection

In this section, I describe the data sources I used to explore Latino/a first-generation college students' experiences of stress and subsequent coping responses. According to Patton (2002), qualitative research can grow out of different sources of data such as in-depth, open-ended interviews or documents. Using different data sources provides a comprehensive perspective of the issue at study. Multiple qualitative sources of data can provide a holistic and rich description of the phenomenon of study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Interviews

Interviews can provide quotations from people about their “experiences, feelings, opinions, or knowledge” (Patton, 2002, p. 4). The purpose of interviews, according to Patton (2002), is to:

Allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of the other person is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone's mind, to gather their stories. (p. 341)

In-depth individual interviews gave me the opportunity to enter into the perspectives of Latino/a first-generation college students on their experiences of stress and coping while attending a PWI. Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is “meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). My research included interviewing Latino/a first-generation college students and student affairs professionals at two different sites. A standardized open interview approach with follow-up probing questions was utilized. This approach “requires carefully and fully wording each question before the interview” (Patton, 2002, p. 344). The reason for this is to be sure that

each key informant is asked the same question, in the same way. My research study utilized more than one site, an approach Patton (2002) advised in order to maintain a level of comparability across sites. Questions were asked to discover how Latino/a first-generation students experienced stressors in college and how they successfully coped with these stressors.

The creation of an interview protocol (see Appendices A and B) ensured that I follow the same basic lines of research with each of the key informants (Patton, 2002). As part of the interview protocol, I developed an informed consent to be read aloud to participants before the beginning of an interview (see Appendices C and D). This protocol informed participants of the purpose of the study. It also informed them that I would be audio recording each interview, and that they could choose to stop the interview at any time. Only after I had obtained consent to continue the interview, did I turn the tape recorder on to begin recording.

Documents

Qualitative studies involve gathering a wide array of research in order for the researcher to build an in-depth picture of the case at hand (Patton, 2002). Documents can be gathered and analyzed from letters, diaries, journal entries, or even medical records (Creswell, 2007). Organizations such as the four-year colleges I utilized and the student services within them produce a lot of documentation which can provide rich sources of data in combination with what is observed by the evaluator (Patton). For my study, I asked for documents produced by student affairs professionals and departments/organizations that provided services to Latino/a college students. I also looked online at the website of each of the institutions in order to gain a holistic view of the types of services or information

provided that might be salient in Latino/a first-generation college students' experience at college.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis is the means through which qualitative data is turned into findings (Patton, 2002). The beginning of the data analysis stage and the ending of the data collection stage do not have a clearly delineated boundary (Patton, 2002). Therefore, the recommendation is to start making sense of the data while still in the field. This requires the researcher to be organized in order to collect and analyze the data. The challenge in all of this is to make sense of the massive amounts of qualitative data and to construct a framework that can adequately communicate the soul of what the data is revealing. There is no recipe or magic formula to transform the data. However, there are structured methods of analysis that can help guide this phenomenological study into how Latino/as experience acculturative stressors and how they cope with these stressors while attending a four-year PWI.

In Chapter 1, I described the four basic steps of a phenomenological study, which include bracketing, intuiting, analyzing, and describing (Polit & Beck, 2012, p. 495). Of note in the process of analyzing phenomenological data is that the process is just as much about thinking as it is about writing. Munhall (2012) emphasized the importance of “dwelling” on the data, or “contemplating” the meanings that participants were trying to convey in analyzing the data (p. 145). As part of contemplation, it is also important to spend time in considering one's own preconceptions or biases about the object under study and to bracket out these beliefs (Polit & Beck, 2012). Bracketing out one's preconceived notions or beliefs can then allow for intuiting. Intuiting, according to Polit and Beck (2012), is a

process of opening oneself to how participants make meanings of the phenomenon under study. This process is followed by the analysis phase, in which researchers categorize and make meanings from significant statements. Lastly, these meanings are used to understand and describe the phenomenon in detail.

Colaizzi's method is advised by Creswell (2007) to aid in analyzing phenomenological data. The first step in Colaizzi's method is to read all of the transcripts several times over, so that a general understanding is gained about the experiences of stress and coping that Latino/a first-generation students have described. The second step is to identify significant thoughts and phrases from the transcripts, and then to identify significant meanings and themes common among the participants. I used these significant themes to frame a detailed description of Latino/a college student experiences of acculturative stressors and subsequent coping responses. I also engaged in member checking in order to validate the findings.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Qualitative research has been criticized as "biased, anecdotal, and lacking in rigor" (Anderson, 2010, p. 2). Qualitative research, according to Patton (2002) is full of ambiguity. Maxwell (2005) established that validity "as a component of your research design, consists of strategies you use to identify and rule out threats" (p. 106). I believe that qualitative research has more benefits than it does negatives. With careful planning, I ensured an acceptable degree of methodological rigor through obtaining validity and reliability. I describe these planning measures in following sections.

Qualitative research design has some important differences compared to the design of a quantitative research study. Quantitative researchers attempt to design controls in

advance that will deal with threats to validity (Maxwell, 2005). These might include control groups or randomized sampling and assignment (Maxwell, 2005). Qualitative researchers must try to rule out validity threats after research has begun. Patton (2002) summarized his stance on validity in qualitative research by stating that validation should be viewed as an attempt to assess accuracy of findings as they have been described by the researcher and by participants. Validity can be a strength of qualitative research in that it has the ability to gather data that are thick and rich in description. This is because the researcher has both: spent time in the field and has had a closeness with participants that fosters this kind of data collection.

Reliability in qualitative research must also be taken into consideration. The goal of reliability, according to Yin (1989), is to minimize errors and biases in a study. In order to ensure reliability and validity, Creswell (2007) prescribed a framework of strategies to address validity; he recommended using at least two.

The first strategy I chose to use to address validity was in incorporating cases that were rich and thick in description. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that in thick, rich description, researchers use details to describe the participants or the setting under study. This allows them to consider whether the results are transferable to other settings. It also permits researchers to find shared characteristics which then can allow the study to be transferable across other settings.

Using a variety of sources in research helps the researcher build on the strengths of each type of data collected and minimize weaknesses of a research approach (Patton, 2002). This strategy is called triangulation (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005). In my study, I employed interviews of students and campus representatives to help provide a broad and

deep understanding of the participants in my research study. As Maxwell (2005) pointed out, validity threats are ruled out by the evidence that you have, not the methods that you are using. Collecting data from different sources and including different types of data both help rule out threats to validity.

I also used bracketing as a technique to clarify my own bias as I conducted the research. This process allowed me to understand what my inherent position was in relation to the research as well as provided a way to protect for bias. Creswell (2007) described this as a process in which the researcher comments on their own experiences, biases, and orientations that might shape the study in some manner. I think this was important in my research study because I was not from the group I sought to study, and I came with my own views and orientation that could be construed as “white privilege.” One of the ways that I combated this was to keep a journal of my experiences and thoughts during the research study. Keeping a journal helped me to identify any areas in which I was lacking neutrality or was biased. Additionally, keeping a journal helped me describe research findings that were new or surprising (Polit & Beck, 2012).

Summary

This chapter laid out the methodological practices I used for this research study. These methodological practices include phenomenological and qualitative research traditions, plans for data collection, and data analysis. I ended the chapter with ways of addressing issues of validity and reliability that could arise from this research study. The next chapter presents the findings from the analysis of data collected during the course of this research study. The findings present a deeper understanding of how Latino/a first-

generation college students experience acculturative stressors in college and the ways in which students successfully cope with these stressors.

CHAPTER 4

STUDY RESULTS

It was a hot September day, and I was sweaty and tired by the time I got to the designated meeting place to interview Adriana, one of the students who had agreed to participate in my research study. As we sat down and got to know each other, I explained to her that I envisioned going to college was like immigrating to a new country, experiencing a new culture, and learning to adjust to that new culture all over again. I explained that sometimes, adjusting to a new culture like college can be stressful. I also explained that the purpose of my research was to discover how first-generation Latino/a students describe experiencing stress while they are attending college, and how they describe coping with stress. I told her that was why I needed students like her to tell me about their experiences in the context of attending a PWI. Her eyes grew sad and wide. I stopped and asked her if she was okay. She shook her head and said, “It’s just that no one has ever been interested in hearing my story before.” Her response made all of the sweat and toil (literally and figuratively) that went into conducting this research study infinitely worth it.

This chapter presents the stories of first-generation Latino/a students who are attending PWIs. These are stories that perhaps no one has “ever been interested in hearing before,” but to which we as college professionals should certainly be paying heed. These stories are explorations of the recounted lived experiences of first-generation Latino/a students when they encountered acculturative stress and employed coping strategies while attending a four-year PWI. The study aims were to identify (1) first-generation Latino/a students’ reported acculturative stressors during their attendance at a four-year PWI, (2) coping responses that these students reported utilizing to respond to these acculturative

stressors, (3) coping responses these students perceived to be most successful in responding to reported acculturative stressors, and (4) variation in reported stressors and student responses across institutions.

The presentation of study results is organized in correspondence to each research question that guided this study. Study research questions are:

1. What acculturative stressors do first-generation Latino/a college students report experiencing while attending a PWI?
2. What coping responses do these students describe using to respond to reported acculturative stressors?
 - 2a. Of the reported coping responses, which do students perceive as being the most successful in facilitating their ability to persist at a four-year PWI?, and why?
3. Do student responses vary across institutions? If so, how and why?

I selected two PWIs at which to conduct this study, one a large urban-serving university, and the other a small, private, faith-based university. In total, thirteen first-generation Latino/a students who attended one of these two PWIs participated in semi-structured interviews. I asked students who were juniors and seniors to participate in my study because they have persisted longer in college in comparison to their freshman and sophomore counterparts. Thus, I believed they would be better able to provide a more complete portrait of the acculturative stressors that first-generation Latino/a students encounter and subsequent coping responses they use while attending a PWI. Additionally, I recruited one campus representative from each of the two PWI locations to participate in a semi-structured interview. The purpose of interviewing campus representatives about their

respective institutions was to provide insight into the campus services available for first-generation Latino/a students and to assist with identifying students who fit the requirements for study participation.

After the semi-structured interviews with first-generation Latino/a students and campus representatives were completed, I recruited students from a Latino/a student organization at one of the PWIs to participate in a focus group. The purpose of this focus group was to establish trustworthiness of my interpretation of the interview data I collected. Seventeen Latino/a students who self-identified as first-generation college students participated in the focus group to provide confirmation of data interpretation. Data from the Latino/a student focus group are included in the findings section of this chapter. In the results section, I denoted the provenance of each comment (student interview participant by pseudonym, campus representatives by pseudonym, or comment from Latino/a student focus group) for better understanding of comments. The following sections present the results of this study organized by the study questions as listed above.

Research Question 1

What acculturative stressors do first-generation Latino/a college students report experiencing while attending a PWI?

My purpose in posing Research Question 1 was to identify first-generation Latino/a students' reported acculturative stressors during college enrollment at a four-year PWI. Acculturation is defined as the process of learning and adapting to a new culture (Berry, 2003; Santiago et al., 2014). Acculturative stress can occur when problems in adapting to a new culture are experienced (Crockett et al., 2007) or when a person experiences a sense of imbalance or conflict between cultures (Burgos-Cienfuegos et al., 2015; Lui, 2015; Navarro

et al., 2014). For this study I posited that college is not just a campus, but an entirely new culture for first-generation Latino/a students (Barzun, 1968; Gettman, 1992; Readings, 1996; Yang et al., 2009). I also posited that first-generation Latino/a college students might experience acculturative stress very much like what a new immigrant might experience upon arriving in the U.S. (Yang et al., 2009).

I identified three overarching themes in relation to the first research question about first-generation Latino/a students' experiences of acculturative stress in college, including (1) the multiple meanings of being first, (2) the double-bind: dodging "La Chancla" (defined in the next section), and (3) seeking a sense of belonging. The results of this study reveal that the experiences of acculturative stress in the context of attendance at a PWI and corresponding coping responses are affected by students' intersecting demographic and background factors. I organized my results based on the intersecting demographic and background factors affecting acculturative stress and coping, beginning with the multiple meanings of being first, followed by the double bind: dodging "La Chancla". The section concludes with seeking a sense of belonging in college.

The Multiple Meanings of "Being First"

First-generation college students are commonly defined as those who are the first in their family to attend college (Center for First-Generation Student Success, 2017), those with neither parent having graduated from college (Boden, 2011), or those whose parents do not have more than a high school degree (Pascarella et al., 2004). Because they are commonly defined as the first in their families to either attend college or to graduate from college, first-generation college students are often characterized as students who might lack access to college information and the "know how" needed to be successful in college (Baum

& Flores, 2011; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Dr. Smith (pseudonym), a campus representative at one of the PWI sites, observed,

Across the board, first-generation students struggle with not having that built-in almost innate knowledge that a family who has been to college has. They tell college stories and they tell about how they talked to professors with their problems and what happened when they did that, but [first-generation] students don't have these stories in their lives, and it makes a difference.

Certainly, being the first in their family to attend or graduate from college and lacking family history or college stories to guide them can negatively affect students' college experiences. However, the first-generation Latino/a students participating in this study revealed multiple meanings of "being first." The discovery of multiple meanings of "being first" emerged midway in my interviews with four students. I learned that these students (Isabel, Jose, Roberto, Veronica), who had originally self-identified to me as first-generation college students, actually had at least one parent who had attended some college in their countries of origin. As Isabel and I discussed what the term "first-generation" meant to her, she explained, "There are a lot of different stories [about what being first really means]." Dr. Jones, the other PWI campus representative participating in this study, made a telling comment about first-generation Latino/a students: "I think for them, being first-generation means you are doing it on your own."

In response to these revelations, I posit that the concept of "first-generation" is defined as much by Latino/a students' perceptions and lived experiences of "being first" as it is by any definition stated in the literature or used by an institution. In this sense, all of the student participants in this study are "first-generation." I also felt this was an important result to note because I posit that students' struggles with "being first," in whatever way they perceive this concept, is part of acculturating to a PWI. It likely contributes to

acculturative stress and to choice of subsequent coping responses. I categorized the multiple meanings of “being first” in students’ responses as (1) first-time in U.S. college, (2) first-time exposure to White culture in college, and (3) the immigrant experience.

First Time in U.S. College

I found that not having family stories or knowledge specifically about going to college in the U.S. added to students’ self-identification as first-generation college students. For example, Isabel stated, “My mom always tried to push me to go to college, but she doesn’t really know how the system works here [in the U.S].” Isabel clarified that she considers herself a first-generation college student because she felt like she had to teach herself how to be admitted to college (enroll, apply for financial aid) and how to navigate the college path (learn to study, attend class, learning college academic expectations), saying, “It’s all been on me.” I also note that this was the common sentiment of all students (Isabel, Jose, Roberto, Veronica) who indicated that they were “first generation,” although they had at least one parent who had attended college. As Veronica stated, “My mom went to college, but that was in Mexico. I am the first in my family to go to university in the United States.” Later Veronica added, “My parents always told me to go to college, but they didn’t know how to do stuff [in the U.S.], so I’ve had to keep learning about college and teaching myself [about scholarship information, financial information].” Roberto concluded that even though his mother had attended college in Mexico,

When my family got to the U.S., they had to relearn everything [learn a new language, learn about the U.S. culture] and then find jobs. Coming to college in the U.S. was kind of like coming to a new world, from high school to college, you don’t have the same people that you know and you are on your own.

First exposure to White culture in college. Alejandra and Rosa are both first-generation students in the traditional sense that they are the first in their families to go to college. However, their stories of “being first” also revealed that their attendance at a PWI was the first time they had been exposed to White culture because the communities in which they lived and/or the K-12 schools they attended were predominantly Latino/a. Alejandra described how her first encounters in the college residence halls made her realize her previous lack of exposure to White culture, saying:

For my first year, I lived on campus. That was just really eye-opening. I thought I was raised really diverse, but then I realized that my whole life...It’s very Hispanic. I went to a Catholic school in our neighborhood. A lot of Hispanic kids there [but few White students].

Further, a focus group participant echoed this experience, saying, “My whole life, I have never had a White friend. Ever. I have never been around White people before, I have always lived in urban neighborhoods [with no White people].”

The immigrant experience. Twelve of the thirteen students interviewed for this study were the children of foreign-born parents, and five were born in their country of heritage and came to the U.S. as toddlers (Gloria, Guadalupe, and Veronica), a young child (Miguel), or as a teenager (Pedro). Like Alejandra and Rosa, Pedro was a first-generation college student in the traditional sense. However, Pedro immigrated as a teenager to the U.S., and as such, his experience presents another unique and multi-layered example of “being first.” He had to adjust to the broader U.S. culture and learn a new language (English) while simultaneously being the first in his family to attend college in the U.S. The experiences he had acculturating to the culture of the U.S. in high school caused him apprehension about what attending college in the U.S. would be like. As Pedro recalled:

Since I got here [to the U.S.], I think the communication [language barrier] has been really important. I didn't speak English, so I didn't have many friends. I got bullied a lot. It was hard. That was my main concern in high school, because I was like, what if college is the same thing?

