

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: NAVIGATING MULTIPLE WORLDS: A
GROUNDED THEORY OF LATINA
STUDENTS' IDENTITY AS LATINA FIRST-
GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS

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The purpose of this study was to explore Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students. Constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006) was used to explore two research questions: (a) For Latina students who are the first in their family to go to college, what is their understanding of being a Latina first-generation college student? (b) What strengths do Latina first-generation college students associate with being a Latina first-generation college student? A grounded theory of Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students was an outcome of this study. Two interviews were conducted with 12 Latina first-generation college students enrolled at the University of Maryland. Participants were considered first-generation college students if their parents' educational background did not exceed high school in the U.S. or some postsecondary education outside of the U.S., and if a

sibling had not preceded them in attending college. Participants were racially/ethnically diverse, with the majority of students identifying as Central and South American.

The metaphor, navigating multiple worlds, particularly the Family Environment and the University Environment, describes the negotiation of experiences that inform Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students. Core identities of Race/Ethnicity, Gender, Role as College Student, and Role within Family represent multiple and intersecting dimensions salient to Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students. Latina first-generation college students negotiated Latino/a Values and Expectations, "American" Values and Expectations, College and Family Responsibilities, Pioneering Higher Education, Responsibility to Give Back to Family and Latino/a Community, and Pressure and Pride. Living at the intersection of multiple worlds, including experiences as "the first" to attend an institution of higher education and engaging both in Latino/a culture and in "American" culture, contributed to the pressure that Latina first-generation college students experience. Latina students also received support from these distinct environments that enabled the participants to engage in culturally and educationally distinct worlds. Participants associated six strengths with being Latina first-generation college students: Family, Latino/a Culture, Spanish Language/Being Bilingual, Determination, Support Network – Prior to College and During College, and Sense of Responsibility to Help Others. This study has implications for research, theory, and practice.

NAVIGATING MULTIPLE WORLDS: A GROUNDED THEORY OF LATINA
STUDENTS' IDENTITY AS LATINA FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE
STUDENTS

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Diversifying higher education continues to remain an important challenge as colleges and universities attempt to reflect the growing demographic changes occurring in the United States (Harvey & Anderson, 2005; Ryu, 2010). Contributing to this growth has been the increasing Latino/a population in the United States (Bernstein & Bergman, 2003; Passell & Cohn, 2011) and the number of first-generation college students (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1995), reportedly more likely to be Latino/a (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nuñez, 2001) and women (Saenz et al., 2007), entering higher education. In 2002, the Latino/a population became the largest minority community in the United States with a population of 38.8 million (Bernstein & Bergman, 2003). According to the 2010 Census, over 50 million Latinos/as reside in the United States (Passell & Cohn, 2011). The Hispanic Scholarship Fund (2001) argued that the effect this population growth will have on the United States will depend on the educational attainment rates of Latinos/as. Increasing the educational attainment rates of Latino/a students has been deemed critical to the United States remaining competitive in a global economy (Obama, 2010; Ryu, 2010).

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics revealed that Latino/a students are projected to account for the highest amount of growth in college enrollment at degree-granting institutions between 2004 and 2015 (Hussar & Bailey, 2006). Latino/a students enter higher education in larger numbers, but are not graduating at similarly high rates (Fry, 2002; Ryu, 2010). Between 1997 and 2007, the percentage of Latino/a students enrolled in four-year institutions (83%) and two-year institutions (54%)

increased (Ryu, 2010); however, the majority of Latino/a students attend two-year colleges (Cook & Córdova, 2006; Ryu, 2010). Between 1997 and 2007, the degree attainment rates of Latino/a students have almost doubled, but discrepancies remain in the number of degrees awarded to Latinos/as and their peers (Ryu, 2010). In 2007, a smaller percentage of Latino/a (7.3%) students who were enrolled in four-year institutions received a bachelor's degree than their African American (8.9%) and White (67.5%) peers (Ryu, 2010). The disparity in college enrollment rates of Latinos/as and their White peers is particularly concerning due to the increasing Latino/a population in the United States. More Latinas are attending (Harvey & Anderson, 2005; Hurtado, Sáenz, Santos, & Cabrera, 2008; Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000; Ryu, 2010; Sy & Romero, 2008) and graduating (González, Jovel, & Stoner, 2004; Harvey & Anderson, 2005; Ryu, 2010) from institutions of higher education than Latinos. In 2007, Latinas received 63% of the associate degrees and 61% of the bachelor's degrees awarded to Latino/a students (Ryu, 2010).

Saenz et al. (2007) indicated that the proportion of first-generation college students attending institutions of higher education has declined due to overall increases in educational attainment rates in the United States, particularly as a result of a rise in attendance at two-year colleges. Despite this decline, Latinos/as are more likely to be first-generation college students than their peers (Saenz et al., 2007). First-generation college students reportedly come from low-income families (Chen, 2005; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton et al., 2001) and were less likely to begin at a four-year institution, enter college immediately after high school, and enroll as full-time students (Chen, 2005; Nuñez & Cucacaro-Alamin, 1998). Students whose parents have

not attended college were found to be at a disadvantage in terms of accessing higher education, staying enrolled, and attaining a college degree (Choy, 2001).

Studies have examined first-generation college students in terms of their academic preparation, transition to higher education, and persistence behaviors, but little is known about their college experiences (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996) and identity as a first-generation college student (Orbe, 2004, 2008). The small number of studies that have focused solely on first-generation college students have typically been quantitative studies (Orbe, 2004, 2008). Few qualitative studies have focused specifically on Latina first-generation college students (Donovan, 2006; Lara, 1992; Rendón 1996). Additionally, only a small number of studies have explored the experiences of Latinas in higher education (Rodriguez et al., 2000; Zambrana & MacDonald, 2009). A number of studies have cited barriers that hinder the participation of Latina students in higher education (National Women's Law Center & Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009; Rodriguez et al., 2000). Theories that provide insight into the experiences of Latina students that do not operate from a student failure perspective (Padilla, Treviño, Gonzalez, & Treviño, 1997) are needed.

Background and Context

Educational attainment has been found to play a critical role in the occupational status and income of individuals (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). A significantly smaller number of Latinos/as and Blacks are expected to receive the economic and social benefits that accompany receiving a college degree than Whites and Asian Americans due to persistent differences in bachelor's degree attainment rates (Swail, Redd, & Perna,

2003). An indirect intergenerational effect has been found between parents who have a bachelor's degree or above and the educational attainment of their children after controlling for income, family size, and the child's intelligence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Two of every three Latino/a children are believed to come from families where neither parent has a high school diploma, and one of every two Hispanic children have families that are in the lowest income percentile (Hispanic Scholarship Fund, 2001). Latinos/as (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Saenz et al., 2007; Warburton et al., 2001) may be less likely to enjoy many of the economic and social benefits associated with higher education (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Milem, 2003; Swail et al., 2003) due to being more likely to be first-generation college students (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton et al., 2001).

Researchers who have studied first-generation college students have tended to compare them to their non-first-generation college student peers (Pascarella et al., 2004). First-generation college students have been described as being disadvantaged (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001) and having family and background characteristics associated with attrition (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). First-generation college students (Hsiao, 1992; Inman & Mayes, 1999; London, 1989; Orbe, 2008; Piorkowski, 1983) and Students of Color (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993) are believed to face many unique challenges that may hinder their progress towards earning a college degree. Latinas (González et al., 2004; Harris Canul, 2003; Rodriguez et al., 2000) were also found to experience challenges as a result of their race/ethnicity and gender.

Latinas experience a "double minority effect" (Harris Canul, 2003, p. 172) as a result of their gender and ethnicity, which includes experiencing gender-related and race-

related stereotypes and discrimination (Harris Canul, 2003; National Women's Law Center & Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2009; Rodriguez et al., 2000). Latinas negotiate collectivist and individualist perspectives (González et al., 2004; Harris Canul, 2003) due to balancing the centrality of one's family in Latino/a culture and the focus placed on the individual within higher education (Baca Zinn & Kelly, 2005; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). Latinas are often expected to assist with family responsibilities, more so than Latinos (National Women's Law Center & Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2009; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004; Rodriguez et al., 2000; Sy & Romero, 2008), due to rigid gender role expectations associated with Latino/a culture (García, Coll, Erkut, Alarcón, & Tropp, 2000; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). First-generation college students were also described as experiencing tension associated with negotiating the sense of independence that is fostered as a result of being in college, with a personal and cultural value placed on interdependence (Orbe, 2008).