Pedro's example presents a complex mix of experiences, some of which are common among many first-generation college students; for example, finding help figuring out classes and finding resources and support, as he relates:

Since coming to college, everything is still new to me. Everything. I didn't know who was going to help me with my classes or who I should go to when I need something. At the beginning it was complicated. At least in high school, I had a counselor and all kinds of people to help me. Then you get to college and you are like, who is my counselor? I didn't have family members to tell me what to do. I feel like everything has been on my own.

However, some of Pedro's experiences adjusting to college are related to "being first" from an immigrant perspective. Latino/a students who arrive in the U.S. as teenagers may find it especially difficult to adjust to the finer nuances of White/PWI culture. As Pedro explained, it can make students feel like they are unable to relate to or to connect to their peers:

My first semester here, I have a class. It was a music class. It was funny because we were 12 students in the class, and they all know the kids' songs. They were singing those songs in like elementary school. Like, "Mary, Mary, rows the boat" ["Row, Row, Row Your Boat."] I didn't grow up knowing those songs, so I was all confused. I was like, "Yeah, I'm afraid to even try to sing or to learn these songs." I guess that was the only part I didn't feel like I really knew how to connect with everyone. I was like, "Yeah, I don't know all these songs and they're a lot. There are a lot of songs." That was the first time I actually heard those songs.

In summary, Latino/a students have multi-layered experiences of "being first." While many in this study were first-generation college students in the sense that they were the first in their families to attend college, they experienced "being first" in the context of attendance at a PWI in multiple ways. For example, college might be the first time students have

exposure to White culture. Other students have family members who attended college, but the students describe themselves as “first-generation” because they are the first to attend college in the U.S, or because they have had to figure out how to attend college without family assistance. Other students are experiencing learning a language for the first time in addition to being the first to attend college, as is the case with Pedro. I contend that it is important for student affairs professionals and other college educators to be aware of the multiple meanings of “first” in the context of first-generation Latino/a college students to better support these students in their educational journey.

The Double-Bind: Dodging La Chancla

Seven of the thirteen students I interviewed and two focus group students reported experiencing what Rischall and Meyers (2017) described as the double-bind of navigating between the emotional expectations of their families and trying to meet PWI academic expectations, which one student described as “dodging La Chancla.” La Chancla in Spanish refers to “the sandal.” The full metaphor is provided in the following sections. Students described feeling obligated to put the needs of their families first while simultaneously trying to maintain responsibilities related to college. For example, Roberto shared that he recently “got a job so I can help my mom pay the bills.” He added,

but I work weekends, and everything is due on Sunday for class. I don’t have time to actually do my homework and study. When I get home, I want to do the homework, but I’m exhausted so I’m like, ‘I can do it later.’ It’s stressful.

Another example is Alejandra, who was the only one in her family to hold a full-time job or own a car. She experienced daily difficulties navigating through the different expectations of family and the PWI:

I'm late to class a lot, especially in the mornings, because I'm the only one with a car in my house. My brother is a junior at our local high school. My mom only works every so often. When we wake up, I have to make sure he [my brother] gets to school, if he didn't miss the bus, and my mom gets to work. My life didn't stop once I started college, nor does it end while I'm sitting here in front of you. They'll [college instructors] tell me to put my phone away a lot, but I'm the only person in my family with a car. If my brother broke his arm, I need to leave, and I need to know that I can leave.

Both campus representatives also described the "double-bind" of stress that first-generation Latino/a students might experience. Dr. Jones observed:

I think the struggle between home and school is the biggest one [stressor], because they feel so obligated, or dedicated to helping out around the house, working a second job to add income and still being a core part of the family. College is structured so differently from high school [and family life], and they feel like if they are not in class, they need to be at home or working at a job.

Dr. Smith added:

The main thing that I was going to talk about today was the different expectation. If you were to compare a—let's say a White or Caucasian middle-class student and a first-generation Latino/a student, if something happens within the family, a death or something like that, this family says that—the White middle-class family says, "Come home for a week. We want to mourn with you or we want to be with you. Then our expectation is you go back to school and you complete that degree. That's our expectation." I've noticed when that [a family death] happens [in a Latino/a family], the expectation from the family can be, "You need to stay here [at home] and help support us in the long-term." Family comes above everything. That is what I think they face any time there's a crisis in the family. The expectations are different from both sides. I think that's hard. I think it's hard when you're trying to get your college degree because life does happen.

Veronica referred to the challenges she experienced trying to navigate the landscape of putting family first while simultaneously being a college student as dodging "La Chancla." She jokingly said:

I feel like my parents still stress me out because they are always calling me. They're like, "Why are you still at school? I need you to come home. I need you to stop by a store. I need you to pick up your sibling." It's like, "I need, I need, I need." I'm just like, "But I don't want to." As a Latino/a student, you cannot say "no" to your parents, or else you'll get this thing called "*La Chancla*" [Veronica emphasized this

term as she said it]. The chancla is called “*The Sandal*” [term emphasized]—that is the English translation. Your parents still beat you up. They don’t care how old you are. They’ll just throw their sandal at you or something.

For students in this study, “La Chancla” was in constant motion, bouncing through (1) putting family first, to (2) shouldering the college burden, (3) the guilt-trip, (4) angry outbursts, and (5) successfully navigating “La Chancla.” I could chart no common trajectory for the course of “La Chancla” in students’ stories. Instead, I found that the course of “La Chancla” depended very much on individual Latino/a students and the coping strategies they devised to navigate between competing expectations. For many students, the true sting of “La Chancla” was that it remained in constant motion in year after year of college attendance, not lessening even as students advanced in their college career. Following are descriptions of how different students experienced “La Chancla” and the various individual courses it took in their lives.

“La Chancla”: **Family first.** Students in this study supported their family in various ways. For example, while all 13 students I interviewed reported working to support themselves, four students (Adriana, Alejandra, Miguel, and Roberto) also worked to support their families. In an earlier section, Alejandra described being the only one in her family with a full-time job and a car, but Adriana also described how she supported her family:

My father works, but he makes minimum wage, maybe eight or nine [dollars an hour] or something like that. My brother doesn’t work. In the household, I’m paying for half of the bills and rent, and my dad is paying the other half. My brother helps out every month but sometimes he misses a payment, or he doesn’t give me a full payment so I have to put in or my dad has to put in. Sometimes my dad doesn’t have his part because he’s paying other stuff, so then I have to put in the rest. It stresses me out because I’m dealing with two men in my family that I feel like sometimes I am supporting.

As another example of prioritizing family, Roberto and Miguel reported being the oldest male in their respective families, and as such, they were head of the household. Roberto shared that this meant that he was often responsible for caring for his younger brother and helping out his mother; he said, “My mom really does need help around the house.” Miguel’s father passed away, leaving him as head of the household. Miguel added that his father’s death “has kind of given me a different role both in my family and in school.” As a final example, a focus group student described his role in supporting the family by acting as a translator:

My family wants me to help with things in their lives, and I have to tell them that I can’t do it, that I have homework I have to finish. My parents are immigrants and they are having some legal status issues, and sometimes I have actually had to skip school and go to the court or lawyer meetings because my parents want me to help translate for them.

“La Chancla”: **Shouldering the college burden.** Gloria, Silvia, and Adriana discussed feeling obligated to take on the burden of college expenses by themselves. Gloria and Silvia both noted the importance of not asking family members for financial support. Gloria described her discomfort expressing feelings to her family about the stress of trying to work and pay for school, saying, “I feel like if I do [express feelings, ask for help] I’ll put a burden on other people [and my family]. I don’t want to do that.” Silvia expressed her discomfort asking her family for any financial assistance to attend college. She described how not wanting to burden family members once interfered with her ability to meet college responsibilities:

I didn’t want to do anything [for class]. I felt so worn out. I think one of the reasons why I was slacking off [and not getting studying done] was because I did want to work as much as I could, to provide for myself so I could avoid asking my parents so much for [support]. They already do so much for us that I didn’t want to ask for more, so that is why I work so many hours.

Silvia added,

It would've been very nice to not have to work through college, but I know that it's just one of those things that I felt like I needed to do, just because I didn't want to ask my parents, "Oh, can you pay my rent?" I do have other siblings, and they're also in school. They [my parents] still have their house and their cars and that sort of thing that they have to pay for.

For Adriana, shouldering the college burden meant choosing between college and being able to afford transportation:

I didn't have a car. I needed to buy a car to get to college, and so I ended up getting a job at a call center. Call center jobs require you to work Monday through Friday and they have set times, so I actually had to make a big decision and stop going to school so I can work at this job, so I can afford to buy a car and afford the payments for that car. That was a big deal for me because I knew I wanted to go to school.

“La Chancla”: The guilt trip. Adriana and Patricia described experiencing family-related stress and conflict in the form of guilt trips from family members, or as Adriana described, “having guilt put on me.” A guilt trip is defined here as causing feelings of guilt in someone or trying to manipulate someone's behavior by causing feelings of guilt (“Guilt trip,” n.d.). I found that family conflict was not always between less acculturated parents and their more acculturated children. Conflict also arose from interactions with less acculturated peers. For example, Adriana offered the following description in an interaction with a cousin who had not attended college:

My cousin came in from California last week. She texted me that she was upset that I wasn't around the family. I was like, “Well, I am in school and I work. It's a lot.” She was like, “Well, you should try to make time for your family.” I felt like that was very rude. It just adds more stress on that I didn't need. It sucks that [my family] doesn't understand. They see it as me ignoring the family. All I'm trying to do is study and get good grades. That is literally it.

Adriana's description illustrates how the experience of being a first-generation Latino/a college student contributed to acculturative stress in the form of trying to negotiate

a balance between competing expectations and the subsequent family conflict. She

continued:

Sometimes [my family] does not understand. They will ask me why I don't come around the family. It stresses me out when they put that on me [guilt] because they tell me I'm not around and they make me feel like I don't want to be around, but in reality I do. I just feel like with a Hispanic family, they're so family-oriented that they get offended so easily when you are out trying to live your life. They just don't understand unless they go to college, and they haven't. I'm the first one to go to a four-year university. They have no idea what it is like.

Patricia also described both being made to feel guilty and also feeling guilty for not making family enough of a priority when she moved back home to live with her family and attend college at the same time:

A mold situation happened in my dorm; I decided to just move back home. It gave me some perspective to what my peers encounter because my mom would want me to be home at a certain time, which was really difficult because I was used to living by myself. Or, I would have to stay at the library for hours and hours because I couldn't get anything done at home. When I'm at home it was like, "Wash the dishes," or, "I need you to translate something for me at City Hall." I just ended up feeling like I prioritized school over my family. My family felt that way too, so there was a lot of "You don't care about us. It doesn't matter if we move back to Mexico, because you don't even see us." So it [going to college] really affected my way of being able to reach out to them as consistently.

Like Adriana, no one in Patricia's family had attended college, which made it difficult for her to talk to her family members about the stress she experienced in college. As

Patricia noted:

I will call my mom to just say "hey" when I am stressed out, I don't give too much detail, because there is a culture gap, I guess you can say between them understanding why I'm so stressed out with school. All I get to say is "school is stressing me out" and they're "oh, okay." There isn't much more than that. They don't ask about whether it's my professors, or what about it is stressing me out. We are first-generation [students], so they don't know what it means to be stressed out here.

As noted earlier, Miguel became head of his household after his father passed away. This meant that he was responsible for helping to support his family, and it was a significant stressor for him in terms of trying to balance many competing priorities. The aftermath of his father's death and the changes to his role in his family left him feeling guilty and conflicted between his life as a college student and caring for his family. He questioned whether there was room for both:

My father passed away about three years ago, and that caused changes for my family. They lived about two hours away from here, and so knowing the kind of changes we had to go through as a family, my brother and I decided it would be good for us to all live in the same place. So, that is something I'm still trying to figure out. I mean, I'm still kind of figuring out how to balance my college life with my family life and knowing what kind of changes my family is going through right now. The expectations of how many times I need to go home has gone up. How much time I need to spend with my family has gone up, and it has caused this stress of whether I can still be a college student and still care for the needs of my family at the same time. It's caused me a little bit of a disconnection, to where I can be a college student and for example, whenever I have to go home. It's kind of taken me away from campus and away from friends and activities that are going on at school.

“La Chancla”: **Angry outbursts.** Roberto recently began a job to help his mother with bills. He was the eldest male in the household, which he said meant that he was responsible for taking care of his younger brother. Roberto reported feeling stressed when he tried to balance the expectations between family and attending a PWI. He offered:

Sometimes it [trying to navigate competing expectations] backfires and then it escalates into stress. I will end up going off [yelling at or getting angry with] on my mom and my brother, because they are both asking, “Can you do a favor?” I'm like, “I am trying to study, and I have to work.” I get selfish, and I forget about the rest of the world [when I'm stressed out]. You can't really do that [in my family].

Adriana offered a similar story. In relation to the stress she felt around trying to simultaneously navigate family expectations and be a college student, she said she tended to

“lash out a little bit on them [my family] because I hold so much in. Sometimes I yell when I don’t want to, or I get irritated really easily.”

“La Chancla”: Support from the family. While some students felt obligated to financially support their families, act in other family support roles, and not burden families with requests for financial assistance, they also needed to feel supported and acknowledged by families in their college endeavors. This support did not need to be financial. As Adriana stated, “I just need them to support me. By support, I mean mentally, emotionally. I don’t need them to pay for stuff. I need people to support me and encourage me and be proud of me going to college.” Alejandra described how family support helped her stay motivated to finish college:

My great-grandmother made it to high school. She was the only one in her family who got to make it to high school, but she didn’t get to go to college. She is crazy about school. She loves it and she loves to hear good things about it. She’s always praying for me. She tells me she is so happy to brag about me to everyone. She gets a thing to brag about. She is so proud, and I don’t want to lose that.

Successfully Navigating “La Chancla”

It is important to note that not every student in this study described experiencing stress from navigating between the two competing cultures of family and the PWI. As I have noted, the experiences of navigating competing worlds differ from student to student. In Gloria’s case, she did not have to support her family financially, but her parents did not speak English, and their assistance in terms of helping her navigate a path through college was very limited. In the section above, Gloria described her discomfort asking her parents for assistance. However, when she finally decided to do so, it somewhat alleviated the stressful situation for her. She said:

Trying to be a student, and also working and trying to make enough to pay for school is difficult. It is a stressful situation for me, and especially for applying for financial aid, because my parents don't speak English, I have to be my own parent, too, and fill out all the information. It felt very stressful to try to figure that out. I am a closed off person. I don't like expressing my feelings, I feel like I'm putting a burden on other people. I don't want to do that. However, once I finally expressed to my parents how I was feeling and how I felt like I was doing so much just to stay in school that I wasn't really focusing on my studies—I was more focused on how I was going to pay for it—then they began to help me with that a little bit more. That decreased some stress.

Acculturated family members. Silvia, Pedro, and Guadalupe had families who made it explicit that college was to be the number one priority, and in addition, this was the number one priority for the entire family. As Silvia describes, her entire family acculturated to American life and made adjustments accordingly. Although in an earlier section Silvia discussed not burdening her family with requests for financial assistance, neither she, Pedro, or Guadalupe described experiencing stress from navigating between family responsibilities and those of attending a PWI. Students have also described a need to feel emotionally supported by family members as they pursue a college degree. It could be that students who are receiving explicit support and acceptance to make college a priority might experience less stress in relation to trying to balance the competing cultures of family and the PWI. Silvia describes how her family has acculturated to the U.S.:

My mom is still very traditional, we would help around the house and that sort of thing, but the way she has raised us compared to the way she was raised it is so different, and it does have a lot to do with growing up in a different country. For example, a little girl in El Salvador that is eight years old, she can make tortillas, papusas; they made those girls learn how to cook. You need to learn household things because that is how your life is going to be when you are older. Not for us, though. Growing up here in America it was more like "Focus on school. Focus on school because this is what your future depends on." Girls [in El Salvador] are raised to care for a family. I was raised to care for myself.

The message to Pedro from his family that attending college is the number one priority has also been loud and clear, and it was the reason he was motivated to consider college after high school and why he is motivated to persist in college:

I was born and raised in Mexico, then, I moved here when I was 15. The reason we moved here was for the education, so we are like “Yeah, there is no way we can stop after high school. We need to keep going.”

Guadalupe had a story similar to Pedro’s, in that the purpose for her family immigrating to the U.S. was so that she and her siblings could have better access to an education. She said:

I was born in Guatemala. I moved here when I was three. We had an opportunity. Our green cards. Our papers. They all came. If we didn’t take it, we couldn’t come to the United States, so we took it. Growing up, I never understood why [we left Guatemala]. They always told me it was for a better education. Growing up, I knew that I needed to go to school.

In summary, many first-generation Latino/a students attending college must navigate a complex set of factors. The course for navigation is different for each student. In this section, I described the navigational courses within and between the competing cultures of family and the PWI for students in this study. However, I stress that not all students in my study described experiencing the stress of navigating between competing cultures of family and the PWI. Some students had families who had acculturated to American life, and these students had received clear messages from their family about making college the number one priority.

Seeking a Sense of Belonging

In the sections above, first-generation Latino/a students described multi-layered ways they perceived themselves to be “first” in the context of attending a PWI. Campus representatives confirmed that what it meant to be “first” was a multi-layered construct for

first-generation Latino/a students. Secondly, the students described acculturative stressors related to navigating between the competing cultures of home and the PWI. Campus representatives confirmed that navigating between these competing cultures was a major stressor for the Latino/a students on their respective campuses. Contributing to the complexity of experiencing acculturative stress, first-generation Latino/a students in my study also described stressors they experienced related specifically to the context of attendance at a PWI. Their descriptions paint a picture of first-generation Latino/a students who sought to establish a sense of belonging within the PWI and the stressful roadblocks they experienced as they tried to do so.

The construct of “sense of belonging” is defined as the sense that members of a community (in this case, the PWI campus community) feel that they belong or matter to one another (McMillian & Chavis, 1996 as cited in Morrow & Ackerman, 2012). College students’ sense of belonging is related to social acceptance and academic growth and achievement (Freeman, Anderman, & Jenson, 2007; Meeuwisse, Severiens & Born, 2010). However, Latino/a students have reported encountering campus climates that are unwelcoming (Museus, Yi, & Saelua, 2017; Nuñez, 2009). Latino/a students may encounter overt and/or subtle forms of exclusion, such as isolation, discrimination, or negative stereotyping that may inhibit a sense of belonging in college (Nuñez, 2009). Building on this literature, my research revealed three stressors related to the concept of seeking a sense of belonging that appear to be unique to these first-generation Latino/a students. These include: (1) not relating to non-Latino/a peers; (2) not feeling Latino/a enough; and (3) code-switching versus role-switching (I define both of these terms in a following section).

Not relating to non-Latino/a peers. Rosa grew up in a community that was primarily Latino/a, and she experienced White culture for the first time at a PWI. This caused “culture shock,” and she felt that she didn’t belong within this culture. Rosa stated:

I grew up in a primarily Hispanic community and the cool thing about it is that I grew up in an area where there are a lot of Mexicans. I’m Mexican, so it wasn’t like I’m Guatemalan, issues like that. Coming here [to this PWI] is definitely culture shock. I got put in the dorm with a lot of White girls. I expected it, but I didn’t anticipate it to be as shocking as it was. It wasn’t that I thought it was bad, it was just so different that I didn’t know how to communicate with them. I would say things that I thought were random things, and they would just start laughing so much. I remember calling my mom and I would cry. I was like, “I don’t want to be here anymore.” I was like, “It’s weird. No one here understands me. I can’t speak the way that I want to speak. I feel like I dress weird and that they look at me and I just don’t fit in.” I’m not a person that needs to fit it, but I was just like, “I don’t belong here.” That had never been a thing before.

Later in the interview, Rosa added that her faith-based, Christian PWI did not always embrace diversity in terms of communicating about spirituality. Rosa indicated that this had sometimes contributed to a sense of not belonging. She stated:

Here [at this PWI] it’s just, “Everyone is welcome, but we’re going to do everything in English.” Everything the America way. How do you expect foreign students and students with different cultural backgrounds to listen to anything that you have to say about God if you are not reaching out to them in a way that they will understand?

Patricia discussed living on campus in her first year and the challenges she experienced relating to suitemates who were not from the same background as she was:

I lived in the dorms on campus. Some of my roommates were of a similar background as me. One roommate was White and African American, and another roommate was Mexican and African American. I really connected with them, because we were from the same background. However, I met another group of suitemates [who were White]. I remember we were talking about food, and I was like, “Well we need to go to my hood so we can get food, because that’s where the most authentic food is at.” I think I said it, and like I cursed or something, and I got the impression that they saw me as some sort of “hood rat,” I guess. Yeah, so that type of perception of me, and I just felt that they did not connect with me, and I could sense that. There was no way after that to [prove myself]. I guess I don’t even know why I wanted to, but to prove myself that, “Yeah, I’m from the hood, but I

don't have to act [like I'm from the hood]—just because I act certain ways with certain groups, doesn't make me inferior, or doesn't make me less classy, or uncultured, or whatever it may be. I remember it would always be uncomfortable around them. I got close [to] one of them [who] was really nice and even so, I was always uncomfortable spending time with them. I would because those are our first friends, and they were right next to us, but it was always uncomfortable.

Not feeling Latino/a enough. In addition to lacking a sense of belonging among non-Latino/a peers, some students described feelings of being an imposter in terms of relating to other Latino/a students. These students discussed trying to make connections with other Latino/a students at the PWI and not feeling as though they were Latino/a enough. For example, I asked students if they belonged to any student groups or organizations on campus. In response, Alejandra described her discomfort as a bi-racial Latina when it came to joining Latino/a organizations because she perceived that it would offend other students who were full Latino/a. “That is a thing,” she assured me:

There are some things that I feel like I don't fit the role, because I don't speak Spanish, or I'm only half. Some of the Latino/a groups seem a little [exclusive]....I don't want to mislead anyone in the program who is really full Hispanic. Because that is also a thing. People really feel that way. I don't want to offend anyone that was full Mexican heritage.

Alejandra added that she had experienced classmates telling her she was not “Latino/a enough”:

It's like I can't qualify for certain things because I'm only half. One time we were talking about race and Latino/a heritage in a class, and I spoke about something [I can't remember what] and a girl behind me was like, “But what's your race?” I was like “Mexican and Black” and then she said, “Then you can't speak on it [Mexican heritage].”

Isabel and Jose attended mostly White K-12 schools and described their adjustment to the predominant White culture. In the case of Isabel, the perceptions of other Latinos/as about her identity has led to conflict. One particular conflict took place while she was

attending a predominantly White high school. She said, “I went to an all-White high school. All of my friends are White. I don’t really have any Hispanic friends. I don’t really put myself in a category, like ‘Oh, I’m Hispanic. I can’t talk to that White person.’” However, Isabel’s open attitude eventually caused conflict for her in terms of relationships with other Latinas in the school and subsequently she was hesitant in college to join the Latino/a groups on campus or talk to other Latino/a students in her classes despite the fact that her goal in college was “to focus on the Hispanic community. Everything I learn, I want to give it back to them.” Isabel described her high school encounter:

A group of Hispanic girls [in my high school], they were just girls I didn’t really talk to, and everyone has their own cliques in high school. I was in the bathroom—it was one that I didn’t usually go to. I just went to the bathroom, and this group of girls stopped me. They told me that I was a disgrace, and they felt that I was acting like I was better than them. I didn’t act like them, I didn’t dress like them, and that I was embarrassed of where I was coming from because I’m Mexican. But that’s not who I am at all. They were saying how they were going to hurt me or fight me because I should act like them.

Jose echoed the same experiences noted by Isabel. Having been exposed mostly to White American culture in K-12 education had, in some ways, caused him to feel like he was between two worlds of Latino/a versus White culture:

I went to a predominantly White private school, being in college has been the same for me [the same experience]. I’ve felt excluded, but it wasn’t by the White people in my fraternity. I guess they [the college] had different clubs, and one of them was directed just for Hispanics. Then there was an all Hispanic fraternity, and I felt excluded because it was like I wasn’t Hispanic enough for them. I remember one of them was like, “You don’t know what this means?” At least in those Spanish clubs they’ll be like, “You don’t know what this means [some Spanish terminology, or saying]?” I’m like, “No, I haven’t heard that word.” Then I just felt judgment. I felt it [judgment] in the same way when someone would be like, “You’re saying that word wrong. It’s actually pronounced this way in Spanish.”

Jose also discussed being in a predominantly all White fraternity where he felt a sense of belonging:

I joined a fraternity here in college, so hanging out with them makes me feel like I belong. There are only two Hispanic guys in that fraternity. Yeah, then two African Americans and that's it. Everyone else is pretty much White. I belong when I am hanging out with them, or going to eat lunch with them.

Even with a sense of belonging most of the time, Jose indicated there were other times, "I remember, well, I'm not White enough for my other fraternity brothers, either. It's like I'm not really sure [what I'm supposed to be]."

Code-switching vs. role-switching. Code-switching is defined as a process of alternating between and mixing of different languages in interactions (Kharkhurin & Wei, 2015; Wei & Wu, 2009). Kharkhurin and Wei (2014) suggest code-switching can be a tactic utilized to cope in interactions with the predominating culture. Four students in my study detailed their experiences with code-switching, and all 17 students in the focus group confirmed that they have used code-switching tactics in college. For example, a first-generation Latino/a student focus group participant stated, "When I'm in a place that is predominantly White, I talk in my customer service voice. It's my professional voice I use so that White people won't be offended or intimidated by me." Other focus group participants echoed the idea of using a different kind of voice, and one added: "I code switch all the time. I know definitely when I'm with my friends, I talk like I don't have an education, but when I'm in class, I use my educated voice."

However, the first-generation Latino/a students I interviewed identified code-switching as a stressor related to attendance at their respective PWIs and not as a successful coping response as some researchers (e.g., Kharkhurin & Wei, 2015; Rincon & Hollis, 2018) suggested it to be. In the following section on coping responses, students describe the ways they have found to cope with the stress they experienced from code-switching.

More importantly, students felt as though they had to switch their entire persona, i.e., “switch roles” as Adriana describes, to fit in with White peers. An example of switching an entire persona or role came from a focus group student who was a medical student. He described and demonstrated switching his way of interaction from the pitch of his voice to the way he greets patients when he walks into a treatment room. He stated:

I have to change my whole voice, because my Latino/a voice is really deep and I feel like that intimidates my patients ... but I also [pantomiming an interaction] have to [act more eager, firm handshake, different stance] ask like how can I help ya? It’s everything I have to change.

Adriana felt pressured to change her language and her role around White people on campus, which she said was stressful. She added that she was not alone in the pressure to conform to White culture:

I feel like I have to sound a certain way. I have to act a certain way around the White population here. It’s definitely stressful, but we all [other Latinos/as, other diverse students] have to conform when we are around White people. When I’m around Hispanic people, or even Black people—cause I grew up with Black people, I feel comfortable around them. So, yes, for sure I notice that the role changes in me.

In summary, within the broader theme of seeking to establish sense of belonging in college, I found that first-generation Latino/a students experienced stressors along the spectrum from not feeling like they could relate to non-Latino/a peers, to not feeling like they were Latino/a enough to relate to other Latino/a peers. I further found that sense of belonging in college may have some basis in student acculturation experiences before college. For example, the two students (Jose and Isabel) who had exposure to White culture before coming to college appeared to have adjusted somewhat to White culture, as opposed to students like Alejandra, or Rosa, who reported having challenges adjusting to White

culture in the PWI. The concept of sense of belonging and its possible relation to acculturation and adjustment is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Research Questions 2 and 2a

What coping responses do these students describe using to respond to acculturative stressors? (2a) Of the reported coping responses, which do students perceive as being the most successful in facilitating their ability to persist at four-year PWIs, and why?

In this section, I explore the responses first-generation Latino/a students reported utilizing to cope with stress while attending a PWI. I explore coping responses in this section in the order of the acculturative stressors I reported in the preceding sections. This section on coping responses to acculturative stress begins with exploring coping responses connected to the perceived experiences of “being first,” followed by a discussion of how students described coping with the double-bind of family versus college expectations and navigating “La Chancla,” and ends with an exploration of the ways students coped with stressors experienced while trying to establish a sense of belonging within the PWI.

Coping with “Being First”

In preceding sections, students described multi-layered ways of “being first.” Some students were first-generation in the traditional sense: they were the first of their families to attend college. They also experienced being first in terms of having first exposure to White culture when attending or experienced “being first” in terms of acculturating to the broader U.S. culture and learning English while simultaneously adjusting to life as a college student. In general, students simultaneously experienced many “firsts” while attending a PWI and learned to cope with these first experiences. In this section, I identify four ways in which students coped with “being first” experiences. I begin with “asking for help” as a coping

response to being first in college, because I posit that asking for help may lead to other types of coping responses. I then discuss managing priorities and time, and then motivation as a way to cope in college, and finally, finding mentors.

Asking for help. Students and campus representatives alike talked about asking for help as a means to cope with stressors related to being first, like asking for help with homework or asking about financial aid or other resources. Dr. Jones observed that first-generation Latino/a students do not always know the right questions to ask about many different aspects in college—for example, asking for help with homework—and this sometimes impedes their ability to ask for help:

Sometimes I think they don't know the right questions to ask, so I know that they have nobody that is supporting them in the regular way, I'll answer their questions. Sometimes they feel like they can't ask questions, because they don't want to appear like they don't know what they are doing. Without that extra layer of support they just really feel like they have to go it on their own. They are like, "Oh, I can't go to my advisor for that." Well, yeah, you can. That is what an advisor is for. Really, they don't understand the roles of people. They think if they have a finance question, they go to financial aid. They don't want to bother their professors. They don't understand that's what office hours are for.

Dr. Jones added,

I think if I had to put them in order [the challenges some first-generation Latino/a students have around asking for help], it is not understanding that they can go to their professors. They really do hold them in high esteem. They are a little intimidated. It's asking for help, and they struggle with that. They see a bureaucracy and they are not quite sure how to navigate that, so they don't want to attempt it.

Asking for help has been a successful coping response for Pedro, who indicated in earlier sections that he was the first in his family to attend college, and thus, he has not always had someone to help him navigate through the newness of attending college. Asking for help has been a successful means for him to connect to the right people who can assist him in college. He stated:

I try to get as much help as I can. I would talk to anyone that I feel could help me in a way. I was like if I don't know something, this person might. Then I keep talking to people to get connected with the school and counselor and all of that [it has been successful for me].

Roberto and Veronica shared that they had to overcome fear of negative perception to learn to ask for help. Roberto described how he overcame his fears:

Right now, I'm not afraid to ask the professors questions that are probably out of the ordinary. When I got here, I was very quiet. I didn't want to ask. It felt like high school, I didn't want to raise my hand and have people start laughing or criticizing. Now, I just don't care. It's my education. It took me a while, and [it took] several professors saying to me, "if you need to ask me a question, ask it. It's what you're paying me for."

Veronica still struggled with asking for help but stated that it was important to speak up about needing help before it was too late. She mused:

I still struggle for asking for help because I'm so used to doing everything myself and learning myself that sometimes it's really hard for me to ask the professor for help or anybody in my class 'cause I don't want—I guess it's a little—a pride thing. I don't want them to think I'm dumb or something. If you don't ask for help, how are people going to know that you are stressed? People aren't mind readers. I still struggle with asking for help because it's just like, no, I'll get it. I'll try doing it. Then you keep trying and trying and trying, and you're not getting it. Then sometimes it's a little too late to ask for help.

Managing priorities and time. The students who participated in my study described having many competing priorities they had to manage, including working, attending classes, studying, and spending time with their families. Gloria, Guadalupe, and Jose each described the different strategies they used to manage time and priorities to cope with the stress of, as Guadalupe described, "having a lot going on." Jose offered:

I have a mobile application through my college and it is really neat how it just pulls up a calendar and sends notifications to your phone when an assignment is due and everything. That is really nice. It alerts me that an assignment has been posted and this is the due date.

Unlike Jose, who used technology to manage his time, Gloria stated that she needed to be able to visualize her time to help her know how to balance things, so she used a paper calendar. She said:

I just pull out my agenda and I write things down and see where I can squeeze things in. That helps me balance everything and it gives me a visual of “Oh, I can do this at this time, and then I’ll take a break from this time to that time, then I will go on and do this class from this time to that time.” On my weekends, I will plan out when I can see my family and while I am there what I can study that is kind of easy and doesn’t take too much time. Seeing things visually helps me figure out how to balance things. [Gloria lives away from home.]

Guadalupe’s story was of learning a tough lesson about procrastination and utilizing strategies to better prioritize her time so she was less stressed. She explained:

I know not to procrastinate anymore and to prioritize my time better, because last year I was all about making friends and just wanting to be out there [on the college campus]. I just left all my homework and studying behind because I wanted to be active in everything and meet people. [My grades suffered], so now I know how to prioritize my time better.

Guadalupe described her strategy for prioritizing and managing her time better:

I have two jobs. I have all my classes. My parents started a church, so I am helping out with them. I am in a worship band on campus that travels to different states. I just prioritize. Schoolwork always comes first. I always invest myself one hundred percent in whatever I do. If I have to do my homework, I’ll do that one hundred percent. If I have to work, I do it one hundred percent. Prioritizing time is how I’ve managed to deal with it [balancing out all the demands on time, getting grades back up].

Motivation as a Way of Coping in College

During my interviews with students, they told me about the beliefs, people, or ideas that motivated them to attend and remain in college. They described motivation to be in college as a first step in coping with stress; that is, they always remembered their motivation for going to college. I identified two motivators that students used as a coping response for

acculturative stress: (1) Not struggling like their parents did, and (2) receiving clear messages from their families to make college the number one priority.

Not struggling like my parents did. Four students said they did not want to struggle the way they had seen their parents struggle to make ends meet. As Silvia described:

If I'm successful in college, I won't have to go through the same struggles my parents went through, because I know that they both came from a different country, and they left everything behind. My mom—she only went to fifth grade. My dad finished his freshman year of high school, and they've been working since. I know it has not been easy for them, having to come to another country, start their life here, and not having an education and having to do the jobs that they do—I know it has not been easy for them. That's why [I'm going to college] because I know that I don't want to go through what they've been through. I know that they don't want me to go through anything like that, either. I think it is one of the biggest [motivations to stay in college].