Rodriguez (2001) noted that current college choice and college persistence theories may not adequately reflect the needs and experiences of first-generation college students and low-income students. Further, the retention and persistence of students has often been studied from a student failure perspective (Padilla et al., 1997), which includes one of the most widely used retention theories, Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure (Braxton, 2000; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004). Padilla et al. (1997) and Rendón (1994) noted that studying the college experiences of Students of Color from a deficit approach has not been effective. Despite the significant amount of research that has been conducted on student retention and persistence over several decades, the

retention rates of racial/ethnic minority students have shown very little improvement (Padilla et al., 1997). A deficit model approach ignores the accomplishments of Latinos/as, which limits opportunities to develop strategies that can be implemented on a national level to enhance the achievement of Latinos/as based on best practices (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). For example, the focus placed on low high school graduation rates in the Latino/a community and the lack of attention given to the achievements of Latinos/as in higher education have resulted in a reliance on a deficit model approach and the invisibility of Latino/a high-achievers (Brown et al., 2003).

Researchers have offered institutions an alternative approach to deficit models by focusing on student success (Padilla et al., 1997; Rendón, 1994; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). Rendón (1994) noted that the learning and development of culturally diverse students is dependent upon validating experiences inside and outside of the classroom. Researchers have found faculty and staff (Rendón, 1994) and peer support (Padilla et al., 1997) to be instrumental to the success of racial/ethnic minority students (i.e., African American, Latino/a, American Indian, Asian American). The important role that family members play in the lives of Latina students (Ortiz, 2004) and first-generation college students (Orbe, 2008) has also been recognized. Some college access programs have reframed the cultural capital of Families of Color into a form of cultural wealth or cultural integrity in order to build upon these assets (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). A perspective based on cultural integrity or cultural wealth considers the cultural identity, home, and community culture of students as a strength and a positive trait in the learning process (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005).

The concepts of cultural capital and cultural integrity have often been linked in the literature although the former has viewed students as possessing deficiencies in a variety of areas while the latter has typically affirmed the cultural identities of students (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). Cultural capital includes the cultural abilities, skills, and knowledge individuals inherit from their families, which often corresponds with the educational background of their family (Bourdieu, 1986). Everyone has some form of cultural capital, but the most socially and economically valued forms are those of the middle and upper class (McDonough, 1997). Researchers have maintained that a cultural capital framework cannot accurately capture the complex identities of Students of Color and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). A cultural integrity framework values the cultural capital that Students of Color possess, although this form of cultural capital is not seen as equivalent to traditional forms that are acknowledged and privileged by society (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). Alternatively, this approach views the attitudes, behaviors, and families of Students of Color as assets in the educational experience (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). The strengths that Latina first-generation college students associate with being the first in their family to attend college will be explored, which can serve to counter the deficit approach that is often used by researchers to describe the experiences of Latinas (National Women's Law Center & Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009) and first-generation college students (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz et al., 2007).

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study was to explore Latina students' understanding of their identity as Latina first-generation college students. A grounded theory of Latina students' identity as a Latina first-generation college student was an outcome of this study. Latina first-generation college students who attended the University of Maryland, a public, four-year institution in the mid-Atlantic region, were interviewed. Individuals were considered first-generation college students if the educational background of their parents did not exceed a high school education in the U.S. or some postsecondary education outside of the United States. The following research questions were explored:

1. For Latina students who are the first in their family to go to college, what is their understanding of being a Latina first-generation college student?
2. What strengths do Latina first-generation college students associate with being a Latina first-generation college student?

This study was guided by a constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006).

Definition of Terms

Researchers typically define a student's generational status according to the highest level of parental education attained (Chen, 2005; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton et al., 2001), but a common definition has not been applied. The definition used in this study for first-generation college students will be provided. In addition, an explanation will be offered regarding my use of the term Latino/a.

First-generation College Students

Researchers have defined first-generation college students in a variety of ways. Individuals have been considered a first-generation college student if the educational backgrounds of both parents do not exceed a high school diploma (Billson & Terry, 1982; Chen, 2005; Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz et al., 2007; Sherlin, 2002; Somers, Woodhouse, & Cofer, 2004). Researchers have further distinguished between students who had at least one parent who attended *some* college, but did not have a bachelor's degree, and students who had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree or higher (Chen, 2005; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Sherlin, 2002). The role of siblings who may have preceded a student in being the first in one's family to go to college has also been considered. Billson and Terry (1982) considered an individual a first-generation college student if neither parent attended college, regardless of whether the student had a sibling who was enrolled in an institution of higher education. York-Anderson and Bowman (1991) recognized an individual as a first-generation college student if neither of the student's parents or siblings attended college for less than one year.

For this study, individuals were considered first-generation college students if their parents' educational background did not exceed high school in the U.S. or some postsecondary education outside of the United States, and if a sibling had not preceded them in attending college. Differences on a variety of outcomes have been found between students who have parents who attended some college and those with parents who have a bachelor's degree or higher (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found, in a review of research since 1990, that first-generation

college students had lower educational attainment rates than their peers who had parents who attended some college or those with parents who earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Students with parents who had some college were nearly twice as likely as first-generation college students to obtain a bachelor's degree, while students whose parents possessed a bachelor's degree or higher were almost five times more likely to earn a bachelor's degree than first-generation college students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). A review of literature did not reveal any studies that explored the experiences of Latino/a first-generation college students who had a parent who attended some college outside of the United States.

Latino/a

“Hispanic” and “Latino” are umbrella terms that are often used interchangeably (Brown et al., 2003; MacDonald, 2004; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Latino and Hispanic have been used to “denote those individuals born in the United States and in Latin America, Central America, the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, and Spain who are of Hispanic heritage, inclusive of Native American and African ancestry” (MacDonald, 2004, p. 2). The word “Hispanic” was created by the United States Census Bureau in the 1980s in order to classify individuals who were related either historically or culturally to the Spanish language (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). The term Hispanic has been critiqued due to excluding individuals who have Latin American heritage and instead acknowledging Spanish ancestry, which includes a history of colonialism (Oboler, 1995). The term Latino is believed to recognize the diverse social and political experiences of Latino/a racial/ethnic groups in the United States (Oboler, 1995). Latino/a or Latino and Latina are viewed as more inclusive terms that intentionally recognize men

and women, respectively (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Zentella, 2005), as well as the Latin American roots of immigrants (Zentella, 2005). The word Latino has been preferred over Hispanic by many, despite the belief by some that this term excludes African, Asian, and indigenous populations (Oboler, 1995). The masculine term Latino is often used by researchers to refer to males and females collectively. I use the term Latino/a versus Latino in an attempt to use gender-inclusive language and to clearly differentiate when I am referring to men and women or just men.

Significance of the Study

Latinos/as and undocumented immigrants are expected to account for the largest amount of growth in higher education between 2004 and 2015 (Hussar & Bailey, 2006). The percentage of Latino/a students entering institutions of higher education will likely increase due to legal and political measures being considered. The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM Act) could give undocumented immigrant children who meet a specific set of criteria an opportunity to attend higher education, in part through the provision of in-state tuition (National Immigration Law Center, 2007), which would make a college education more affordable for these students (Fischer, 2007). Passage of the DREAM Act has implications for the Latino/a community because over 50% of this population are believed to be foreign-born; foreign-born Latinos/as have lower educational attainment rates than Latinos/as born in the United States and all other racial groups (Crissey, 2009; Stoops, 2004). Approximately 65,000 students raised in the United States who graduate from high school each year would qualify to receive the benefits outlined in the DREAM Act (National Immigration Law Center, 2006). In December 2010, the DREAM Act passed the House, but failed to pass in the Senate

(Field, 2010). In 2011, Maryland became the 11th state to permit eligible undocumented students (e.g., graduated from a MD high school after attending for three consecutive years, proof that parents filed a MD income tax return) to pay in-state college tuition rates at a community college (Aro, 2011). Students would then become qualified to receive the same in-state tuition benefit at a four-year institution upon receiving an associate's degree or completing 60 credit hours (Aro, 2011). This study will aid researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in better understanding and supporting the growing and diverse number of Latina first-generation college students, who are projected to continue to enter institutions of higher education (Hussar & Bailey, 2006; National Immigration Law Center, 2006; Ryu, 2010).

In order to better support Latina college students, practitioners must understand the unique experiences of these students (National Women's Law Center & Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Few qualitative studies have focused solely on first-generation college students (Orbe, 2004, 2008), Latino/a first-generation college students (Cabrera, 1998; Dalpes, 2001; Singer, 2007; Torres, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, & Ruder, 2006), and, more specifically, Latina first-generation college students (Donovan, 2006; Lara, 1992; Rendón 1996). Rendón (1994) has argued that institutions of higher education must develop a new approach to understanding the experiences of diverse students. This constructivist grounded theory study will add to the dearth of literature focused on Latina first-generation college students. Additionally, this study's exploration of the strengths that Latina first-generation college students associate with being the first in their family to enter high

education will assist practitioners in developing programming that is reflective of an asset-based versus deficit approach.

Summary

The growing number of Latina students (Hussar & Bailey, 2006; Ryu, 2010) and first-generation college students (Terenzini et al., 1995) entering institutions of higher education necessitates additional research focused on understanding the experiences of Latina first-generation college students. This study will provide insight into Latina students' understanding of their identity as a Latina first-generation college student. Research focused on Latina students' identity as a Latina first-generation college student can inform the development of initiatives aimed at increasing the persistence of Latinas who are the first in their family to enter higher education.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

For a grounded theory study, the purpose of the literature review is to provide insight into ideas and research related to areas of exploration (Charmaz, 2006).

Literature and research focused on Latino/a students and first-generation college students in higher education have informed my understanding of Latina first-generation college students. My knowledge of this research influenced the development of interview questions, sampling decisions, and data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). An extensive review of the literature is not necessary when conducting a grounded theory study because being immersed in the literature could bias the researcher during data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). After data analysis was completed, I reviewed additional literature that aided me in understanding some of the findings of this study.

Latino/a Students in Higher Education

The number of Students of Color entering institutions of higher education is expected to increase as a result of demographic changes in the United States (Harvey & Anderson, 2005; Ryu, 2010). Maryland will likely join other areas of the country in becoming “majority-minority” due to racial/ethnic minorities comprising approximately 40% of their current populations (Bernstein, 2005). Latinos/as are contributing to the large and fast growing racial/ethnic diversification of the United States (Bernstein, 2007, 2008; Passell & Cohn, 2011). The Latino/a population is predicted to increase between 2008 and 2050 by three times the current rate, expanding from 46.7 million to 132.8 million (Bernstein & Edwards, 2008). In 2010, Mexicans (63%) comprised the largest Latino/a population in the United States, followed by Puerto Ricans (9.2%), Cubans (3.5%), Salvadorans (3.3%), and Dominicans (2.8%) (Lopez & Dockterman, 2011).

Since 2000, a 152% increase in the Salvadoran population accounted for the largest amount of growth among Latino/a populations (Lopez & Dockterman, 2011).

Latino/a students and nonresident aliens are expected to account for the largest amount of growth in enrollment rates in higher education between 2004 and 2015 (Hussar & Bailey, 2006). Since 1965, Latinos/as and Asians have accounted for the fastest growing immigrant groups entering the United States (MacDonald, 2004). A variety of motivations have influenced the entrance of immigrants into the United States. Undocumented immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua entered the United States during the 1960s and 1970s in order to escape political oppression, violence, and poverty (MacDonald, 2004). Many immigrants also entered the United States in search of economic opportunities (MacDonald, 2004; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001) and better opportunities for their children (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). During the 1960s and 1970s, Salvadoran and Central American women immigrated to the Washington, DC area at high rates due to the availability of housekeeping and child care positions (Repak, 1995). Central American women played an integral role in the decisions of immediate and extended family members to immigrate to the Washington, DC area due the support network that the women provided to other Latinas (Repak, 1995). Most immigrants are in the United States legally (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Zentella, 2005) while approximately 10% are considered undocumented (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). The majority of children born to immigrants are documented (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Researchers rarely examine differences based on generational status in the United States, but this type of research is important due to the heterogeneity that exists within and between groups (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Native born individuals include anyone who was born in the United States, Puerto Rico, or other U.S. protectorates and children born abroad to parents who are U.S. citizens (Jensen, 2001). First-generation Latinos/as were not born in the United States (Fry, 2002; Jensen, 2001). Individuals considered the 1.5 generation were born outside of the United States, but arrived in the U.S. as pre-teens (Fry, 2002). Second-generation Latinos/as were born in the United States, Puerto Rico, or other U.S. protectorates and have at least one parent who was born in a foreign country (Fry, 2002; Jensen, 2001). Latinos/as who are third-generation or higher in the United States include individuals who were native-born as well as their parents (Fry, 2002; Jensen, 2001). Latino/a immigrants and their children are becoming the “newest Americans” (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001), and are considered some of the least educated in the United States (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; Ryu, 2010; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Latino/a College Enrollment

Since 1990, the high school completion rates and college participation rates of Latino/a students have increased; however, large disparities remain between the high school and bachelor’s degree completion rates of Latino/a students and their White peers (Cook & Córdova, 2006; Harvey & Anderson, 2005; Ryu, 2010). The gap between the high school completion rates of Latino/a students and the group with the highest completion rate, White students, is noteworthy because the path into higher education begins in high school or earlier for many students. Between 1988 and 2008, the college

enrollment rate of Latino/a students increased from 17% to 28%; Latinas were enrolled at a 10% higher rate than Latinos (Ryu, 2010). From 1997 to 2007, the degree attainment rates of Latinos/as have almost doubled, but Latino/a students continue to have much lower graduation rates than their African American and White peers (Ryu, 2010).

College participation rates have differed based on national origin. Among Latino/a students who entered four-year institutions, Puerto Rican (66%) students were more likely to be enrolled than Cuban (62%), Central or South American (54%), and Mexican students (49%) (Fry, 2002). Differences have also been found among Latino/a students based on generational status in the United States. Traditional-aged Latino/a high school graduates born in the United States entered four-year and two-year colleges at higher rates than their peers born abroad; 26% of first-generation Latinos/as enrolled in higher education in comparison to 42% of second-generation Latinos/as, which was similar to the 46% enrollment rate for White students, followed by 36% of Latinos/as from the third and higher generations (Fry, 2002).

Factors Contributing to Latino/a Student Persistence

A greater number of Latino/a students are entering college, but reportedly have lower rates of completing a bachelor's degree due to entering higher education predominantly through community colleges, as part-time students, and as a result of delaying or extending their college education into their mid-20s or later (Fry, 2002). Racial/ethnic minorities and low-income students were more likely to enroll in two-year colleges due to community colleges being viewed as a more economical way to enter higher education (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). However, students who enter higher education by attending community colleges were significantly less likely to earn a

bachelor's degree than their peers who began at four-year institutions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

Hernandez and Lopez (2004) outlined factors that contribute to the persistence of Latino/a college students in positive or negative ways based on a review of retention literature: personal factors (i.e., high school grade point average and test scores, academic self-concept, family, finances), environmental factors (i.e., racial climate, presence of an ethnic community, working and living off-campus), involvement factors (i.e., faculty-student interaction, mentorship, participation in student organizations), and socio-cultural factors (i.e., immigrant status, ethnic identity development, gender roles, community orientation, the role of religion). Many of these factors were addressed in studies in this review of the literature, which includes research about the college experiences, academic achievement, and racial/ethnic identity development of Latino/a college students and Students of Color. Pertinent research and literature focused on Latinas is also provided.

Academic and social involvement. Persistence has been linked to student engagement in the social environment and academic environment of an institution (Tinto, 1993). Peers play a particularly influential role in a variety of student outcomes (Astin, 1993; Newcomb, 1962; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Formal and informal involvement in the social environment, including peer interaction, has had varying effects on the academic success of Students of Color (Mayo, Murguía, & Padilla, 1995; Padilla et al., 1997). New students tended to receive heuristic knowledge (e.g., knowing when to drop a class or change a major, information about financial aid) informally from experienced students via student organizations rather than through formal campus

systems (Padilla et al., 1997). Formal involvement in the social environment had a greater effect on the academic performance of Mexican American, Black, Native American, and White students attending a large, public university in the Southwest than informal social interactions (Mayo et al., 1995). Students involved formally in the social environment (e.g., participation in student organizations, interaction with faculty outside of class) tended to have a higher cumulative grade point average than students who were involved in informal ways (e.g., socializing with peers in residence halls and classrooms, dating, attending parties). Mayo et al.'s study revealed that being a member of a student organization, having a faculty or staff role model (including faculty from the same and different ethnic backgrounds), and being satisfied with personal interactions with instructors had a significant and positive influence on the grade point average of Mexican American students.