When asked how she came to make the decision to attend college, Adriana offered,

It's because my parents didn't go to school. My mom stopped in third grade. That's when my parents both lived in Mexico, so it's not a big deal over there. My parents are more focused on as long as they have somewhere to live and food to eat. It's fine if they get by like that, but I don't want to. I knew I wanted to go to college. I didn't know what I wanted to do, I just knew that I wanted to go.

Not working for low wages like her parents was a motivator to go to college for Veronica, who had an epiphany while in high school “when I thought about what I wanted to do with my life [after high school], I obviously didn't want to do what my parents did because it is very low-paying.”

Gloria's family members urged her to go to college so she wouldn't struggle the way they had. She observed:

I am the first person in my family to attend college. My parents immigrated here from El Salvador when I was about three. They didn't get the opportunity to go to college, especially my mom, since she basically raised her brothers and sisters. During that same time there was a civil war going on in El Salvador and my dad couldn't attend college. They wanted something better for me so they immigrated here. Growing up, I've always been told, “You need to go to college, get an

education so that you are not working for a little bit of money like every other person who has immigrated here and has not been able to go to college.”

Receiving the message: College is priority. Students who received clear messages from their family members to make college a priority did not identify stressors related to navigating between family college expectations. These students ascribed family support as their motivation to persist in college. For example, Silvia’s said, “Growing up here in America it was more like [my parents said] “Focus on school. Focus on school because this is what your future depends on, so I have always known the priority.” Guadalupe’s parents immigrated from Guatemala to the U.S. when she was three. She stated that her parents always made it known to her that their sole purpose for coming to the U.S. was for educational opportunities. She offered, “Growing up, I knew that I needed to go to school.” Pedro echoed this experience. He was 15 when his family immigrated. He said, “The reason we moved here was for the education, so we are like, “Yeah, there is no way to stop after high school. We need to keep going.” Jose offered, “College was always, ‘you are going to do it.’ There was no question about it, at least with my parents growing up.”

From these descriptions, I posit that helping first-generation Latino/a students successfully cope with the demands of attending a PWI may depend upon the type of family support they receive. I further discuss the role of the family in the students’ experiences of acculturative stress while attending a PWI and their subsequent coping responses to acculturative stress in Chapter 5.

Finding Mentors

The students in this study described receiving mentoring support and developing relationships in two ways: (1) formal mentoring programs, defined as a mentoring

relationship in which a relationship is set up through an organization (or a college program) (Harrington, 2011) and which characteristically includes training of the mentee and mentor, program objectives, and program activities (Harrington), and (2) informal mentoring. Informal mentoring can be defined as a relationship that develops over time, and is a relationship in which the mentor and mentee choose each other (as opposed to being “matched” by a program) (Harrington, 2009). It is less structured or managed and is not formally recognized by the university or by a program (Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

Formal mentoring programs. Students who belonged to Latino/a organizations on campus had access to mentors through more formal mentoring programs, although students’ access to these mentors and organizations sometimes depended upon chance. For example, a chance encounter on campus led Veronica to finding someone to act as mentor during college. One thing led to another, and instead of quitting college, she persisted. She said:

If I wouldn’t have met him [my mentor], if I would not have seen him at the parking lot behind the library and talked to him; I might’ve not stayed at college. He’s been that person to be like, “No, this is what we’re going to do. You’re going to keep going, and I’m going to get you connected with other people on campus who can help. You’re going to get connected with a mentoring-mentee program we have here on campus. We’re so fortunate to have it.” That’s when [another mentor] came, and she was a really strong mentor for me because she was always willing to be somebody to listen and hear me out when I had difficult times. She always told me, “You need to lay off your hours at work.” She got me connected. It’s just a matter of keep pushing.

Patricia also received mentoring through the campus Latino/a student organizations to which she belonged. She learned valuable lessons about herself with the help of her mentors/mentoring program. She recounted:

Through my mentoring program [on campus] I have learned that other people’s values need to align with my values [that is what makes me feel like I can fit in]. My mentors have helped me understand myself as an individual and as a professional.

Mentoring programs designed to address the needs of Latino/a students are a powerful tool to help them succeed in college (Marx, 2018). As Dr. Jones observed, “What I see them really getting successful [the Latino/a students on her campus] with is the mentoring program that is specific for them. Those kids really get it [going to college]. That support is very telling.”

Informal mentoring. Students also received informal support from faculty, staff, counselors, and advisors on campus. Though this type of support was not part of campus programming, it served many functions, like guiding students toward counseling (Silvia), or on a friendship basis, as Gloria describes. Informal mentoring was also helpful when students knew they had someone on campus they felt they could talk to, as Pedro affirmed: “My counselors and teachers are always willing to know what you think or if you have something to say.” Gloria discussed knowing she could go to her professors for help, and that made her feel motivated to do well in college. She offered:

I know a lot of professors that I talked to, when I told them, “I’m kind of struggling,” they really took the time to get to know me and get to know my situation. That helped me do better just because I felt like I kind of owed it to them just ’cause they were taking that time, and they were taking my feelings into consideration. I’m like, well, if they’re taking their time, then maybe I need to take that time to do well in their class and keep things going.

Gloria also developed a special relationship with a faculty member:

I actually babysit for one of my old professors I had junior year. She was my discourse professor. It’s just this really nice relationship that I have with her and other faculty members. It just very easy to talk to the ones that I’ve been able to build a really good connection with.

Silvia found help through a very hard time in her life (she was the driver in a car accident that killed the passenger in her car) from a professor who was able to guide her toward getting counseling:

One of my professors—it was one of the classes I dropped that semester, and she was like, “I really think you should consider dropping this class [because you are not doing very well in it].” I completely broke down, and she told me she wanted to refer me to counseling. She said, “It sounds like you are going through a really tough time, this is a lot to go through. I want you to consider taking advantage of this [free counseling at the campus counseling center] because it would really help you out.” So she emailed them right away and attached me to the email. I thought that well, why not take advantage of it? It’s already in your tuition and taking advantage of counseling is definitely something that is beneficial to coping.

Conversely, some students were unable to find mentors in college, and navigating through college was difficult without that support. As Roberto described:

I wish I would have had more mentors that could have helped me. It’s really hard when others are telling you that you are going to fail and that is all you are going to do. You learn how to overcome it, but it takes its toll. It kept me down for about two years. In those two years, I wish someone could have mentored me and told me to keep going and not to give up.

In conclusion, first-generation Latino/a college students can face challenges tied to “being first” beyond the traditional definition of “first-generation” as a student who is the first in their family to attend or finish college. In this study, Latino/a students described being the first in their family to attend college in the U.S., being exposed to White culture for the first time in college, and the experience of “being first” as an immigrant. Their choice of coping responses (asking for help, managing priorities and time, finding motivation to remain in college, and finding mentors) reflects all of the experiences of “being first” described by the first-generation college student participants in this research study. In the next section, I detail how students described coping with family expectations as well as the responsibilities they face in college.

Coping with Family Expectations vs. College Responsibilities

Seven students who participated in key informant interviews identified navigating between the expectations of their families and expectations of college as a major

acculturative stressor. Not all of these seven students were able to identify specific successful means of coping with this type of stressor. I contend that the most successful way of navigating between competing expectations appears to be family support, but it bears repeating. This seemed to be especially true when family support was in the form of sending clear messages about making college attendance the priority, since the students who described receiving family support for their endeavors in college did not describe stressors related to trying to balance family expectations with college responsibilities.

Going to counseling. In addition to family support, two students (Miguel and Silvia) named counseling as a successful coping response to extreme stressors experienced across the domains of family life and college experiences. Miguel attended counseling to resolve his feelings of grief over the death of his father and to find strategies to navigate his new role as head of household versus college student. He offered, “It [counseling] has helped a lot with learning how to deal with this kind of stress and given me tools to use [to figure out how to balance between family responsibilities and college responsibilities].” Sylvia also went to counseling to cope with grief and sudden traumatic events which kept her from focusing on her school work:

I know every campus should have different counseling services and stress services. I feel like it’s better to talk to a stranger than to try to talk to somebody you know because they don’t know your life. If you tell it from your point of view, they’re gonna be there to listen and give you advice as a counselor. There actually were two major events back to back [death in family and a car accident that killed a passenger]. It was two days apart from each other. It was crazy. It was actually my freshman year, my second semester, so spring 2016. I believe it was March 4, if I’m not wrong. After the car accident [Silvia was the driver of a car involved in a car accident that killed her passenger. She was not at fault for the accident]—I remember, I dropped three classes that semester, and the two semesters after that, my grades weren’t the best, and it even kinda followed me into this last year. I didn’t really know how to deal with this sort of thing. I actually went to the school’s

counseling center for it. I took advantage of that, and I'm very glad I did because if I didn't, I don't know if I would've gotten better, honestly.

Another student, Rosa, also described looking into counseling as a means to deal with the stressors she has experienced associated with establishing a sense of belonging in college and homesickness. However, at the time of my interview with her, she had not attended a counseling session.

Coping with Seeking a Sense of Belonging in College

The Latino/a students participating in this study identified two ways in which they coped with challenges related to seeking a sense of belonging in college: (a) having a space to be a Latino/a (for example, a student group or a group of friends as an important means to cope with stressors associated with establishing a sense of belonging in the PWI); and (b) finding a group of friends (finding your tribe).

Space to be a Latino/a on campus. Von Robertson, Bravo and Chaney (2016) referred to the concept of having a space on campus to be Latino/a as “counter-space” and define it as a space, or an area on a PWI campus where Latino/a students can go to preserve their culture, or simply as a place of refuge from the arduous terrain of the PWI. As described by students in this study, having a counter-space buffered against the stressors of code-switching and/or role-switching. Patricia talked about the multi-cultural office on the campus she attended: “It is always empowering for me to step into that office and know that space is there for us, that physical space.”

“Counter-space” for the students in this study also referred to space which is not physical, such as providing opportunities to connect with other Latino/a students and being given “space” to be around other students of the same cultural heritage. For example, Rosa

described how joining a Latino/a student group helped her reconnect with her Latino/a identity rather than trying to accommodate to White culture. In turn, this helped her establish a sense of belonging on her PWI campus. She said:

There were auditions for a Hispanic ministry group. I love worship, but I get tired of it in English. I'm not used to it. I figured, I'm a little homesick, let's see if this fixes anything, so I tried out. This year I'm on the team again. We have Guatemalans, Mexicans, we've had people from Peru and things like that on the team. That has honestly, to this day, been the thing that keeps me going. If I did not have this group, if I did not have that family—because that's the only group I can ever speak Spanish with, make jokes we understand, talk about home life and parents, or the way we were raised. I get tired of accommodating to this American culture. Let me just come back in to my little Hispanic family that isn't actually my family but it's the closest thing that I've got to it.

Guadalupe highlighted the need to find a group of Latino/a students to interact with in order to feel connected:

I love having my inner circle. I do have that inner circle that I can count on and depend on. I like to be with every group. I don't like sticking to just one. I'll get interactions from this group and this group, and this group. It's just nice to be able to have those interactions with many different types of people. It's funny, because this year I realized that Hispanics just automatically click. We just do. You know it's gonna be like that wherever you go. I've never felt not accepted by American culture. It's just that this year made me realize—because there are a lot more Hispanics on campus this year—just how quickly we can connect. We say little jokes in Spanish and they understand. I don't know. It's just really cool to have that.

Gloria echoed this observation, stating that finding ways to be involved has helped her feel happy and successful in her college pursuits.

I had a few friends who came to the university, and they weren't happy. I feel like they didn't really try and branch out and find clubs or interact with people that they had things in common with. That is why I love the university. There are so many clubs [to get involved with]. Just finding your own path and your own way to happiness will really help you be successful [in college].

“Finding your tribe.” Students described finding a group of friends to relate to as a successful means of alleviating the stressors related to being a first-generation student,

establishing a sense of belonging (and an identity) in the PWI, and in balancing new expectations and priorities in college. It's about "finding your tribe," as described by

Patricia:

Somebody at a conference I attended actually described finding a group of friends as "finding your tribe," and I was like, "It's all about finding your tribe," those people that get you, because once you find that—those people, it's easier to walk around campus and not just automatically want to leave, but come back, and come hang out at the union, and know that someone is there.

When asked what advice he would give other first-generation Latino/a students,

Miguel emphasized the importance of finding a group of friends:

Find a group of people that can keep you accountable and that you feel safe sharing where you are at with. I think a lot of stress—or at least for myself, keeping things in my own mind and building different [stressful] scenarios in my mind. I think [it is important to] have people to process with and to be able to tell them about what is happening and having those friends respond and help you with what you are feeling stressed out about. Just find a trustworthy group of people.

Finding friends from different diverse groups with whom she could relate about matters of identity helped Rosa alleviate stress she was feeling about transitioning to a PWI.

She stated:

It was a mere moment of grace. I saw one of my first friends, she's Black, and I thought she looked really cool. She asked me to sit with her, and then she was sitting with another girl, who was White. Another was Haitian, the other mixed. Another one was originally from Ecuador but adopted by White parents. I didn't realize till we were all really close friends that we all had the same issue of identity. That's the way I coped with it, is finding other people, mainly minorities. Had I known there were other people [not just White people], I would have gone out and looked for them, because I think that would have made the transition easier.

Pride in Latino/a identity. Students described taking pride in their Latino/a identities as a buffer against stress, because it imbued them with a sense of confidence and ease in interacting with those who were not from the same culture. Rosa described how she got in touch with her identity: "I took a Chicanos studies class, and I was like, 'I'm not

Mexican American, because I am mixed. I am Chicana. Born on the border. Full-blooded Mexican.” Later, Rosa stated that while she is proud of her identity she also said, “I don’t have an issue with American culture. It makes sense. We live in the United States.” Patricia echoed Rosa’s pride in her identity and added that she was aware of how it helped Latinos/as cope with the world around them:

My parents immigrated from Mexico, so that’s that. Growing up, we went to Mexico every three months, or every year, depending on the financial situation. That’s just to say that I’m really in touch with my identity, and I’m really proud of who I am, and I feel that—and I’ve read about it too, that it does help with students coping, or managing the world around them.

Other students talked about the pride they have in their Latino/a identity. For example, Gloria shared her pride by saying, “I’m 100 percent Salvadoran. That is something I am very proud of. I even have a tattoo of the country on the back of my neck. That’s how much I love it.” Pride in their identity also acted as a protective factor against racial negativity and micro-aggressions, as Guadalupe emphasized:

For me, I don’t take things personally when people say things. That’s because I’m just so proud to be a Guatemalan that really, anything that anyone says has no effect on me. Because I’m like, I know who I am. I know who my family is. I don’t really mind. Other people might say stuff, and I’m like, I feel bad for them for thinking that, but I’m not gonna cry about it.

Guadalupe added that pride in her identity makes it easy for her to interact with other types of students and helped her feel included. She stated:

I like being involved. I’m involved in a lot of different things. I like being friendly. I like saying hi to people. Things like that. I’ll walk into a cafeteria and I’ll have a group say hi to me over here and a group say hi to me over there. I feel very included in that way.

Veronica also stated that pride in her identity blocks the negativity of others. She stated:

I identify myself as a Mexican-American. I was not born here, but I was raised here. I’ve been here since I was two-and-a-half years old. I know more English than

Spanish, but yet I still put on my resume “fluent in Spanish” because I’m still able to translate for people, and that’s one of the biggest things is communication. I can’t deny that I was born in Mexico. I’m proud of it, it just saves me time from explaining to people that aren’t aware of how it works. Sometimes it blocks those racist people from saying that I’m not from here. It’s been everything that resolves it: “I’m Mexican-American.”

Respecting differences. Respecting differing opinions helped students maintain their equilibrium when faced with negative interactions. For example, Manuel described his approach to addressing others who were different than he was or who had ideas with which he didn’t agree. He stated:

Because coming from a different place, you have a lot of different points of view about everything. You can usually agree with someone. You’re like, “I don’t like the way you do this but I would respect it as long as you respect the way I see things.” you know what I’m saying?

Veronica shared a story about an incident on campus which she perceived to have negative racist undertones and the discomfort it made her feel, but she also posited that respect of others’ beliefs as well as understanding their side of a story is important. She said:

It was this whole thing like we are a campus of freedom of speech, but those are—there were some racial slurs on there, and those were things that I was like, “So we do have Trump people here. Okay.” We had a lot of small-group focus groups during that time, and one of the things, I was like I would really love to talk to somebody that’s pro-Trump to talk, not to argue about politics. But I want to know your side. What made you think that this man was fit enough to be a president of this country? I said it in a group for one of my history classes. We were separated into groups as well on different days. I was 100 percent sure that there was a guy or two guys there that were pro-Trump because of just the things I’ve been overhearing from them. I didn’t point them out, but I did say, “If any of you are here pro-Trump, I want to know your side to talk. I want to know what’s going on. I just want to listen to you. I don’t want to argue back or any means. That point is when I noticed we still have this problem on campus. They’re quiet again, but that’s mainly because [this institution] has been doing a better job of diversity, inclusion and equity and making sure that the minority students are the ones being supported. It’s just a little borderline because technically, we have to respect their beliefs. That’s like in your mind you’re like that’s—to you it may be not morally right or correct, but to them it’s correct. It’s a very fine borderline that we stand on when it comes to letting students protest because it is a freedom we have. We’re supposed to because we

cannot discriminate because you have these beliefs. I get it. It's borderline, but I'm pretty sure if I were to do something they didn't like, it would upset them.

Feeling unable to cope with establishing a sense of belonging. In the acculturative stressor section, students described the barriers they experienced to establishing a sense of belonging and the stressors that resulted from experiencing these barriers. To tell the full story of coping with acculturative stressors experienced while attending a PWI, I believe it is important to examine how students described their coping responses as well as what they were not able to cope with. Although Rosa described ways of successfully coping with establishing a sense of belonging, like joining a Latino/a student organization and making a diverse group of friends, she also described her frustration with making accommodations to the predominating White culture in her college, and a psychological and physical withdrawal, in a sense, from certain aspects of college:

Here, the food is different. I don't like going to the social events. It's not that they are bad, everyone else has fun at them. The music isn't what I listen to. The food we use is not what I eat. I've gotten tired of constantly accommodating and changing myself to live by this [White, American] culture. I don't think I can do it anymore. I'm just...done.

Often, not coping is embedded within the stressors identified by students. Alejandra described herself as very stressed out and unable to cope with feelings arising from interactions with a cohort of other students. She talked about her sense that the students in the cohort were unable to relate to her, and she in return, felt unable to relate to them. She said:

Coping wise, I really don't think it [my experiences in college] affected me much in my freshman and sophomore years, I feel like I was pretty positive throughout the whole thing [adjusting to college in her freshman and sophomore years of college]. Until my junior and senior years. I think you meet so many people in your freshman and sophomore year, a ton, and you can relate to a lot of people. Now I am noticing differences that I chose to ignore earlier. I will say that coping hasn't really come

into play till my third year and fourth year. It's because now the people that I'm in class with I know well, there's only eight of us in my cohort. That is where I feel like I am stressed out, because I can't really relate to anyone [in my cohort]. Diversity is literally at none. Everyone is a White female and they come from backgrounds that are so different to mine. It's just obvious that we don't relate. For example, recently, I went to go get a snack from the vending machine, and they were all together. I did not know about this. They were working on homework, and no one told me anything about that. That upset me. And then I had to remind myself that I probably wouldn't have said yes anyway, because we don't relate in regular conversation. It just makes me feel left out. I don't know other ways to deal with it [feeling left out].

In conclusion, Latino/a students described successful ways of establishing a sense of belonging in college, like learning to ask for help, finding a space to be a Latino/a student on campus, finding a group of friends, and finding support through mentoring (both formal, and informal). Students also described their reactions to feeling like they were unable to establish a sense of belonging in college, like physical and psychological withdrawal from college pursuits, hurt feelings, and feeling extremely stressed out. It is important for campus professionals to pay heed to successful coping strategies. However, it is just as important to pay attention to unsuccessful coping responses to acculturative stress in college. This section may provide a guidepost for such consideration. The next section of this chapter addresses Question 3 of this research study: Do student responses vary across institutions?

Research Question 3

Do student responses vary across institutions, and if so, how and why?

No major themes emerged regarding variation of student responses across institutions. Instead, what emerged was that students described the same stressors related to acculturation and the same coping responses across the two PWIs in this study. In order of presentation of this section, these themes were: The meaning of being first, which both campus representatives and students discussed as a contributor to acculturative stress.

Campus representatives indicated that “being first” for Latino/a students meant that they are “doing it on their own.” The first-generation students in this study presented with multi-layered stories of “being first,” beyond the traditional sense (being first in the family to attend college). Multi-layered stories were about exposure to White culture for the first time in college, being the first to attend college in the U.S. (but not necessarily the first to attend college), and also the ways in which being an immigrant student meant being first.

Examples of being first in different ways are learning to speak English, or learning to adjust to the broader U.S. culture while concurrently attending college in a new country (and being the first in the family to attend college). Given the fact that students from both institutions described similar stories and that campus representatives also named “being first” as a contributor to stress would suggest that the perception of being first is just as important to consider as the traditional definition of first-generation. Students and campus representatives involved in this research study also described common coping responses to perceptions of “being first” in the PWI. These included learning to ask for help and finding mentors.

Campus representatives and students at both campuses identified the double-bind of navigating between competing expectations (and cultures) of family and the PWI as a major college stressor. The metaphor of “La Chancla” or the sandal, was a representation for the various courses students must navigate. Additionally, students at both PWIs described stressors related to seeking a sense of belongingness in college. Common stressors described were specifically about not being able to relate to non-Latino/a peers and to feeling required to code-switch and specifically, to role switch in order to fit in at the PWI. Correspondingly, common coping responses related to seeking a sense of belonging (and experiencing

stressful roadblocks) included coping strategies such as taking pride in Latino/a identities to buffer against negative perceptions and also respecting the opinions of others. Most importantly, students described establishing “counter-spaces” as a means of re-establishing their Latino/a identities, as a place to which they could retreat from the pressure of role-switching and code-switching in the PWI, and as a place where they could, in a sense, “let their hair down” and be with a group of students who have had common experiences and common identities. Lastly, students talked about their motivation for remaining in college and the way that receiving explicit messages about making college the number one priority motivated them to persist in college.

In summary, this chapter presented multi-faceted descriptions of the acculturative stressors and subsequent coping responses of first-generation Latino/a students’ attendance at PWIs. Latino/a students perceived themselves as “being-first” in multi-layered ways beyond the traditional definition of being the first in the family to attend college. “Being-first” can contribute to acculturative stressors experienced in a PWI. Latino/a students in this study also described the tenuous roads they may navigate between honoring the expectations their families have of them, and the expectations incumbent upon them while attending a PWI. Concurrently, many students also experienced stressors related to seeking a sense of belonging at the PWI, including feeling as though they must speak in particular voices or switch roles to fit-in. In Chapter 5 I address the findings, including discussion, implications, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IDEAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As we stood waiting for the elevator, my study participant for the day observed that something I said in his classroom during a recruitment speech for this study struck him as truth: “Going to college is like arriving in a new culture.” For this study, I posited that attending college at a predominantly White institution (PWI) is not just engaging with a new campus, but also, for first-generation Latino/a college students, engaging with a new culture. I also posited that first-generation Latino/a college students might experience acculturative stress very much like what immigrants might experience when they arrive in a new country (Yang et al., 2009).

My study findings supported my postulations as the first-generation Latino/a student research participants revealed multiple meanings of “being first” to attend a PWI and described navigating between the competing cultures of family and the PWI. The student participants also described a broad spectrum of experience related to seeking a sense of belonging in a PWI. At the one end of the spectrum, they described feeling like they did not relate to their White peers, while on the other end of the spectrum, they described not feeling like they were Latino/a enough to relate to other Latino/a peers. Also related to seeking a sense of belonging was the stress they experienced when Latino/a students felt they must code switch to fit in at the PWI. My postulations were further supported as the Latino/a students described the responses they utilized to cope with such stressors. Coping responses included asking for help, finding mentors, finding a “tribe” of friends, developing a bi-cultural identity to protect against negativity, and going to counseling. In the next sections, I describe my application of an interdisciplinary lens to the study and then describe the key

study findings and discuss my interpretation of them. I present study limitations and offer recommendations for practice and ideas for future research. Lastly, I offer a study conclusion.

Application of Interdisciplinary Lens to Study

Before I review and interpret key findings, it is important to address the application of an interdisciplinary lens to explore first-generation Latino/a college students' acculturative stress and coping responses while attending a PWI. Repko (2008) described interdisciplinary research as:

A process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or professionit draws on different disciplinary perspectives and integrates their insight through construction of a comprehensive perspective. (p. 11)

When I began to think about first-generation Latino/a college student experiences at a PWI, I knew using perspectives limited to those within the discipline of higher education would not yield a complete conceptual foundation for my study. The conceptual foundation for exploring these students' experiences lay *between* fields of study, *not within* one single field; that is, understanding first-generation Latinos/experiences at a PWI required an interdisciplinary approach (Repko, 2008). More specifically, the topic of these students' persistence at a PWI was located in higher education, but the factors contributing to their persistence were located not only within higher education, but also within psychology and sociology. Thus, I chose to apply an interdisciplinary conceptual lens to my study underpinned by both psychological and sociological perspectives.

For this study, I utilized Berry's Framework of Acculturative Stress and Coping (1997) from psychology, and from sociology, I utilized Lazarus and Folkman's (1984)

seminal work on coping responses. I framed first-generation Latino/a persistence at a PWI as a result of a process of acculturating or adjusting to a new culture combined with the experience of stress related to college attendance as acculturative in nature. As I described in Chapter 1, coping responses are triggered by experiences of acculturative stress (Kuo, 2014; Padilla et al., 2013) and are therefore an important component of my research study.

Utilizing Berry's Framework of Acculturative Stress and Coping (1997) and Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) work on coping responses assisted me in forming the study purpose and research questions. My study purpose was to identify first-generation Latino/a students' reported acculturative stressors during their attendance at a four-year PWI and the coping responses they utilized to respond to acculturative stressors. The study research questions were:

1. What acculturative stressors do first-generation Latino/a junior and senior college students report experiencing while attending a PWI?
2. What coping responses do these students describe using to respond to acculturative stressors?
 - 2a. Of the reported coping responses, which do students perceive as being the most successful in facilitating their ability to persist at four-year PWIs, and why?
3. Do student responses vary across institutions, and if so, how and why?

I employed qualitative phenomenological inquiry as the methodology to explore the lived experiences of first-generation Latino/a students when they encountered acculturative stress while attending a PWI as well as their subsequent coping responses to this stress. Qualitative research, as described by Denzin and Lincoln, has the potential to “crosscut

different disciplines, fields, and subject matters” (2005, p. 2). Both Bruner (1990) and Polkinghorne (1988) described narrative approaches such as phenomenology as interdisciplinary in that studying narratives and analyses of texts and talk are linked to psychology and literature. In this study, I used a phenomenological inquiry approach by conducting in-depth interviews with first-generation Latino/a junior and senior college students enrolled at PWIs to obtain rich, thick, descriptions of the phenomena of stress and coping. To help me understand the contextual background of these PWIs, I interviewed campus representatives.

Repko, Szostak, and Buchberger (2017) highlighted the importance of contextual thinking in interdisciplinary research and learning. These authors stated that contextual thinking is the ability to examine a problem from the broader perspective by placing it within “the fabric of time, culture, or personal experience. This kind of thinking is the primary focus of interdisciplinary learning and is characterized by wholes, and the relationship between parts” (2017, p. 7). Application of contextual thinking as described by Repko and colleagues and the employment of phenomenological research methods empowered me to explore the lived experiences of Latino/a students from the broader perspective of attending a PWI as a process of acculturation for first-generation Latino/a college students. This broader perspective then helped me interpret the described experiences of first-generation Latino/a students from the frameworks of acculturative stress and subsequent coping responses. In the following section, I present my key study findings and my interpretation of these findings.

Discussion of Key Findings

Key Findings Related to the First Research Question

The key study thematic findings associated with the first research question, “What acculturative stressors do first-generation Latino/a college students report experiencing while attending a PWI?” included: (1) multiple meanings of “being first” and student descriptions of coping with stressors related to “being the first,” (2) The double-bind: dodging “*La Chancla*” and described coping responses for navigating between emotional expectations of Latino/a students’ families and academic PWI expectations, and (3) Seeking a sense of belonging and described coping responses students used to find a sense of belonging at a PWI.

Multiple Meanings of “Being First”

At the beginning of my study, I defined the term “first-generation college students” as students who are first in their family to attend college (Center for First-Generation Student Success, 2017a). However, I found that students participating in this study revealed different and multiple meanings of “being first.” For example, I found that students experienced “being first” if they were the first in their families to attend college in the U.S. Four students in this study shared during key informant interviews with me that they had a parent/s who had attended college in their respective country of origin. Yet, these four students still considered themselves to be first-generation college students. Additionally, students in this study defined themselves as “being first” when their parents lacked knowledge about the U.S. college system and could not help them navigate this system; as a result, these students felt obliged to figure out to how navigate the U.S. college system by themselves.

“Being first” for some students in this study also meant that attending a PWI was the first time they were exposed to the broader White culture. As noted earlier, even though Latino/a students are born and educated in the U.S, they often attend primary and secondary schools that are racially and ethnically isolated (Lopez, 2013). This can contribute to “culture shock” if they attend a PWI for college.

In my study, only one student (Pedro) was a late-coming immigrant to the U.S, but his description of “being first” highlights the multiple and concurrent ways Latino/a students can experience this phenomenon, including learning English and encountering and adjusting to the predominating U.S. culture for the first time. In addition to being the first in his family to attend a U.S. college, Pedro was also the first in his family to attend a U.S. high school. His description of the difficulties adjusting to the finer nuances of White culture, such as not knowing the song “Row, Row, Row, Your Boat,” illustrated the many ways that students might “be first” and how these experiences might later contribute to acculturative stress and coping while attending a PWI.

“Being first” in and of itself was a potentially powerful acculturative stressor for some students in my study. After all, acculturation is a process of encountering a new culture (like college) for the first time, and trying to adjust to it. Thus, *acculturative stress* is essentially stress caused by encountering this new culture for the first time, and experiencing problems adjusting to it. Further, students’ experience of “being first” in college, in whatever way it manifested, also appeared to lead to other acculturative stressors in college. For example, Alejandra and Rosa both described experiencing culture shock from being exposed to White culture for the first time when they attended college. In turn, their respective experiences of culture shock affected their sense of belonging while attending a

PWI. As another example, some students in this study experienced conflicts with family members as they tried to negotiate competing worlds of family expectations and responsibilities related to college attendance. As Patricia and Adriana described, being a “first-generation” college student often meant that family members lacked knowledge about college responsibilities. For Patricia, family members’ lack of college knowledge contributed to her being unable to communicate with her family about the stressors that she was experiencing in college. For Adriana, family members’ lack of college knowledge led to family conflict in the form of “guilt trips” and then to angry outbursts at her family members.

In this study, I also found that having a family member attend a PWI can be a “first” for the *entire* family, not just the student. This was the case for eight students who participated in interviews with me. Students such as Patricia and Alejandra described how their parents, who had never attended college or never attended a U.S. college, were unable to provide them with emotional support because of the “culture gap” between the family culture and students’ need to meet expectations and responsibilities associated with college culture. Family members’ lack of understanding about college expectations and responsibilities contributed to students’ acculturative stress in many ways, as in, for example, students feeling unable to talk to family members about stressful college experiences.

In short, governmental, societal, and educational entities often define and frame the term “first-generation” only through the lens of parental educational attainment (Center for First Generation Student Success, 2017a; Toutkoushian, Stollbert, & Slaton, 2018).

However, my study findings revealed that the meaning that students make in self-defining as

“first-generation” extends far beyond referral to their parents’ level of educational attainment. Simply put, “being first” is not a static definition; it is a dynamic lived experience with multiple meanings. Further, students’ varied perceptions and experiences of “being first” appeared to trigger other acculturative stressors while these students were attending a PWI.

Thus, I contend that it is time to reframe the understanding of what it means to “be first” in college. I contend that it is important for PWIs—and *all* higher education institutions—to consider the context and experiences of “being first” of each individual student (Latino/a and otherwise), rather than to assume parental educational attainment is the only or even primary reason related to experiencing stressors related to identifying as a first-generation college student.

Experiencing or Dodging La Chancla

My study findings revealed two distinct student subgroups. Students in the first group experienced stress as they navigated between the sometimes competing cultures of Latino/a family values and the academic expectations of the PWI. Students in the second group did not describe experiencing this type of stress. They did, however, describe the clear messages they received from their family to make college a priority.

Experiencing la chancla. The experience of the first student group is represented by the powerful metaphor of *La Chancla* (the sandal) that I described in Chapter 4. In that chapter, I recounted that Veronica used a reference from Latino/a popular culture to describe her relationship with her family. As Veronica and I sat down to do an interview, her phone rang repeatedly. It was her mother. Finally, Veronica asked me if we could stop the interview (which we did) so that she could take the phone call. Afterward, she asked me if I

had ever heard of “*La Chancla*,” which translates in English to “*the sandal*.” When I said I had not, she told me the story of what *La Chancla* represented:

As a Latino/a student, you cannot say “no” to your parents, or else you’ll get this thing called “*La Chancla*” [term emphasized]. The chancla is called “the sandal”—that is the English translation. Your parents still beat you up. They don’t care how old you are. They’ll just throw their sandal at you or something.

In my study, I found that the story of “*La Chancla*” symbolized the different stress triggers that some first-generation Latino/a students experienced as they navigated between competing cultures and the different ways that stress played out in their attempts to balance competing expectations. The seven students in my study who faced *La Chancla* described stress triggers such as feeling pressed to “put family first,” taking on the burden of college expenses themselves, experiencing family-induced guilt-trips, and having angry outbursts. As examples, Alejandra and Adriana reported they both provided significant family financial support while paying their own respective ways through college. Alejandra said this often impeded her ability to focus on academic pursuits and find a sense of belonging at the PWI. As a result, she described feeling very stressed about balancing so many competing expectations. Adriana stated that her family members expected her to spend significant amounts of time with them, even when she needed to study. When she did not attend family functions so she could study, it led to conflicts (i.e., “guilt trips”) from family members and triggered angry outbursts from her. While attending college, Roberto, who became male head of his household after his parents’ divorce, had to get a job to help his family and was responsible for caring for a younger brother. He recalled his angry outbursts directed toward his mother and younger brother when he was interrupted by them as he was trying to study.