Similar factors were found to influence the adjustment (Hernandez, 2002; López, 2007) and persistence (Hernandez, 2000) of Latino/a college students during two critical times in their collegiate careers, the first year of college and upon graduation. Hernandez (2002) explored the adjustment of Latino/a students during their first year in college while Hernandez (2000) and López (2007) studied the factors that influenced the persistence of Latino/a students who were graduating or had graduated. Hernandez (2000, 2002) and López conducted qualitative studies at predominantly White institutions in the mid-Atlantic region. Hernandez (2002) found that the adjustment of 10 ethnically diverse Latino/a students (i.e., Puerto Rican, Salvadoran, Mexican, Nicaraguan, Peruvian) during their first year of college was influenced either positively or negatively by the following: academic and social adjustment, family support and encouragement,

involvement opportunities, and ethnic and cultural identity. The following were found to be important to the success (López, 2007) and retention (Hernandez, 2000) of Latino/a students who graduated from college: involvement in the social environment (e.g., peer interaction, participation in campus activities) and academic environment (e.g., positive interactions with faculty and staff), family, and ethnic and cultural identity (e.g., involvement in the Latino/a community, awareness of Latino/a culture). Hernandez (2000) and López also found that a sense of determination to persist and graduate was integral to the experiences of Latino/a students.

Peer and faculty interaction were found to influence the academic and social adjustment of Latino/a students (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996) and their sense of belonging to the institution (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Latino/a students who received assistance from other first-year students during their freshman year in college were less well adjusted academically during their second year in college (Hurtado et al., 1996). Lower levels of social adjustment were found among Latino/a students during their second year if they relied on peer advisors during their first year. However, higher levels of social adjustment occurred among Latino/a students who received assistance from resident advisors and upperclass students during their first year (Hurtado et al., 1996). Peer and faculty interaction outside of class and involvement in student organizations positively influenced Latino/a students' sense of belonging to their institution (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Latino/a students who interacted with peers (i.e., tutoring other students, discussing course content outside of class) and spoke frequently with faculty outside of class in their third year reported a higher sense of belonging than their peers who did not engage in these activities (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Involvement in student

organizations (i.e., social-community organizations, religious clubs, student government, sports teams) contributed to a higher sense of belonging among Latino/a students in their third year in college than those who were not involved (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Influences on Latino/a student achievement. Several studies highlighted the lack of confidence that Latino/a students (Hernandez, 2002; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Longerbeam, Sedlacek, & Alatorre, 2004; Nájera, 2007) and Students of Color (Smedley et al., 1993) have in their academic abilities. Smedley et al. (1993) studied the adjustment of 45 African-American, 54 Chicano, 25 Latino/a, and 37 Pilipino first-year students attending an academically selective, predominantly White university. Racial/ethnic minority students experienced status-related achievement stresses, which negatively influenced their academic achievement (Smedley et al., 1993). Achievement stresses included students' doubts about their academic preparation and ability to succeed in college as well as contending with high familial expectations for college success and a lack of family understanding regarding college pressures (Smedley et al., 1993). Women reported higher levels of achievement stress than men (Smedley et al., 1993). Differences have been found between levels of academic confidence of Latinos and Latinas. In the study conducted by Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005), Latinos reported higher levels of confidence in their analytical skills than Latinas. Similarly, in an ex post facto comparative study conducted by Nájera (2007) with 230 first-time first-year Latino/a students, Latinos expected that they would be more likely to have the skills and knowledge needed to attain their academic goals than Latinas. Despite this belief, Latinos anticipated that they would be less likely to complete a degree from their institution and would temporarily drop out prior to completing their bachelor's degree

than Latinas (Nájera, 2007). Many Latino/a students also felt academically unprepared during their first year of college in the study conducted by Hernandez (2002) even though they took honors and advanced placement courses in high school.

Pascarella and Terenzini's (1991, 2005) comprehensive reviews of higher education literature identified college grade point average as one of the strongest predictors of a student attaining a bachelor's degree. However, noncognitive variables versus standardized tests and measures may be more helpful in predicting the success (e.g., grades, retention, graduation) of students, particularly nontraditional students, due to taking into account the unique experiences of all students (Sedlacek, 2004). Sedlacek (2004) defined nontraditional students as individuals who were different from White, middle-class, heterosexual, men of European descent. Eight noncognitive variables can be used to assess the success of diverse populations: positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, success in handling racism, preference for long-term goals, availability of a strong support person, leadership experience, community involvement, and knowledge acquired in a field (Sedlacek, 2004). Advisors, counselors, and instructors who use noncognitive variables in their work can help students develop areas that may positively influence a variety of student outcomes, including grades and retention (Sedlacek, 2004).

Latino/a students' perceptions of the campus racial climate. Three longitudinal quantitative studies examined the influence of various college experiences on educational outcomes of Latino/a students during their first two (Hurtado et al., 1996; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005) and three (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) years of college. Each of these studies (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado et al., 1996; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005) explored the effects of students' perceptions of the campus racial climate (Nora &

Cabrera, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Studying the effects of the campus racial climate has been deemed important to understanding the persistence of racial/ethnic minority students (Baird, 2000; Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005).

Hurtado et al. (1996) studied the transition and adjustment of 203 high-achieving Latino/a college students (i.e., Chicanos/as, Puerto Ricans, other Latino/a groups) attending four institutions (63% of the sample attended private four-year institutions). Latino/a students who reported experiencing discrimination on campus had lower levels of attachment (i.e., sense of belonging to college environment, institutional and goal commitments) to their institution (Hurtado et al., 1996). In addition, students who perceived racial/ethnic tension on campus reported lower levels of personal-emotional adjustment (e.g., ability to handle stress), academic adjustment, social adjustment, and attachment (Hurtado et al., 1996).

Hurtado and Carter (1997) examined the background characteristics and college experiences of academically talented Latino/a students during their first and second year of college to determine if these factors contributed to students' sense of belonging in the third year. Sense of belonging was offered as an alternative and more appropriate measure to understanding the college experiences of Students of Color versus the concept of integration used in Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). In Hurtado and Carter's study, the sample of 272 high-achieving Latino/a students from 127 colleges included 43.4% Chicano/a students, 22.4% Puerto Rican students, and 34.2% from other Latino/a groups (e.g., Cubans, Central and South Americans). Latino/a students who experienced an easier transition to college were less likely to perceive a hostile racial climate in their second year (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

However, Latino/a students who perceived a hostile racial climate in their second year of college had a lower sense of belonging in their third year of college.

Hurtado and Ponjuan (2005) conducted a longitudinal study of 370 Latino/a students attending nine primarily residential campuses; demographic information regarding the sample was not shared. Surveys were administered to students during summer orientation sessions prior to the beginning of the first year of college as well as in some large classes held in the first semester. A follow-up survey was given at the end of the students' second year. Latino/a students who reported speaking Spanish at home were more likely to perceive a hostile racial campus climate for diversity than their peers who tended to speak English at home. A more hostile climate for diversity was also perceived by students who had positive interactions with diverse peers and those who participated in co-curricular diversity programs (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Hurtado and Ponjuan noted that Latino/a students may be more critical of the campus climate as a result of insights gained from interacting with diverse groups at a predominantly White institution and may also choose to become involved in diversity activities as a result of the hostile campus climate. Latino/a students reported a higher sense of belonging to their institution if they lived on campus or with their parents, had positive interactions with diverse peers during college, participated in academic support programs, and took courses that focused on issues of race and ethnicity (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Students had a significantly lower sense of belonging if they perceived a negative campus climate for diversity (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005).

Role of Latino/a Family

Family plays a critical role in the college experiences (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Ortiz, 2004; Torres et al., 2006), adjustment (Hernandez, 2002), and persistence (Hernandez, 2000; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004) of Latino/a students. The cultural value of familismo is central to the experiences of Latinos/as (Vega, 1990; Villarruel, 2000). Family is a “source of pride and strength” (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2009, p. 22) for the Latino/a community and has been found to assist students as they transition between their home culture and Anglo culture.

Family members influence Latino/a college students in positive ways (Hernandez, 2000, 2002; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Ortiz, 2004). However, the families of poor and racial/ethnic minority students are often viewed as having deficiencies (Ceballo, 2004; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). Tinto (1993), in his model of student departure, has argued that students who have cultural backgrounds or homes with lower college participation rates may need to reject their communities, peer groups, and families in order to persist. Tinto’s concept of integration has been troubling to researchers due to the meaning that this term has for racial/ethnic minority groups (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1993, 1999; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009). Tinto has also deemed the word, integration, troublesome because of the connotation that this term has and due to how this concept has been interpreted when studying the retention of Students of Color (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). In order to become integrated into the college environment and persist, Students of Color are expected to separate from their prior communities, cultural values, and beliefs (Rendón et al., 2000; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2009). The use of Durkheim’s concept of suicide in Tinto’s theory also communicates a

belief that racial/ethnic minority students must experience a form of “cultural suicide” (Tierney, 1999, p. 82) and abandon their cultural identities and communities in order to persist at predominantly White institutions. Additionally, the retention of underrepresented racial/ethnic minority students has been deemed at risk if students are unable to connect with a smaller cultural community with which they identify (Braxton et al., 2004).