Further, in this study, I learned just how much some Latino/a family members expected students to participate in family life even while these students were making a life for themselves on campus. I found this somewhat surprising in light of the fact that four students I interviewed had parents who had attended at least some college in their respective countries of origin. Thus, these four sets of parents had some knowledge of the college responsibilities their children faced. However, this knowledge did not stop them from expecting their children to participate in and prioritize family life. For example, the mother of Veronica, the student who provided me with the “*La Chancla*” vignette, had attended college, and she still expected Veronica to be fully immersed with her family’s daily life.

Dodging la chancla: The message to make college the priority. It is important to note that Latino/a families might not always have the knowledge of college to support their student, but they are just as rich in family capital as they are in many other domains of cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). My study was about the lived experiences of acculturative stress and subsequent coping responses of first-generation Latino/a students at a PWI. While this research study revealed that some students experienced stress resulting from trying to navigate between the cultures of family and PWI, other students in my study did not. Three students described receiving very clear messages from family members to make college the priority. For example, Pedro’s parents made it clear to him that their reason for immigrating to the U.S. was so he would have a chance at a better education, so he knew “There is no way we can stop after high school. We need to keep going.” I contend that students whose family members have acculturated to American life and who receive clear messages of support and acceptance from these family members, are less likely to experience stressors related to trying to balance competing cultures of family and the PWI.

In summation, in my interviews with first-generation Latino/a students, it became evident to me that family expectations and responsibilities affect acculturation and adjustment in college. Additionally, study findings revealed the relationships between family members' prioritization of family over college or the prioritization of college over family and the experience of student stress. I contend that the prioritization of family over college is likely directly related to first-generation Latino/a student persistence and must be recognized as such by PWIs and other types of colleges and universities.

Seeking a Sense of Belonging at a PWI

My findings revealed that nine first-generation Latino/a students in this study reported experiencing acculturative stressors related to their sense of belonging at a PWI. Specifically, these students described three stressors: (1) difficulty in relating to their non-Latino/a peers, (2) feeling like they were “not Latino/a enough,” and (3) needing to code-switch or alternate between languages and interactions to fit into the PWI.

In Chapter 4, I defined the term “sense of belonging” as the sense that members of a community feel that they belong, or matter, to one another (McMillian & Chavis, 1996 as cited by Morrow & Ackerman, 2012). For college students, a sense of belonging can denote whether they feel accepted, encouraged by others academically, valued, or included (Booker, 2016). My study builds on and extends the existing literature about sense of belonging by identifying the three unique stressors noted above. In the following section, I discuss my findings related to seeking a sense of belonging, which include experiences relating to other peers and the recognition that code switching may be more stressful than successful.

Experiences relating to other peers. First-generation Latino/a students described two distinct stressful experiences in their attempts to relate to other college peers. First, two students, Rosa and Patricia, described how being unable to relate to their non-Latino/a peers caused them stress. Rosa grew up in a primarily Latino/a community and experienced White culture for the first time when she attended a PWI. The experience caused her “culture shock” and consequently, she felt unable to relate to White culture. Even basic decisions such as what type of food to eat and what type of clothes to wear were stressful for her. Patricia also struggled to relate to her non-Latino/a dorm suitemates, or, more to the point, she perceived that her suitemates struggled to relate to her.

Second, three students in my study experienced another type of peer racial alienation. Specifically, Alejandra, Jose, and Isabel described feeling like a “racial impostor.” According to the Eastside Times Blog (2018), racial impostor syndrome refers to a feeling of not belonging in your racial group. People who are multi-racial can experience racial impostor syndrome in the form of feeling forced to choose between racial identities. Alejandra described feeling like a racial impostor as a bi-racial Latina who did not fit in at college, explaining that it has made her hesitant to join Latino/a-related groups and clubs in college. She said:

There are some things that I feel like I don't fit the role, because I don't speak Spanish, or I'm only half. Some of the Latino/a groups seem a little [exclusive] ... I don't want to mislead anyone in the program who is really full Hispanic. Because that is also a thing. People really feel that way. I don't want to offend anyone that was full Mexican heritage.

Alejandra also added that she had experienced classmates telling her she was unable to talk about Mexican heritage because she was “only half [Hispanic].”

Jose reported not feeling “Latino-enough” because he attended all White private k-12 schools and, as he relayed, “being in college [at a PWI] has been the same [experience] for me. I’ve felt excluded here, but it wasn’t by the White people in my fraternity.” He recalled that when he first enrolled at a PWI, “There was an all Hispanic fraternity, and I felt excluded because it was like I wasn’t Hispanic enough for them.” Instead, Jose joined a predominantly White fraternity, saying, “I belong when I’m hanging out with them, or eating lunch with them.”

Isabel related that in high school, she was bullied by other Latina students for not acting Latina enough. She recalled:

I just went to the bathroom, and this group of [Latina] girls stopped me. They told me that I was a disgrace, and they felt that I was acting like I was better than them. I didn’t act like them, I didn’t dress like them, and that I was embarrassed of where I was coming from because I’m Mexican. But that’s not who I am at all. They were saying how they were going to hurt me or fight me because I should act like them.

In the interest of assisting all Latino/a students, I argue that it is important for those on the college campus to be aware that not all of these students find a sense of belonging in college in the same ways. Some Latino/a students in this study described challenges around relating to non-Latino/a peers, while others described challenges relating to other Latino/a peers. Thus, these findings highlight the need to not make assumptions that every first-generation Latino/a college student finds or experiences sense of belonging in the same way at the PWI.

Code switching is more stressful than successful. Code switching is a means for people from a non-dominant culture to negotiate their way within a dominant culture—a culture in which they can feel ignored or oppressed (Kumar & Narendra, 2012; Rincón & Hollis, 2018). Research has described this as a way in which students can successfully

navigate through one's own values and through the cultural norms of the predominant societal culture (Rincón & Hollis, 2018). In Chapter 4, I reported students' descriptions of using code switching as both a linguistic tactic and as an entire changing of roles or persona. While researchers have described code switching as a way to successfully navigate and cope with the dominant culture (Kumar & Narendra, 2012; Rincón & Hollis, 2018), students in my study reported that code switching felt exhausting and stressful to them. This finding raises the question of whether code switching is, in fact, successful as a coping tactic, especially within the context of attendance at a PWI where the White culture is usually dominant. I contend that it is important for higher education and student affairs professionals to recognize that for Latino/a students (and likely others), code-switching can be more of an acculturative stressor than a successful coping response. In the next section, I discuss and interpret findings related to questions 2 and 2a and the coping responses students describe using to respond to acculturative stress while attending a PWI.

Key Findings Related to the Second Research Question

In this section I discuss the key study thematic findings associated with my second research question, "What coping responses do first-generation Latino/a students describe using to respond to acculturative stressors?" and the sub-question, "Of the reported coping responses, which do students perceive as being the most successful in facilitating their ability to persist at four-year PWIs?" Overall, students described coping responses to acculturative stressors they experienced in surprising and resourceful ways. For example, in relation to the stress of being first to attend college, students described learning to ask for help, and using motivation as way of coping in college. When students talked about ways they found a sense of belonging in the PWI, I was struck by how they used positive self-

image to block negativity at the PWI and how they used “counter-spaces” to both find a sense of belonging and refresh themselves from the often daily requirements of (in the words of Rosa) “accommodating to this American culture.” In the following sections, I provide a detailed discussion of student interviewees’ coping responses to the stressors I described in Chapter 4: (1) coping with “being first,” (2) coping with family expectations versus college expectations, and (3) coping with a sense of belonging.

Coping with “being first.” First-generation Latino/a students in my study described how they successfully coped with the multi-layered ways of “being first” in college. They coped with “being first” by (1) asking for help, (2) managing priorities and time, (3) motivation as a way of coping in college (i.e., not struggling like their parents did and receiving the message: college is a priority), and (4) finding mentors.

Asking for help. Help seeking has been identified as one of the most important learning strategies contributing to college student success (Karabenick & Newman, 2013; Williams & Takaku, 2011). Help seeking occurs when students experience difficulties (i.e., academic, adjustment, stress) and then seek assistance to resolve those difficulties (Williams & Takaku, 2011). As described by the students in this study, it was a powerful (and successful) coping response to stress.

However, the students in this study also described asking for help as a skill that they first had to learn or as a task they first had to become comfortable doing. For example, Roberto described his fear of asking questions when he first came to college: “When I got here, I was very quiet. I didn’t want to ask...I didn’t want to raise my hand and have people start laughing or criticizing. Now, I just don’t care. It’s my education.” Veronica also

described having to first overcome the fear that she would be perceived negatively by her professors before she could ask for help. She stated:

I still struggle for asking for help because I'm so used to doing everything myself and learning myself that sometimes it's really hard for me to ask the professor for help or anybody in my class 'cause I don't want—I guess it's a little—a pride thing. I don't want them to think I'm dumb or something. If you don't ask for help, how are people going to know that you are stressed?

Dr. Jones, a PWI campus representative, stated that in general, first-generation Latino/a students do not understand that they can go to their professors if they need help; she further thought that many of these students are intimidated by faculty. She observed:

I think if I had to put them [the challenges some first-generation Latino/a students have around asking for help] in order, it is not understanding that they can go to their professors. They really do hold them in high esteem. They are a little intimidated. It's asking for help, and they struggle with that. They see a bureaucracy and they are not quite sure how to navigate that, so they don't want to attempt it.

However, when students do ask for help, they can be successful in resolving their issues. For example, Pedro described how asking for help connected him to the right people who could assist him in college:

I try to get as much help as I can. I would talk to anyone that I feel could help me in a way. I was like "If I don't know something, this person might." Then I keep talking to people to get connected with the school and counselor and all of that [it has been successful for me].

Based on these findings, I assert that asking for help is a critically important coping response because of its potential to achieve so many positive outcomes, such as finding people to help, resolving stress, finding a sense of belong, or finding a mentor. What makes it so surprising as a coping response is the seeming *obviousness* of it. It is an ingrained habit for so many people to ask for help or advice all day long. Yet, asking for help as described by first-generation Latino/a students is not an obvious coping tool (it probably is not an

obvious tool for many 18-year-olds). That students described asking for help as something they did not know how to do, or were fearful of doing, is important for college professionals to note and to teach *all* students—not just first-generation Latino/a students—to keep in their respective toolkits.

Managing priorities and time. The students in this study described experiencing stress arising from managing competing priorities such as studying, attending classes, working, and spending time with their families. Three students described prioritizing and managing their time to raise their grades, to balance priorities, to visualize the week ahead, and to help manage school deadlines. For example, Jose described using a mobile application through his school to keep track of deadlines and assignments, while Gloria described using her agenda to help her visualize and then prioritize activities. She recounted:

I just pull out my agenda and I write things down and see where I can squeeze things in. That helps me balance everything and it gives me a visual of “Oh, I can do this at this time, and then I’ll take a break from this time to that time, then I will go on and do this class from this time to that time.”

Gloria added that when she was able to visualize her time on her agenda, it helped her to “figure out how to balance things.” Another student, Guadalupe, learned hard lessons about prioritizing her time better. She recalled:

I know not to procrastinate anymore and to prioritize my time better, because last year I was all about making friends and just wanting to be out there [on the college campus]. I just left all my homework and studying behind because I wanted to be active in everything and meet people. [My grades suffered], so now I know how to prioritize my time better.

Gloria later added, “Prioritizing time is how I’ve managed to deal [with balancing out all the demands on time, getting grades back up].”

Time management, or prioritizing time, is not a new concept for campus representatives or for college students. However, the above examples illustrate that first-generation Latino/a college students in my study prioritized time to achieve different outcomes, whether it was to curb procrastination, keep on top of deadlines, or help raise grades to an acceptable level. Thus, I find that “prioritizing time” is a flexible coping strategy to teach first-generation Latino/a students to utilize for multiple purposes.

Motivation as a way of coping in college: As stated earlier, I found that the coping responses first-generation Latino/a participants described utilizing while attending a PWI were often surprising and resourceful in one way or another. Student descriptions of using motivation to remain in college was one such surprise. I had never thought of identifying motivating forces as a way to cope with stress in college. This is possibly because I am not a first-generation college student, and going to college was less a “motivation” and more of an “auto-pilot” situation (that is, I really did not stop to think about going versus not going to college because everyone in my family went to college. I just went). In Chapter 4, I identified two motivators students utilized as coping strategies. The first motivator was that going to college would mean they need not struggle like their parents had done and continued to do. As Silvia mused, “If I’m successful in college, I won’t have to go through the same struggles my parents did.” She later added that this was her biggest motivator to stay in college. Adriana also knew she wanted to go to college because she did not want to struggle like her parents did:

It’s because my parents didn’t go to school. My mom stopped in third grade. That’s when my parents both lived in Mexico, so it’s not a big deal over there. My parents are more focused on as long as they have somewhere to live and food to eat. It’s fine if they get by like that, but I don’t want to. I knew I wanted to go to college. I didn’t know what I wanted to do, I just knew that I wanted to go.

The second motivation as described by students was receiving clear messages about priorities from family members to make going to college a priority. Sylvia described her parents urging her to go to college. She recalled, “Growing up here in America, it was more like [my parents said], “Focus on school. Focus on school because this is what your future depends on. So I have always known the priority.” Another example of receiving clear messages came from Pedro, who said, “The reason we moved here [to the U.S.] was for the education, so we are like, ‘Yeah, there is no way to stop after high school. We need to keep going.’” Jose also knew he had to finish college. He said, “College was always, ‘You are going to do it.’ There was no question about it, at least with my parents growing up.” In conclusion, based on these students’ descriptions, I believe that helping first-generation Latino/a students to identify the reasons why they were motivated to come to college and remain in college can help them persist in college.

Finding mentors. In Chapter 4, I noted that first-generation Latino/a students in this study described two ways they received mentoring support and developed relationships with mentors. The first way was through formal mentoring programs in which, for example, a mentoring relationship was set up through an organization or through a college program. The second way was through informal relationships with college professors or staff that developed over time and were not structured or managed by a college program. My study findings illuminate the various different relationships that first-generation Latino/a students form in college. More importantly, my findings indicate that these relationships were equally as supportive to these students, regardless of whether they were structured and formal or unstructured and informal.

Mentoring supported students in this study in a variety of ways. For example, Patricia described how a formal college mentoring program helped her understand herself better. She said, “My mentors have helped me understand myself as an individual and as a professional.” A mentoring relationship that Veronica took part in through a formal college mentoring program helped her persist in college during a time when she was not sure she wanted to stay:

If I wouldn't have met him [my mentor], if I would not have seen him at the parking lot behind the library and talked to him; I might've not stayed at college. He's been that person to be like, “No, this is what we're going to do. You're going to keep going, and I'm going to get you connected with other people on campus who can help. You're going to get connected with a mentoring-mentee program we have here on campus. We're so fortunate to have it.” That's when [another mentor] came, and she was a really strong mentor for me because she was always willing to be somebody to listen and hear me out when I had difficult times. She always told me, “You need to lay off your hours at work.” She got me connected. It's just a matter of keep pushing.

Through informal mentoring relationships Gloria developed with her professors, she reported feeling more motivated to do well in college (and to persist). She stated:

I know a lot of professors that I talked to, when I told them, “I'm kind of struggling,” they really took the time to get to know me and get to know my situation. That helped me do better just because I felt like I kind of owed it to them just 'cause they were taking that time, and they were taking my feelings into consideration. I'm like, well, if they're taking their time, then maybe I need to take that time to do well in their class and keep things going.

An informal mentor helped Silvia in a time of crisis (she was the driver in a car accident that killed her passenger). A professor was able to recognize that Sylvia was struggling and successfully guided her to counseling. Thus, my findings reveal the resourceful ways in which first-generation Latino/a students developed relationships with mentors. My findings further suggest that the different relationships that first-generation Latino/a students develop in college, through formal programming or informal means, have

the potential to be supportive to them in many ways. These mentoring relations can help first-generation Latino/a students persist in college, as mentors can recognize and step in with support during a student crisis, or students can develop long-lasting connections with a professional, knowledgeable adult, as Silvia described with a college professor:

I actually babysit for one of my old professors I had junior year. She was my discourse professor. It's just this really nice relationship that I have with her and other faculty members. It just very easy to talk to the ones that I've been able to build a really good connection with.

In conclusion, first-generation Latino/a students evidenced several resourceful and even surprising coping strategies for “being first” in college. In the next section, I discuss findings about how students cope with and navigate between expectations of their family and the expectations of the PWI.