Latino/a students are believed to experience additional tensions as a result of engaging in and between culturally distinct environments. Rendón (1996) wrote about the academic, racial, and ethnic shock that she experienced as a Latina first-generation college student. Rendón noted that pain is experienced by students and their families when a student tries to live in two different worlds, their family environment and college environment, because of the implicit belief in higher education suggesting that Students of Color must separate from their past and values in order to succeed in college. Anzaldúa (1987) wrote about living life on the border and in the margins as a result of growing up in two cultures, Mexican and Anglo culture. A great deal of tension is experienced by individuals who are not from dominant cultures based on race, language, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status (Anzaldúa, 1987). Hernandez (2002) also indicated that Latino/a first-year students experience ethnic and cultural identity issues as a result of feeling “torn between two cultures” (p. 77); many students feared becoming assimilated and losing their culture. Concerns also exist within Latino/a families who fear that their children will lose fluency in their native language (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001) and will be drawn away from their family by peers in the process of becoming acculturated (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Latina Students

Rigid gender roles influence acceptable behaviors and values for men and women in traditional Latino/a culture (García et al., 2000; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004) and are informed by Latino/a cultural values (Harris Canul, 2003; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). The concept of familismo influences gender role expectations in Latino/a families due to the emphasis placed on family over the needs of the individual (Harris Canul, 2003; Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). Latinas often experience conflict as they negotiate individual needs and priorities (e.g., working) with family responsibilities (Harris Canul, 2003). Latinas are expected to demonstrate respeto or respect for individuals in authority and their family; the actions of Latinas are believed to affect and be a reflection of their family or community (Harris Canul, 2003).

The character traits and roles of women in traditional Latino/a communities are also guided by marianismo (González, 2005; Harris Canul, 2003), which is analogous to machismo for Latino men (González, 2005). In Latino/a culture, machismo refers to the masculine qualities that are viewed as socially acceptable for Latino men to possess, which includes being strong, unemotional, and the provider for his family (Rouque Ramirez, 2005). Marianismo is rooted in Catholicism and is associated with the Virgin Mary, who is believed to be the mother of God (González, 2005). Latinas are expected to symbolically represent images of the Virgin Mary and the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe (González, 2005). Within the context of marianismo, Latinas should be pious, submissive, and passive (González, 2005). Latinas are expected to get married and become mothers, with sexuality being limited to reproduction (González, 2005). The concept of marianismo has been described as limiting and subordinating women

(González, 2005). Qualities associated with Latinas that are rooted in marianismo have stereotyped Latinas as having multiple children, being uneducated, and poor (Harris Canul, 2003). However, some feminists have challenged traditional views regarding the Virgin Mary and the Virgin of Guadalupe to develop a more liberating and progressive view of Latinas (González, 2005).

Latinas experience “the double minority effect” (Harris Canul, 2003, p. 172) as a result of their gender and ethnicity, which includes stereotypes and discrimination based on race and gender (Harris Canul, 2003; National Women's Law Center & Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2009). Rodriguez et al. (2000) outlined four main sources of stress for Latinas based on a review of literature: a lack of financial resources, academic issues, family obligations and expectations, and gender-role stereotyping. The effects of cultural and gender-role stereotyping as well as institutional marginalization were viewed as barriers to the participation of Latinas in higher education (Rodriguez et al., 2000). Similar findings were reported by the National Women’s Law Center and Mexican American Legal Defense Fund (2009) regarding the challenges that Latina girls experience as a result of their ethnicity and gender. Latinas encounter stereotypes and discrimination based on gender and ethnicity, including at school, as well as challenges associated with early teen pregnancy and parenting responsibilities (National Women's Law Center & Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2009). Latinas reportedly have higher teen pregnancy rates and teen birth rates than any other racial/ethnic group (National Women's Law Center & Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Latinas are also expected to assist with family responsibilities (e.g., caring for siblings) to

a greater degree than Latinos, which results in Latinas becoming less involved in afterschool activities than Latinos (National Women's Law Center & Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2009).

Sy and Romero (2008) explored the role that family responsibilities play in the college experiences of Latina students. Sy and Romero conducted 20 interviews with Latinas in southern California who attended some college, were currently enrolled in a four-year institution, or graduated with an undergraduate degree. Sy and Romero organized the family responsibilities of Latina college students under three themes: becoming self-sufficient in order to support their family, making a voluntary financial contribution to their family, and serving as a “surrogate” (p. 218) parent to siblings (e.g., caring for siblings, serving as a role model). Latina students expressed a desire to assist their family, versus viewing these responsibilities as obligations that their parents required (Sy & Romero, 2008). Sy and Romero highlighted the pressures that Latina students experience as a result of balancing multiple roles and responsibilities.

Raffaelli and Ontai (2004) interviewed 22 Latina women with an average age of 31 and diverse educational backgrounds (i.e., high school graduates, some college, college graduates, some graduate education). Three themes emerged regarding the gender socialization of Latinas: girls and boys received differential treatment (i.e., sons granted more privileges or freedoms than daughters, girls expected to assist with household responsibilities), stereotypically feminine behavior was expected of daughters, and the involvement of girls outside of the home was limited by parents (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). Results of a second study that included Latino and Latina students between the ages of 19-45 who attended four Midwest universities was also shared in Raffaelli

and Ontai. The second study confirmed findings reported in the first study, which involved only Latinas. Latinos and Latinas reported being socialized differently based on gender, which included the expectation that boys and girls play with gender appropriate toys (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). Latinas indicated having less freedom than Latinos, and men indicated having fewer restrictions than women (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004).

Latino/a Racial/Ethnic Identity Development

To understand the development of college students, multiple dimensions of students' identity should be considered, including their racial/ethnic identity formation (McEwen, 2003). Identity development theories can assist student affairs professionals in understanding diverse students (Torres, 2003; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009), but few data-driven models have focused on the development of Latino/a students (Torres, 1999). A review of key Latino/a racial/ethnic identity development theories follows in order to better understand factors that might influence identity as a Latina first-generation college student.

Helms's (1995) People of Color racial identity model has often been used to understand how individuals with full, partial, or a combination of African, Asian, and Indigenous backgrounds overcome internalized racism. Helms's model has been applied and validated on diverse groups, including Latinos/as (McEwen, 2003). However, Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) argued that attempting to understand the experiences of Latinos/as through the use of theoretical models intended for other groups, such as Helms's (1995) People of Color model, can be problematic because Latinos/as cannot be easily categorized according to race and due to the heterogeneous nature of this population. Latinos/as have been classified as belonging to one or more racial groups

(e.g., White, Black, Indigenous), but these categories do not provide insight into an individual's national origin, history, or immigration status in the United States (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Similarities that exist among some Latinos/as related to their values, beliefs, and use of Spanish should be considered, as well as differences based on how individuals view themselves in terms of their race, national origin, generational status in the United States, socioeconomic status, language, acculturation, appearance, color, gender, and geographic location (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001).

Torres (1999), seeking to validate the Bicultural Orientation Model (BOM) introduced by Torres and Phelps (1997), surveyed 372 Hispanic college students at two comprehensive universities and two community colleges located in urban areas in the Southeast. The majority of students in the sample identified as Mexican (32%) followed by individuals with Central and South American (22%), Cuban (19%), Puerto Rican (3%), Spanish (3%), and Caribbean (2%) ancestry. Most of the students were bilingual, between 17-25 years old, second-generation Hispanic Americans, and lived with their parents (Torres, 1999). Four cultural orientations emerged based on participants' responses to the following three subscales, based on the work of Phinney (1992) and Ramirez (1983): Affirmation/Belonging (measured ethnic pride and feeling good about one's ethnic background), Ethnic Identity Achievement (measured individuals' interest in and awareness of their ethnicity), and Ethnic Behaviors (assessed participation in social activities and cultural traditions related to one's ethnicity) (Torres, 1999). Individuals who had a Bicultural Orientation were able to function competently in both Hispanic and Anglo cultures. Students with an Anglo Orientation preferred to function in Anglo culture. Those with a Hispanic Orientation preferred to function in Hispanic culture.