Coping with family expectations versus college responsibilities. Seven students in this study identified navigating between family expectations and the expectations of college as a major acculturative stressor. Yet these same students were unable to identify coping responses they utilized to cope with this stressor. What appeared to be the most successful means of navigating between the competing expectations of family and college was when students received clear messages about making college attendance the priority. I have repeated this contention throughout Chapters 4 and 5, but I believe that it cannot be stressed enough that the family and its ability to affect the types of stressors and coping responses experienced by first generation Latino/a college students cannot be underestimated. Silvia, Pedro, and Guadalupe received these explicit messages from their family members. For example, Pedro was given clear messages about the importance of education since he immigrated with his family to the U.S. He stated:

I was born and raised in Mexico, then, I moved here when I was 15. The reason we moved here was for the education, so we are like “Yeah, there is no way we can stop after high school. We need to keep going.”

As a consequence of messages like this, Silvia, Pedro, or Guadalupe did not report experiencing acculturative stressors related to navigating between competing expectations. This suggests that receiving clear messages of parental support to make college the priority can be a powerful coping mechanism for first-generation college students, regardless of race/ethnicity.

While they were not able to identify the specific coping responses they used to navigate between the competing expectations of family and college, Miguel and Silvia did refer to the use of counseling to cope with related issues. Miguel went to grief counseling after his father passed away, and he also learned tools to navigate his new role as head of household. “It [counseling] has helped a lot with learning how to deal with this kind of stress and given me tools to use [to figure out how to balance between family responsibilities and college responsibilities].” Sylvia also went to counseling to cope with grief and a sudden traumatic event in her life. This finding is significant, in that the literature suggests that traditional Latino/a cultural beliefs can stigmatize mental health as shameful or could embarrass family members (Cheng, Kwan, & Sevig, 2013; Rastogi, Massey-Hastings, & Wieling, 2012). It appears from my findings, however, that at least some Latino/a college students are more knowledgeable about the benefits of counseling than research suggests, and they are willing to seek counseling assistance.

This concludes the findings on how students identified coping responses related to navigating between family expectations and academic expectations. The next section

describes how Latino/a student research participants described coping with finding a sense of belonging in the PWI.

Coping with sense of belonging. Four coping themes related to seeking a sense of belonging emerged during student interviews: (1) space to be a Latino/a on campus. (2) Finding your tribe, (3) taking pride in Latino/a identity, and (4) respecting differences.

Space to be Latino/a on campus. In the literature, finding a space to be a Latino/a on campus is referred to as “counter-space” (Von Robertson, Bravo, & Chaney, 2016). Counter-spaces refer to “spaces” or “areas” on the PWI campus that Latino/a students carve out to preserve their culture and develop a sense of belonging (Yosso, 2005). Counter-spaces can include culturally specific student centers, campus courses, relationships with faculty, and student organizations. Counter-spaces can facilitate a “home away from home” feeling of comfort and help to minimize the alienation that students of color frequently experience at the PWI (Von Robertson et al., 2016). Student organization involvement is an important component of collegiate success for Latino/a students and is an integral component of the success of students of color at PWIs (Von Robertson et al., 2016). The first-generation Latino/a participants in this study also identified finding a counter-space (belonging to a Latino/a student organization) as an important means for them to cope with the stress and exhaustion of code-switching. I discuss the concept of counter-space in more depth in my recommendations. In closing, my findings confirmed what the literature indicates about the importance of counter-space on college campuses for diverse student groups, including first-generation Latino/a students.

“Finding your tribe.” Patricia, Miguel, and Rosa emphasized the importance of “finding a tribe” of people in the college setting who, as described by Patricia, “get you.”

Finding a group of friends or tribe in college helped these students feel a sense of belonging. Miguel also emphasized how important his group of friends were, and his advice for other Latino/a students was to “find a group of people that can keep you accountable and that you feel safe sharing where you are at with.” Finding friends can also help students make a successful transition to college. In Chapter 4, Rosa talked about how finding a group of friends helped her feel less stressed about transitioning to a PWI, and helped her find a sense of belonging, because she slowly realized that they all had the same issues with identity. She described how her friendships unfolded:

It was a mere moment of grace. I saw one of my first friends, she’s Black, and I thought she looked really cool. She asked me to sit with her, and then she was sitting with another girl, who was White. Another was Haitian, the other mixed. Another one was originally from Ecuador but adopted by White parents. I didn’t realize till we were all really close friends that we all had the same issue of identity. That’s the way I coped with it, is finding other people, mainly minorities. Had I known there were other people [not just White people], I would have gone out and looked for them, because I think that would have made the transition easier.

“Finding a tribe” might not seem like a new or an edgy research finding, but it is noteworthy in that the students stressed how important it was for them to establish friendships based on trust and common understanding. These relationships helped students cope with the stress of attending a PWI and finding a sense of belonging within it.

Taking pride in identity. As I discussed in Chapter 1, literature about coping responses suggests that adopting a bi-cultural approach and identity in which a person is able to mesh elements of their home culture with that of the prevailing U.S. culture is an adaptive approach to acculturation (Coatsworth et al., 2005; Sam & Berry, 2010; Schwartz et al., 2013). This study uncovered an unexpected bi-cultural coping response that I assert is related specifically to attendance in a PWI: taking pride in the Latino/a identity to buffer

against negativity and racism. Guadalupe, Veronica, Rosa, and Gloria took pride in their Latino/a identities as they described in Chapter 4. Guadalupe and Veronica, in particular, both described how being proud of their respective heritage acted as a buffer against negativity and racism. As Guadalupe stated:

For me, I don't take things personally when people say things. That's because I'm just so proud to be a Guatemalan that really, anything that anyone says has no effect on me. Because I'm like, I know who I am. I know who my family is. I don't really mind. Other people might say stuff, and I'm like, I feel bad for them for thinking that, but I'm not gonna cry about it.

Veronica also stated that taking pride in her identity blocks the negativity of others:

I identify myself as a Mexican-American. I was not born here, but I was raised here. I've been here since I was two-and-a-half years old. I know more English than Spanish, but yet I still put on my resume "fluent in Spanish" because I'm still able to translate for people, and that's one of the biggest things is communication. I can't deny that I was born in Mexico. I'm proud of it, it just saves me time from explaining to people that aren't aware of how it works. Sometimes it blocks those racist people from saying that I'm not from here. It's been everything that resolves it: "I'm Mexican-American."

This finding adds to the literature on bi-cultural adjustment and identity development of Latino/a students attending a PWI, which has so far been lacking in rich description.

Respecting differences. Even the seemingly innocuous findings in this study have been worthy of note because of the resourceful manner in which first-generation Latino/a students use them as coping strategies. One such "innocuous" coping response is respecting the differences of other individuals. First-generation Latino/a study participants described respecting others as a strategy for maintaining their equilibrium when they are faced with negative interactions. Manuel, for example, described his approach to addressing others who had different opinions or ideas that he did not agree with, stating,

Because coming from a different place, you have a lot of different points of view about everything. You can usually agree with someone. You're like, "I don't like the

way you do this but I would respect it as long as you respect the way I see things.” you know what I’m saying?

Another student, Veronica, shared an anecdote about an incident on campus that had negative racist undertones to it, and her approach to it:

It was this whole thing like we are a campus of freedom of speech, but those are—there were some racial slurs on there, and those were things that I was like, “So we do have Trump people here. Okay.” We had a lot of small-group focus groups during that time, and one of the things, I was like I would really love to talk to somebody that’s pro-Trump to talk, not to argue about politics. But I want to know your side. What made you think that this man was fit enough to be a president of this country? I said it in a group for one of my history classes. We were separated into groups as well on different days. I was 100 percent sure that there was a guy or two guys there that were pro-Trump because of just the things I’ve been overhearing from them. I didn’t point them out, but I did say, “If any of you are here pro-Trump, I want to know your side to talk. I want to know what’s going on. I just want to listen to you. I don’t want to argue back or any means.” That point is when I noticed we still have this problem on campus. They’re quiet again, but that’s mainly because [this institution] has been doing a better job of diversity, inclusion and equity and making sure that the minority students are the ones being supported. It’s just a little borderline because technically, we have to respect their beliefs. That’s like in your mind you’re like that’s—to you it may be not morally right or correct, but to them it’s correct. It’s a very fine borderline that we stand on when it comes to letting students protest because it is a freedom we have. We’re supposed to because we cannot discriminate because you have these beliefs. I get it. It’s borderline, but I’m pretty sure if I were to do something they didn’t like, it would upset them.

“Not coping.” Lastly, two students in the study described not knowing how to cope with establishing a sense of belonging in the PWI. This is noteworthy because it is important to identify how “not coping” might manifest so that campus professionals are better able to recognize and intervene with students who seem unable to cope with the stressors of college. In the case of Rosa, not coping manifested as psychological and physical withdrawal from certain aspects of college life, such as college activities and interacting with other students. For Alejandra, not knowing how to cope with relating to other non-Latino/a students left her very stressed and excluded from a cohort of other students in her educational program.

When I sat down to interview Alejandra, it was immediately obvious from her body language and conversation that she was very stressed out.

It is also important for campus professionals to identify stress triggers related to being unable to cope with sense of belonging. Both Rosa and Alejandra grew up in communities that were primarily Latino/a, and their experiences with White culture for the first time came when attended the PWI. The stress triggers for both students were in relation to feeling like White students (in particular) were not able to relate to them and vice versa. From the findings, it appears that exposure to White culture for the first time in college is a stress trigger to other experiences of acculturative stress—especially in terms of establishing a sense of belonging in college. This finding also addresses another contention I earlier identified, which is that experiences of “being first” in college are more important than how first-generation is defined. This concludes the discussion on coping by seeking a sense of belonging. In the following section, I address the third research question and related findings.

Key Findings Related to the Third Research Question

This section discusses the findings from the third research question, “Do student responses vary across institutions, and if so, how and why?” I interviewed students from two institutions that varied substantially in size, purpose, and student demographics. Regardless of these significant institutional differences, the content of student responses did not vary in terms of the acculturative stressors experienced and subsequent coping responses utilized at a PWI. Additionally, I found similarities between what students perceived as acculturative stressors and coping responses and campus representative descriptions of the acculturative stressors and coping responses of first-generation Latino/a students on their respective

campuses. The findings formed patterns of stress and coping that were transferrable across two very different types of PWIs. Specifically, identified (and without variation) among all student participants who were interviewed or participated in the student focus group were the stressors related to being first, family expectations and how this interferes with attending college, and sense of belonging in the PWI. Coping responses described by students across both PWIs were around finding a space to be a Latino/a within the PWI, developing pride in identity as a Latino/a to buffer the stress of negative interactions, and finding a tribe. Additionally, first-generation Latino/a student participants and campus representatives identified mentoring, counseling, and learning to ask for help as important coping responses.

This concludes my discussion of study findings. In the next section, I address recommendations for policy and practice that resulted from these study findings.

Recommendations for Practice

One campus representative I interviewed for this study provided an interesting description of improvements her institution made to serve diverse groups of students, including Latinos/as and first-generation college students. She stated:

We are trying to help first-generation students and other diverse students. We are learning [at this institution] that we need to change our vocabulary because though some people may know what the meaning of “syllabus” is, not everyone does—like if you are a first-generation student. There is a lot of lingo that we don’t often think about and some students have no clue what it means. We’ve also had to work to change professors’ thinking, so they don’t automatically assume every person in their classes knows what to do on your first day of college.

Her comment underscores the recommendations for changes in practice that my research findings point to. Overall, I recommend that all higher education institutions, and not just four-year PWIs, begin to change the paradigms through which we view the meanings of first-generation, and of Latino/a students and their persistence in college.

Student affairs professionals, faculty, and administrators can do this by incorporating the multiple meanings of “being first” in campus programming and supports for all college students who self-define as “being first.” Further, student affairs professionals, faculty, and administrators must recognize the extent to which Latino/a family culture intertwines with the college experiences of some Latino/a students, and include this recognition in decisions about how to support Latino/a students in college.

As broad as “changing paradigms” might sound, I contend that changing the way student affairs professionals, faculty, and administrators think and practice in regard to first-generation Latino/a students begins at the individual institutional level. As they say, “Small ripples can create big waves.” In the following sections, I provide recommendations for policy and best practices for changing these paradigms. My recommendations include (1) incorporating multiple meanings of “being first” into student programming (tracking students, first-generation Latino/a programs, student tool-kits, mentoring programs), (2) providing counter-spaces for Latino/a students, (3) orienting the family to college, (4) providing culturally sensitive counseling and support, and (5) providing Latino/a students with outlets to tell their stories.

Incorporate Multiple Meanings of “Being First” into Policy and Programming

My study revealed the existence of multiple meanings of “being first” in college that can affect students’ acculturative stress and subsequent coping responses. This finding highlights the need for PWIs and other institutions to take into account the *lived experiences* of first-generation Latino/a students (as well as other first-generation college students). My first recommendation is to move beyond applying only the common educational attainment definitions of “first-generation.” I believe many higher education institutions need to

broaden the scope to incorporate multiple meanings and multiple experiences related to “being first.” It is equally important to establish institution-wide policies and definitions which recognize the multiple meanings of “being first.” Institution-wide policies would help to “operationalize” multiple meanings of being first.

Tracking of Students

The Center for First-Generation Student Success (2017b) called for better tracking of first-generation students and recognizing the intersecting complexities of being a first-generation student in college. For example, racial identity can also play a part in the experiences related to “being first” in college, as it did in my research study. I would recommend that institutions of higher education begin assessing first-generation status when a student first enters college, based on a broader recognition of what “being first” really encompasses for students. I make this recommendation for two reasons. The first is that tracking students via this broader understanding might very well change the numbers, and this would strengthen the case for better funding to support first-generation Latino/a (and all first-generation) students. Secondly, recognizing what kinds of intersecting complexities and experiences students have around being first means the institution has the opportunity to guide them towards support and services at the very beginning of their college journeys.

Programs for First-generation Latino/a Students

Increasingly, institutions of higher education are developing specific supports and services to help first-generation students navigate the college experience (Piper, 2018). One example of first-generation student programming is Florida Atlantic University’s (FAU) first-generation college student organization to help create a sense of belonging for first-generation students. An additional program service provides students with books and

academic supports. Lastly, a third program service works to motivate FAU first-generation male students to graduate in four years. This first-generation student program could be retooled for self-identified first-generation Latino/a students in a way that incorporates many of my study findings, such as student guides. The first-generation Latino/a students in my study talked about not knowing who to go to and not knowing what types of help were available on campus, especially in the first few months. My recommendation is to incorporate a student guide support service for first-generation students, staffed by volunteer students, faculty or campus representatives who are available for intensive guidance for the first few weeks or months of college. Other ideas, which I address below, are student tool-kits and mentoring support.

Student “Tool Kits”

First-generation Latino/a students described using multiple tools to cope with the stressors they experienced in college. I believe these tools are important for every entering college student to have in their “tool kit.” These tools include asking for help, learning to prioritize time and responsibilities, identifying motivational factors for succeeding in college, and, for those students who do not identify with the dominant culture, developing a bi-cultural identity to buffer against negative interactions. My recommendation to existing programming for first-generation Latino/a students or to a higher education institution developing new programming for these students is to include educational support around these tools and to help each student develop a “tool kit” that is uniquely designed for and with them.

Mentoring Programs

Students like Alejandra and Rosa grew up in primarily Latino/a communities and attended schools that were predominantly Latino/a. Their first entrée into White culture was when they came to college. Students like these may need unique and extra support making the transition to the PWI. Peer mentoring programs could be successful in helping students like Alejandra and Rosa transition to college. It is my “dream” recommendation that all incoming students, and especially those students who are attending PWIs and are first in their families to attend or experience certain aspects of college life, would automatically be assigned a mentor as an incoming student. Mentors can provide guidance about many aspects of college life, as well as support throughout the experience. I argue that if every student had a mentor, and especially if every first-generation Latino/a college student had a mentor, their persistence in college would be much higher.

Providing Counter-Space for Latino/a Students

In addition to support for first-generation students, Latino/a students also need a space or counter-space that can serve as a refuge from daily accommodations to the culture of the PWI, one in which they are free to be Latino/a students. As a privileged White woman, making the recommendation to provide more space for Latino/a students to be with one another seemed more like encouraging Latino/a students to segregate themselves within the university. However, during the course of my research, I realized that Latino/a student groups are one of the most powerful means through which Latino/a students are able to find a sense of belonging in the PWI. Thus, providing the space for Latino/a students to reconnect with their Latino/a culture and heritage can be a successful coping mechanism within the context of the PWI.

Given the importance of Latino/a student groups in helping Latino/a students cope with the stressors identified in my study, it is important that PWIs provide student access to these groups. However, the ability to provide this access is often dependent on institutional financial abilities. Nonetheless, for Latino/a students to successfully acculturate (and cope) at a PWI, they should at the very least be provided with opportunities to socialize with other Latino/a students who may be experiencing the same stressors that they are.

Orienting the Family to College

Students in my study described experiencing acculturative stressors in the form of trying to negotiate a balance between competing expectations of their family and the PWI. As in the cases of Adriana and Patricia, negotiating this balance was difficult because their respective family members had never attended college. For example, Adriana described how her family members became upset when they felt she had not spent enough time at home with them:

I just feel like with a Hispanic family, they're so family-oriented that they get offended so easily when you are out trying to live your life. They just don't understand unless they go to college, and they haven't. I'm the first one to go to a four-year university. They have no idea what it is like.

Similarly, Patricia described being the first in her family to attend college, and “the culture gap, I guess you could say, between them [family members] understanding why I'm so stressed with school. We are first-generation [students], so they don't know what it means to be stressed out here.”