Individuals with a Marginal Orientation were characterized as being unable to function adequately in Hispanic or Anglo cultures. The cultural orientation of Hispanic students depended on their level of acculturation and ethnic identity (Torres, 1999). For example, a student with a Bicultural Orientation had a higher level of acculturation and ethnic identity while students with a Marginal Orientation had a lower level of acculturation and ethnic identity (Torres, 1999). Torres' model validated a bicultural construct that provides insight into how Latino/a students negotiate living in two cultures.

Building on her previous work of validating a bicultural orientation model (Torres, 1999), Torres (2003) conducted a longitudinal constructivist grounded theory study at a private, predominantly White urban research university on the East Coast in order to explore the ethnic identity development of 10 self-identified Latino/a students during their first two years of college. Three of the participants identified as Mexican and the remaining seven identified as Puerto Rican, Cuban, Venezuelan, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Nicaraguan, or Colombian. Eight of the participants were born in the United States, and eight were bilingual. The ethnic identity and cultural orientation of Latino/a students were influenced by the following: environment in which participants grew up, their family, generational status in the United States, and self-perception of status in society (Torres, 2003). Latino/a students' self-perception of their status in society was informed by their socioeconomic status and whether or not they felt a sense of privilege over others (Torres, 2003). Students who were the first generation in the United States experienced difficulties balancing the expectations of their parents with college expectations; second and third generation Latinos/as were more highly acculturated and experienced less conflict (Torres, 2003). The ethnic identity

development of Latino/a students was influenced by cultural dissonance and a change in their relationships (Torres, 2003). For example, some students who were the first generation in the United States felt caught between the Latino/a culture of their family and the “American” culture of the university and associated with the majority culture (Torres, 2003). Additionally, positive interactions with Latino/a peers influenced a change in a student’s identification from an Anglo Orientation to a Bicultural Orientation (Torres, 2003).

Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) highlighted five dimensions that inform an individual’s orientation to one’s own Latino/a identity: one’s “lens” toward identity, how an individual identifies oneself, how Latinos/as are seen as a group, how Whites are seen, and how race is framed. Ferdman and Gallegos described six Latino/a racial identity orientations. Individuals who were *Latino-Integrated* had a Latino/a identity that was fully integrated with their other social identities and were comfortable engaging with diverse Latino/a groups. *Latino-Identified* individuals embraced a Latino/a racial identity and Whites were seen as possible barriers or allies depending on their behavior. Individuals who were *Subgroup Identified* focused on their own ethnic or national-origin subgroup rather than race, and Whites were not central to their thinking, but seen as barriers to their full inclusion. *Latino as “other”* included individuals who did not identify with White cultural values or norms and were unaware of their specific Latino/a background and culture. Individuals who were *Undifferentiated* did not see “color” (p. 53) and accepted the dominant norms of society. *White-Identified* individuals saw themselves as White and superior to People of Color and viewed race in terms of White or Black. The model proposed by Ferdman and Gallegos has not been empirically tested,

but provides a descriptive approach to understanding the heterogeneity of the Latino/a population based on the consideration of multiple factors (e.g., national origin, generational status in the United States, early socialization) that challenge dominant racial constructs. The work of Ferdman and Gallegos was not intended to be a linear stage model.

To better understand students' development, multiple dimensions of an individuals' identity should be explored (Jones, 1997; Jones & McEwen, 2000; McEwen, 2003). Jones and McEwen (2000) proposed a model of multiple dimensions of identity development for women college students based on a grounded theory study conducted by Jones (1997). Jones (1997) interviewed 10 diverse women college students who were enrolled at a large university located on the East Coast. Ten key categories emerged as influencing the identity development of the participants: (a) relative salience of identity dimensions; (b) the multiple ways in which race matters; (c) multiple layers of identity; (d) the braiding of gender with other dimensions; (e) the importance of cultural identifications and cultural values; (f) the influence of family and background experiences; (g) current experiences and situational factors; (h) relational, inclusive values and guiding personal beliefs; (i) career decisions and future planning; (j) the search for identity (Jones, 1997; Jones & McEwen, 2000). Jones and McEwen reported that the saliency of particular dimensions of a student's identity, for example, race, culture, class, religion, gender, and sexual orientation, were more salient for some individuals than others. For example, race was more salient for Black women than White women (Jones & McEwen, 2000). The women also identified a core identity, which included personal attributes and characteristics (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

Jones (1997) and Jones and McEwen (2000) provide a helpful model that emphasizes the importance of considering multiple and intersecting dimensions of the identity development of women college students, including the intersection of race, gender, and culture. Torres (1999, 2003) and Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) outline factors that should be considered when exploring the racial/ethnic identity development of Latina college students. The cultural orientation framework offered by Ferdman and Gallegos emphasizes the need to consider the influence of multiple dimensions (e.g., race, ethnicity, generational status in the United States) due to the heterogeneity of the Latino/a population. The bicultural orientation model produced by Torres (1999, 2003) provides a framework that can assist in understanding the engagement of Latinas in culturally distinct environments, particularly the primarily “American” culture of the college environment and the Latino/a culture of their family.

First-generation College Students

The few studies that focused exclusively on first-generation college students have typically been quantitative studies (Orbe, 2004). Research on first-generation college students can be organized under three categories (Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996) that correspond with stages that occur within the college-going process (Terenzini et al., 1996). The first category includes studies that compared first-generation college students to non-first-generation college students with regards to their demographic characteristics, precollege expectations, college planning, and the college choice process (Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996). The second category encompasses studies that examined the transition of first-generation college students between high school or work and college (Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996). The third category

comprises research focused on the persistence and degree attainment of first-generation college students in comparison to their non-first-generation college student peers (Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996). A review of research that can aid in understanding the experiences of Latina first-generation college students will be presented, including a discussion of the following: characteristics of first-generation college students in higher education, Latino/a first-generation college students, role of family in the lives of first-generation college students, first-generation college student identity.

Characteristics

Survey data collected by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) between 1971 and 2005 revealed that the proportion of first-time, full-time first-generation college students entering four-year institutions as freshmen declined from 38.5% to 15.9% (Saenz et al., 2007). The percentage of first-generation college students entering higher education has increased, but this growth mainly occurred at two-year institutions (Chen, 2005; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Numerous studies (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz et al., 2007; Sherlin, 2002; Terenzini et al., 1996; Warburton et al., 2001) have outlined characteristics associated with first-generation college students. First-generation college students are reportedly more likely to be Black (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001) or Latino/a (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Saenz et al., 2007; Warburton et al., 2001) and come from low-income families (Chen, 2005; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton et al., 2001). Students who were the first in their families to attend higher education were also more likely to be female (Saenz et al., 2007;

Núñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton et al., 2001), work full-time during their first year of college (Billson & Terry, 1982; Núñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton et al., 2001), and receive financial aid, grants, and loans (Núñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998) than non-first-generation college students. First-generation college students were less likely to enroll as full-time students (Chen, 2005; Núñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton et al., 2001) and live on campus (Billson & Terry, 1982; Saenz et al., 2007; Núñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella, 2004; Sherlin, 2002). Warburton et al. (2001) noted that first-generation college students were more likely to be foreign-born than students whose parents had some college. Warburton et al. also found that first-generation college students were more likely to speak a language other than English at home than non-first-generation college students.

First-generation college students have been described as academically disadvantaged (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Pascarella et al., 2004; Saenz et al., 2007). These students reportedly take less rigorous coursework in high school and remedial courses in college, and have lower GPAs in their first year of college than their non-first-generation college student peers (Chen, 2005; Warburton et al., 2001). First-generation college students were also less likely to persist or earn a bachelor's degree than non-first-generation college students (Chen, 2005; Ishitani, 2003; Núñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Warburton et al., 2001). Among first-generation high school graduates who enrolled in college between 1992 and 2000, 43% did not earn a degree and were no longer enrolled by 2000; only 24% earned a bachelor's degree (Chen, 2005). In comparison, 20% of their non-first-generation peers were no longer enrolled in 2000 and 68% received a degree (Chen, 2005). Ishitani (2003) found that first-generation college students were

more likely to drop out of college during their first year of college or during their third year (although to a lesser degree) than their peers with parents who both received a college education. Higher three-year retention rates were found among first-generation college students who took more rigorous high school courses, were enrolled full time, and did not work or worked part-time during college (Warburton et al., 2001). First-generation college students who had a larger percentage of loans or unmet financial need in their first year were less likely to persist into the second year (Sherlin, 2002).