These descriptions from Latino/a students highlight the need for Latino/a families, as a whole and holistic unit, to be more involved in the student's orientation to college. This might take place, for example, in the form of outreach programs, partnering with area high

schools, or family orientation nights with dinner. I was not able to find best practices that might fit this recommendation. This also highlights the need for PWIs and other higher education institutions to begin developing programming and supports that include first-generation Latino/a students and their family members. I posit that when Latino/a families have an understanding of what college will require of the student, and of the entire family, they can better support their family member who is attending college.

An important finding related to this was that students who received clear messages of support from their families did not describe stress triggers as a result of trying to navigate between family and institutional responsibilities. Instead, they described clear messages from family members that attending college was the main priority. From Adriana and Patricia's descriptions, Latino/a family members may not know how to talk to or support their college student. Thus, providing them with the information about sending clear messages would be beneficial to families (and to college students). I argue that it is possible that many first-generation Latino/a students would be able to better acculturate to college without the added stressor of navigating competing family and college expectations.

Culturally Sensitive Counseling Support

Only one student in this study, Miguel, identified a successful coping response to navigating the competing responsibilities of family and college. Miguel stated that counseling "helped a lot with learning how to deal with this kind of stress and [has] given me tools to use [to figure out how to balance between family responsibilities and college responsibilities]." In the future, campus professionals should pay more attention to helping students address stressors experienced from navigating competing worlds of family expectations and college expectations.

However, students did identify going to counseling as a way of coping with other college and life stressors, which is hopeful. My recommendation is that every PWI make available culturally sensitive counseling (if it is not already available) that recognizes and responds to the unique experiences of first-generation Latino/a students. An example of a best practice in this regard is to bring on an intern/or a graduate student who is training in culturally sensitive counseling/supporting Latino/a students to provide counseling support. Another recommendation is partnering with community organizations that already provide counseling support for Latino/a students. Because every institution is different in size, available resources, populations, and locations, every institution must decide how it can best provide this type of counseling.

Connecting the Disconnects: Telling Stories

During the course of this research study, I also read books and watched movies recommended by the student who participated in the study. One wintry day, I watched the movie, “Coco” (Unkrich & Anderson, 2017). Returning to *La Chancla*, once again: If one of the students had not let me in on the joke about the sandal, I would not have quite understood the constant reference to it in the movie. Nor would I have found it quite so hilarious to watch an elderly woman hurl her shoe at people who angered her.

This is relevant here because campus representatives and students referred to students’ lack of stories about going to college. For example, Rosa described how first-time exposure to White culture in college, and not knowing what a different culture that was going to be, caused her culture shock. Additionally, students described feeling like White students had wrong perceptions of the Latino/a culture. For example, Patricia described how some of her White roommates did not connect with her in the same way as they did with

other White students because they perceived her as inferior. Campus representatives talked about how first-generation Latino/a students (and other first-generation students) “don’t have the stories [about going to college] in their lives” that students who have parents that went to college do. Students described the “culture gap” that their family members have in understanding what going to college in the U.S. entails. In summation, there appear to be some “disconnects” between students, family members, and campus representatives. These disconnects hinder first-generation Latino/a students in finding a sense of belonging in college and from attending college without the distraction of navigating between competing cultures of family and college for example. They possibly hinder some students from persisting in college.

Talking about the movie “Coco” (Unkrich & Anderson, 2017), with a group of Latino/a first-generation students facilitated a deep conversation about how the movie made students feel connected and proud of their heritage. Together we concluded that it is important to carry on with telling stories about Latino/a life. Stories do not need to be specifically or only about the experience of attending college, but about what they find special about being Latino/a as a means for others to understand all the nuances of Latino/a life.

Storytelling has been used throughout history to provide a way to reflect on various aspects of life and as a means to heal (Gazarian, 2010). A variety of different mediums tell stories like poetry, music, songwriting, dance, and literature. Stories are used as a way to teach and remember the challenges that others have encountered, so that those who go after do not struggle as much (Gazarian, 2010). A final recommendation is to continue using storytelling in various outlets to help first-generation Latino/a students tell their stories and

hopefully, to close the existing disconnects between the culture of their home, the institution, and broader predominant culture.

The suggestion to provide opportunities for first-generation Latino/a students to tell their stories ties in with incorporating multiple meanings of “being first” into student programming, to experiences of navigating between the competing cultures of family and the PWI, and to helping first-generation Latino/a students find a sense of belonging in college. One example is that some Latina students who participated in my research study decided to start a podcast to discuss issues and tell stories about the Latino/a community. They were supported in this endeavor by the student group to which they belonged and were able to utilize the institution’s recording studio. Another example comes in the form of a Latino/a faith-based traveling group that allowed Latino/a students to tell the story of their faith from the viewpoint of Latino/a culture. These examples showcase the different ways an institution of higher education can provide storytelling opportunities.

Ideas for Future Research

In the following sections, I provide my ideas for future research. Given our somewhat limited definitions of “first-generation” to parental academic achievement, I think it is important to gather thick, rich data on how other student groups experience “being first” in the context of attending a PWI. My research study was limited to two PWIs. I think the literature would be greatly enriched if research on Latino/a student’s experiences of acculturative stress and coping responses were extended across different higher educational institution types. Lastly, research studies that extend across regions would also enrich our knowledge about the types of acculturative stressors and coping responses of Latino/a college students. The following sections provide further elaboration on these ideas,

including (1) research on multiple meanings of being first (2) comparative studies across institutional types, and (3) studies across multiple geographic settings.

Research on the Multiple Meanings of Being First

My study identified multiple meanings of “being first” beyond how first-generation students are typically identified on a college campus. I have argued throughout this study that it is time to move beyond the definition and focus on how (most specifically to this study) Latino/a students experience “being first” within the context of college attendance. However, I believe it is important for future research to explore how other groups of first-generation students experience “being-first” in the college context, especially in the PWI context. Do these students experience “being first” in ways that echo the experiences of the students in my study, or are their “being first” experiences markedly different? In either case, what might these findings mean for PWIs and all institutions that serve “first” students? Leveraging the findings from this study and extending research and literature around the “being first” experience could assist college professionals in moving forward with the development or improvement of programs that can address the respective experiences of every self-identified “first” college student.

Comparative Studies across Institutional Types

My own research study into the lived experiences of first-generation Latino/a students’ experiences of acculturative stress and coping responses while attending a PWI raises questions about what types of stressors and coping responses are experienced by students attending different types of institutions. For example, what stressors and coping responses do first-generation Latino/a students attending Hispanic Serving Institutions describe experiencing? I believe literature would benefit from more comparative studies to

identify whether there are common acculturative stressors and coping responses across varying institutions (i.e., two year, community colleges, HSIs, and PWIs).

Studies across Multiple Geographical Settings

In relation to the previous idea, my study incorporated two PWIs geographically located in the Midwest. While my study did reveal strong patterns of experiences of stress and coping responses across the institutions, I believe that reproducing this study utilizing multiple geographical sites or multiple institutions would also enrich the literature and knowledge of first-generation Latino/a students' experiences of acculturative stressors while attending college, and subsequently, their coping responses to stress.

Study Conclusion

My study asked first-generation Latino/a students and campus representatives about the stressors they perceived experiencing while attending a PWI and how they coped with these stressors. Themes of stress and coping related to the multiple meanings and experiences of being first, navigating the competing expectations of family and college, and finding a sense of belonging in college emerged from the study. Identifying these themes provided a story of the experience of acculturative stress and the types of coping responses that first-generation Latino/a students reported utilizing to adjust to the PWI culture. As described by the students and campus representatives in this study, the experience of acculturative stress was complex, and students' responses to this stress were often surprising. I believe this study can provide a guide to student affairs professionals, faculty, administrators, and all who serve first-generation Latino/a students to better understand the complexities surrounding acculturation, coping, and adjustment in college so they can better provide these students with the support they need to persist to college graduation. .

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: STUDENTS

I would like to talk with you about your experiences with stress while you have been in college, and how you have coped with this stress (for example, such as managing a problem). The stress you may describe can be in relation to attending college or to situations you are experiencing (or have experienced) that have affected you while you have been in college. There are no wrong or right answers, as everybody experiences stress differently, and everyone copes with it differently. The purpose of this interview is to learn about your experiences with stress while in college and how you cope with stress.

1. Besides you, has anyone else in your family attended college? If so, tell me about that person's college experiences.
2. When in your life did you start thinking about attending college? Tell me about who or what influenced your decision to attend college.
3. Did you begin your first year of college at {name of current university}? If not, what colleges or universities did you attend before this one, and how long were you there (or at each college or university, if more than one)? When did you transfer to {name of this college or university}
4. How many years have you attended this university At this point, are you a college junior or college senior? If not, how many more years do you have until you graduate?
5. What is your major? Has this been your major since you started college, or have you changed majors? If you have changed majors, why did you change majors?
6. Think back to a time during your first two years of college when you didn't cope well with something that happened. Please describe what happened and how you tried to cope with the situation. How did the situation finally get resolved? What, if anything, would you do differently now if faced with that same situation?

7. Tell me about what causes you stress now as a college student.
 - a. How do you cope with each of these stressors?
 - b. How has coping in these ways helped you with these stressors?
 - c. How has coping in these ways not helped with these stressors?

8. We have been talking about stress you have experienced while attending college. However, sometimes situations in your life beyond college can affect how you feel and act while you are going to college. If this is true for you, tell me about the situations in your life beyond college that are causing you stress. How are they affecting your experience as a college student? How are you coping with them?

9. If someone asked you to describe your cultural heritage and how you identify yourself (for example, you might think of yourself as Hispanic, or Latino/a, or identify as Mexican or Salvadoran) what would you say?

10. Sometimes attending a campus at which most of the students are White when a student identifies as (however the interview participants culturally identifies) influences the number and type of stressors that they experience while on campus. Do you believe this situation applies to your college experience? If so, please describe how it has applied to your college experience.

11. When and where have you felt a sense of being included or belonging as a student on this campus?
 - a. When and where have you NOT felt a sense of belonging or being included as a student on this campus? How have you coped with feelings of not belonging or being excluded?

12. Please describe your interactions with the faculty on this campus. Why and how have you have interacted with faculty? How did you feel about your experiences interacting with faculty on this campus? Have you ever experienced a difficult situation with a faculty member on this campus? If so, what happened, and how did you cope with this situation?
 - a. Please describe your interactions with your student peers on this campus. Why and how have you have interacted with your campus student peers? How did you feel about your experiences with these campus student peer interactions? Have you ever experienced a difficult situation with a student peer on this campus? If so, what happened, and how did you cope with this situation?
13. Tell me about how you are involved as a student, either formally or informally, on this campus. Formal involvement might include, for example, participating in a student organization. Informal involvement might include, for example, participating in a study group of classmates.
14. Tell me about your experiences balancing different components of your life. For example, you might be balancing the need to work full- or part-time or the need to undertake family house-hold chores while studying for tests, or attending classes. If you have had to balance these type of different life components, what sort of stressors have you experienced? How do you cope with balancing different these components of your life?
15. What does it mean to you to be successful in college? Can you give me an example of this type of college success?
16. What advice do you have for those like you who are college students who must successfully cope with stress?
17. What advice do you have for university faculty and staff members about helping other students like you to be successful in college?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL:

UNIVERSITY STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONAL

I would like to talk to you about your experiences working with students as a (mentor, advisor, etc.). I am interested in learning from your perspective, what kinds of experiences students have when they attend your university. In particular, I'd like to know about the experiences of first-generation students and those students who identify as Latino or Latina culturally. I will be asking questions about student experiences at your university, stress, and the ways in which students adjust to your university. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions. My purpose is to have a well-rounded understanding of how students who are first-generation, and who identify themselves as Latino or Latina in culture experience and adjust to attending college.

I would like to start the interview with a few questions about your role and responsibilities at this university.

1. Please describe your job position and your major job responsibilities.
2. How long have you been in this position on this campus?
3. How often do you interact with first-generation Latino/a students as part of your job responsibilities?
4. In what ways do you interact with first-generation Latino/a students as part of your job responsibilities?
5. In general, how would you describe first-generation students' experiences on this campus, regardless of students' racial/ethnic background? {probe for details and examples}
6. In general, how would you describe first-generation Latino/a students' experiences on this campus?

7. In regard to student experiences on your campus, do Latino/a first-generation students' experiences differ from those of other first-generation students who are not Latino/a? If so, how?
8. What factors or situations have you seen first-generation Latino/a students struggle with on this campus? {probe for details and examples}
9. What struggles or stressors are first-generation Latino/a students more likely to experience **within their first few years** of attending college on this campus?
10. In what ways have you seen first-generation Latino/a students address or cope with these struggles or stressors **in the early years** of their college experience?
11. In your opinion, do the struggles and stressors first-generation Latino/a students experience change from freshman and sophomore to junior and senior years? If so, in what ways do they change students' college journey?
12. From your perspective, what coping responses do first-generation Latino/a students use that appear to be effective for them in addressing the struggles and stresses they experience on campus? {probe for details and examples}
13. From your perspective, what coping responses do these students use that appear to be less than effective for them in addressing the struggles and stresses they experience on campus?
14. Please describe the on-campus resources available to assist first-generation Latino/a students with struggles and stresses they experience while attending this university.
15. In your opinion, how useful or helpful are these on-campus resources to these students?

16. In your opinion, what else, if anything, could be done on your campus to assist first-generation Latino/a students with struggles and stresses they commonly encounter on this campus?

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT: STUDENT

Student Informed Consent: Soy El Primero: Latino/a First-Generation College Students Stress and Coping Responses in College

This informed consent will be emailed to students ahead of scheduled meeting for their records, in addition to being read out loud to them at time of interview, before the interview begins.

My name is Tracy Graybill. I am an Interdisciplinary Doctoral student at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC), in the School of Education, Department of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Foundations (ELPF). I am currently conducting Doctoral research on Latino/a First-Generation students and their experiences of acculturative stress and coping while attending college. Specifically, the study aims are to identify: 1) first-generation Latino/a students' reported acculturative stressors during college enrollment at a four-year predominantly White institution (PWI), 2) common coping responses utilized to cope with acculturative stressors, and 3) common coping responses Latino/a first-generation college students perceive to be the most successful in responding to acculturative stressors. I will be interviewing students and campus representatives who can provide insight into the types of services available for students.

Based on your response for volunteers for this study, your self-identification as a Latino/a first-generation college student attending a PWI, and your status as a Junior or Senior in college, you have been chosen to participate in this study.

As part of this research I will be conducting an interview with you today to find out about your experiences with stress and how you cope while you are attending college. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to participate or to withdraw at any time. Your decision to not to participate or to withdraw does not result in any penalty to you. During the interview, you may choose not to answer any question. Not answering a question is not the same as not participating or withdrawing from the study. If you do decide to leave the study, your information will be withdrawn and not included in the results. There is no compensation to participate. This study involves no known risk to you, or benefits you as the participant. The interviews will be tape recorded. Interview results published in this dissertation and in professional publications will be anonymous, and no identifiers will be used. The data collected will help to provide information and inform decisions with regard to helping other Latino/a first-generation college students.

If you agree to participate, I would like to begin the interview and turn on the tape recorder. Your verbal agreement to begin the interview indicates your consent to participate in this interview.

If you would like a copy of this letter for your records, you can have a copy now. If you have any questions regarding the research, contact Tracy Graybill at 816-651-872. If you

have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator of UMKC's Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5927.

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT: UNIVERSITY STUDENT AFFAIRS PROFESSIONAL

Soy El Primero: Latino/a First-Generation College Students Stress and Coping Responses in College

This informed consent will be emailed to students and staff ahead of scheduled meeting for their records, in addition to being read out loud to them at time of interview, before the interview begins.

My name is Tracy Graybill. I am an Interdisciplinary Doctoral student at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC), in the School of Education, Department of Educational Leadership, Policy, and Foundations (ELPF). I am currently conducting Doctoral research on Latino/a First-Generation students and their experiences of acculturative stress and coping while attending college. Specifically, the study aims are to identify: 1) first-generation Latino/a students' reported acculturative stressors during college enrollment at a four-year predominantly White institution (PWI), 2) common coping responses utilized to cope with acculturative stressors, and 3) common coping responses Latino/a first-generation college students perceive to be the most successful in responding to acculturative stressors. I will be interviewing students and campus representatives who can provide insight into the types of services available for students.

You have been chosen for this study based on your response for volunteers for this study, and as a campus representative who serves Latino/a college students in the capacity of your job.

As part of this research I will be conducting an interview with you today to find out about the types of services provided to Latino/a first-generation college students on your college campus, and your experiences working with these students. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to participate or to withdraw at any time. Your decision to not to participate or to withdraw does not result in any penalty to you. During the interview, you may choose not to answer any question. Not answering a question is not the same as not participating or withdrawing from the study. If you do decide to leave the study, your information will be withdrawn and not included in the results. There is no compensation to participate. This study involves no known risk to you, or benefits you as the participant. The interviews will be tape recorded. Interview results published in this dissertation and in professional publications will be anonymous, and no identifiers will be used. The data collected will help to provide information and inform decisions with regard to helping other Latino/a first-generation college students.

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