Student involvement in the academic environment and social environment of an institution is critical to student persistence and success (Astin, 1984, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Researchers have found first-generation college students to be less involved in the college environment than non-first-generation college students (Billson & Terry, 1982; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Pascarella et al., 2004; Sherlin, 2002). First-generation college students who were involved academically (e.g., interacted with faculty and advisors, participated in academic and career-related activities) during their first year of college were more likely to persist to the second year (Sherlin, 2002). First-generation college students were more involved in the social environment (e.g., interacted with peers, involvement in student organizations) during their first year of college if they lived on campus or had a sibling who attended or was enrolled in college (Sherlin, 2002). First-generation college students were less socially involved if they were female, paid for a large percentage of their college costs with loans, or worked more hours per week than non-first-generation college students (Sherlin, 2002). First-generation college students who were involved in student organizations tended to be involved in fewer groups than their non-first-generation college student

peers (Billson & Terry, 1982). Involvement in extracurricular activities (e.g., campus activities, student organizations, athletic activities) also had a significant and positive effect on the critical thinking and degree plans of first-generation college students in comparison to non-first-generation college students (Pascarella et al., 2004).

Latino/a First-generation College Students

In the 2005 CIRP survey of college freshmen who attended four-year institutions, Latino/a students accounted for the largest percentage of first-generation college students (38.2%) followed by non-U.S. citizens (27.7%) (Saenz et al., 2007). Tornatzky, Cutler, and Lee (2002) explored the experiences of Latino/a students who achieved academic success during their primary and secondary education and subsequently enrolled in college despite having limited income and parental education. Tornatzky et al. found that Latino/a parents who were the first generation in the United States had lower levels of college knowledge than second-generation and third-generation parents. Parents from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds had lower levels of college knowledge than parents from middle- and high-socioeconomic backgrounds (Tornatzky et al., 2002).

Torres et al. (2006) conducted a constructivist grounded theory study to explore the processes that Latino/a first-generation college students used to gain academic information (e.g., classes, transferring, financial aid, careers). Over a three-to-four-year span, Torres et al. interviewed 24 Latino/a first-generation college students who attended four urban, commuter institutions (i.e., three public institutions and one private institution; two institutions were Hispanic-serving, and two were predominantly White). None of the participants' parents graduated from college. Seventeen of the participants were Mexican and the remaining seven identified with Colombian, Cuban, Dominican,

Salvadoran, or Puerto Rican ancestry. Torres et al. identified three themes regarding how Latino/a first-generation college students obtained academic information. First, students did not seek assistance from advisors. Second, information was obtained from peers, pamphlets, or staff with whom they had a personal relationship. Third, students who sought out information in new ways were often prompted to do so as a result of experiencing dissonance. For example, some students who experienced an “academic crisis” (p. 68) contacted an advisor for assistance (Torres et al., 2006). Similar findings were found in the study conducted by Nájera (2007) regarding the anticipated use of campus services and the college experiences of first time first-year students attending a predominantly White, public research university in Maryland. Latina students were significantly more likely to seek counseling for career planning and drugs/alcohol than Latino students (Nájera, 2007). Latino/a first-generation college students were significantly more likely to indicate that they would seek study skills training, career counseling, and drug/alcohol counseling than continuing generation students (Nájera, 2007).

A review of doctoral dissertations uncovered four qualitative studies that focused specifically on the experiences of Latino/a first-generation college students (Cabrera, 1998; Dalpes, 2001; Singer, 2007) and only one study focused solely on Latina first-generation college students (Donovan, 2006). Donovan (2006) conducted a constructivist case study using a Chicana feminist epistemology to explore the meaning that the family of a Mexican female first-generation college student gave to having someone in their family who was the first to go to college. Researchers (Lara, 1992; Rendón 1996) have

also written about their experiences in higher education as Latina first-generation college students.

Role of Family

First-generation college students have been reported to have family and background characteristics associated with attrition (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998) and to be academically and psychologically unprepared for college (Inman & Mayes, 1999). These “new students” to higher education are believed to face unique challenges that could impede their progress towards earning a college degree, which includes needing to balance conflicting obligations associated with being a college student and a member of their family (Hsiao, 1992; London, 1992). More cultural continuity is believed to exist between the homes of majority students and the college environment, which can provide students with a sense of familiarity and security as a result of this congruency (Padilla et al., 1997). Conversely, little cultural continuity reportedly exists between the homes of racial/ethnic minority students and the colleges and universities they attend due to Students of Color having few or no family members who can provide guidance regarding college expectations because they did not attend college (Padilla et al., 1997). A lack of cultural continuity is also believed to exist between the homes and schools of racial/ethnic minority students due to having few role models of the same race or ethnicity in the college environment and fewer resources (i.e., counseling, development of academic skills) invested in them prior to entering college (Padilla et al., 1997). A perceived lack of fit between a student’s needs and interests with those of an institution could contribute to an individual dropping out (Tinto, 1993).

Orbe (2008) indicated that first-generation college students experience tensions as a result of engaging in the “alien culture of the academy” (p. 82) and their home. Similarly, London (1992) described first-generation college students as living “on the margins of two cultures” (pp. 6-7) due to engaging in environments that have differing values. In college, a value is placed on the individual (Orbe, 2008), which can come into conflict with the sense of collectivism associated with Latino/a culture (Harris Canul, 2003). Students who were the first in their family to go to college often experience feelings of guilt and loss as a result of leaving a familiar environment and entering a new environment that requires them to reconcile often conflicting roles as a college student and a member of their family (London, 1989). The feeling of loss experienced by first-generation college students (London, 1989) and college students (Perry, 1978, 1981) in general has been reported to have implications for their future development (Perry, 1978, 1981).

First-generation College Student Identity

Orbe (2004, 2008) explored the saliency of students’ status as first-generation college students to their identity. Thirteen focus group interviews and four individual interviews were conducted over a two-year period with 79 first-generation college students from six institutions in three Midwest states. The sample included 34 European Americans, 29 African Americans, 12 Latinos/as, and 4 Asian Americans. Students’ status as first-generation college students tended to have high-salience, variable-salience, or was not salient to the identities of participants (Orbe, 2004). Individuals who had a highly salient first-generation college student identity thought about being a first-generation college student on a daily basis (Orbe, 2004). Students of Color, students

from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, and nontraditional female students tended to have a highly salient first-generation college student identity, and viewed their status as first-generation college students as a source of motivation, an added pressure, or a reminder of hardships experienced (Orbe, 2004). Students who had a variable-salience first-generation college student identity (e.g., White students from middle to high socioeconomic backgrounds, traditional college-aged students) experienced their first-generation college student identity as situational rather than central to their identities. Students with a variable-salient first-generation college student identity tended to think about their first-generation status during initial experiences on campus and upon graduation (Orbe, 2004). Students whose first-generation college student identity was nonsalient (e.g., traditional college-aged White males) to their identity typically attended institutions where they were surrounded by individuals who had similar backgrounds to their own (Orbe, 2004).

Orbe (2008) explored the tensions that racially/ethnically diverse first-generation college students negotiate as a result of engaging in the distinct environments associated with their home and the university. Orbe presented a framework outlining the six primary tensions that influence the development of a first-generation college student identity. Orbe noted that first-generation college students would experience tensions differently depending on their cultural and personal background.

The development of an identity as a first-generation college student is influenced by the negotiation of tensions associated with having an individual identity and social identity (Orbe, 2008). The individual or independent identity fostered in college often comes into conflict with the value that many families of first-generation college students

and students from diverse backgrounds place on interdependence (Orbe, 2008). Orbe (2008) noted that students from diverse backgrounds (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, nationality) possess a more collectivist culture and will likely experience greater tension. First-generation college students experience tension associated with feeling both similar to and different from family members and individuals within the college environment (Orbe, 2008). A tension is also associated with the stability and change experienced by first-generation college students who “negotiate established and emerging identities” (Orbe, 2008, p. 88), particularly as they engage with family members at home. Certainty and uncertainty are felt by students due to a concern about their ability to balance family and college responsibilities (Orbe, 2008). Advantages and disadvantages create tension due to first-generation college students feeling different from non-first-generation college students on campus and family members at home (Orbe, 2008). Participants also experienced tension as they determined whether or not to be open or closed with family members and others about experiences as first-generation college students (Orbe, 2008).

The studies conducted by Orbe (2004, 2008) provide valuable frameworks that reveal differences in how racially/ethnically diverse students experience being first-generation college students. Orbe (2004, 2008) assists in addressing the need for more research that explores the unique challenges and experiences of first-generation college students from diverse backgrounds (London, 1992). My study on Latina first-generation college students addresses the call for more research and theories that explore the experiences of first-generation college students from specific populations (Orbe, 2008).

Cultural Capital and Cultural Integrity

Research has tended to examine the college experiences of Students of Color from a deficit approach (Padilla et al., 1997; Rendón, 1994) and the retention and persistence of students from a student failure perspective (Padilla et al., 1997). Adopting a cultural integrity perspective (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005) that validates the cultural backgrounds and families of Students of Color has also been found to enhance the academic success of Latinas (Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002).

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital has been a concept used by researchers to help explain the disparities that exist in the academic achievement of children based on their socioeconomic backgrounds (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) questioned the assumption that academic success or failure is due to natural abilities and argued instead that cultural capital and social capital play a role in terms of academic achievement. Cultural capital has been defined as the cultural abilities, skills, and knowledge individuals inherit from their families, which are often associated with their educational background (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital, an additional form of capital, may provide benefits and resources to individuals as a result of social networks that are usually a product of an individual's socioeconomic status and family (Bourdieu, 1986). Individuals can use relationships or social structures to achieve their goals; those that have a large social network have access to a variety of resources as a result of these connections (Coleman, 1988).

Individuals from all socioeconomic backgrounds have some form of cultural capital, but those from middle- and upper-class backgrounds have forms of capital that

are more socially and economically valued (McDonough, 1997; Yosso, 2005). Students who have parents who attended some college tend to have an advantage over first-generation college students in navigating higher education due to having better access to information as well as fiscal and social resources (Saenz et al., 2007). The underrepresentation of Blacks, Latinos/as, and American Indians among high-achieving students has been attributed to differences in average levels of human capital possessed by parents from all socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural differences, disparities in economic resources, and schools not producing large gains in the achievement of diverse children (Miller, 1999). White individuals with a college degree were reported to have advantages over racial/ethnic minority parents and White parents with less schooling as well as racial/ethnic minority parents who possessed a college degree (Miller, 1999). Racial/ethnic minority parents who have a college education were reportedly more likely to have attended undemanding or underresourced schools and to have parents who may not have attended college than White parents who have a college degree (Miller, 1999).

Cultural Integrity

Research using a theoretical framework that does not assume that Students of Color are culturally deficient is needed (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005), particularly since many first-generation college students are persisting and graduating despite experiencing challenges (Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007). Researchers have critiqued the appropriateness of using a cultural capital framework to understand the complex identities of Students of Color and students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). A cultural capital perspective views students as possessing deficiencies in a variety of areas while a cultural

integrity framework affirms the cultural identities of students (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005).

Cultural integrity (Tierney, 1999; Tierney & Jun, 2001; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005) and cultural wealth (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005; Yosso, 2005; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002) are concepts that have been used primarily in the college access literature in order to study the role that culture plays in college preparation programs. A cultural integrity framework values the cultural capital that Students of Color possess and views their cultural identity, home, and communities as assets in educational experiences although this form of cultural capital is not traditionally valued by society (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). A similar concept within K-12 literature, funds of knowledge, has been used to describe the resources, skills, and knowledge Latino/a families possess that can be used by teachers to influence academic and nonacademic outcomes (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Rios-Aguilar, 2010; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). College preparation programs can develop the cultural capital and cultural integrity of low-income urban racial/ethnic minority students so that they can gain access to higher education, particularly among individuals who otherwise would not have had an opportunity to enter higher education (Tierney, 1999; Tierney & Jun, 2001). For example, when the cultural wealth (i.e., ethnic values, customs, traditions, language) of Latina girls was converted into social capital by school personnel and administrators, the academic success of the girls improved and a sense of resiliency and hope was fostered (Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002). Similar models could be adopted within higher education in order to increase the participation and retention of racial/ethnic minority students (Tierney, 1999).

Yosso (2005) identified forms of cultural wealth that Communities of Color possess using a cultural wealth perspective and critical race theory. This approach challenged traditional forms of cultural capital that are usually defined based on White, middle-class values, and wealth (Yosso, 2005). Critical race theory challenges deficit views of Communities of Color as being disadvantaged, “and instead focuses on and learns from the array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrecognized and unacknowledged” (Yosso, 2005, p. 69). A cultural wealth perspective acknowledges the strengths of Communities of Color. Yosso identified six forms of capital that Communities of Color possess, including aspirational capital (sense of resiliency related to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams despite real and perceived barriers), linguistic capital (multiple language and communication skills of Students of Color), familial capital (importance of connection to extended families and community), social capital (network of people and community resources), navigational capital (ability to maneuver through social institutions including those not supportive of Communities of Color), and resistant capital (behaviors and attitudes fostered by Parents of Color that challenge inequalities).

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of literature and research that informed this study of Latina first-generation college students. A review of positive and negative factors in the academic environment and social environment that influence the enrollment and persistence of Latino/a students and first-generation college students was provided. Latino/a racial/ethnic identity development frameworks (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Torres, 1999, 2003) and the model of multiple dimensions of identity development of

college women (Jones, 1997; Jones & McEwen, 2000) were presented in order to better understand possible influences on Latina students' understanding of their identity as a Latina first-generation college student. A discussion of the tensions that influence the development of a first-generation college student identity was also included (Orbe, 2008). Information was provided regarding the important role that families (Vega, 1990; Villarruel, 2000) play in Latino/a culture as well as the influence of Latino/a cultural values on the gender role socialization of Latinas (García et al., 2000; MacDonald & Carrillo, 2009, Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). Finally, a discussion regarding cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and cultural integrity (Tierney, 1999; Tierney & Jun, 2001; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005) frameworks provides insight into perspectives that have dismissed or placed value on the experiences of racial/ethnic minority students. A review of the methodology guiding this study will be reviewed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I outline the epistemological paradigm and research methodology guiding this study. The purpose of the study is discussed, and the research context is described. Sampling strategies, data collection techniques, and data analyses are outlined. The trustworthiness of this study and ethical considerations are also presented.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006) study was to explore Latina students' understanding of their identity as Latina first-generation college students. Latina first-generation college students who attended the University of Maryland were interviewed. Participants self-identified as Latina. Individuals were considered first-generation college students if their parents' educational background did not exceed high school in the U.S. or some postsecondary education outside of the United States, and if a sibling had not preceded them in attending college. The following research questions were explored:

1. For Latina students who are the first in their family to go to college, what is their understanding of being a Latina first-generation college student?
2. What strengths do Latina first-generation college students associate with being a Latina first-generation college student?

A grounded theory of Latina students' identity as a Latina first-generation college student was an outcome of this study.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Qualitative methods have been deemed useful in exploring and describing the experiences of college students, especially when very little is known regarding an area of interest (Brown, Stevens, Troiano, & Schneider, 2002). Thus, qualitative research

methods are particularly appropriate to understanding identity as a Latina first-generation college student. Few qualitative studies focused specifically on Latino/a first-generation college students (Torres et al., 2006) or Latina first-generation college students (Donovan, 2006). The qualitative research methodology used in this study is constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006).

A constructivist grounded theory approach has moved researchers away from positivistic forms of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000, 2003, 2005). Within positivist or objectivist forms of grounded theory the researcher is viewed as an unbiased discoverer of data believed to exist in the world (Charmaz, 2006). Conversely, a constructivist grounded theory approach, similar to many other qualitative approaches, recognizes the role of the researcher and participants in creating meaning of data (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivist grounded theory provides accessible methods because the experiences of individuals are studied in their natural environments from their point of view (Charmaz, 2003). Researchers who operate from a constructivist paradigm acknowledge that reality or knowledge is socially constructed and that the values of researchers play a role in the research process (Charmaz, 2003; Mertens, 2005). The resulting theoretical analysis is the researcher's interpretation of the participants' realities rather than an objective report (Charmaz, 2005). Meaning is created from data as a result of the interaction that occurs between the researcher and participants (Charmaz, 2000, 2003). Temporal, cultural, and structural influences should also be considered during the meaning-making process (Charmaz, 2000, 2003). Researchers attempt to discover what participants define as real and how their own views influence how data are represented.

The researcher influences the research process just as much as participants within constructivist grounded theory. The research process is shaped by the researcher through the development of research questions, the creation of interview questions, the analysis of data, and the resulting theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2003). Constructivist researchers can more accurately capture the lived experiences of participants by taking steps (e.g., paying attention to how an interview is structured, maintaining ongoing involvement with participants) to make individuals feel more comfortable sharing their stories (Charmaz, 2003). Researchers must also listen to the feelings and experiences of participants to determine the spoken and unspoken meaning that individuals give to a particular phenomenon (Charmaz, 2003). Thus, it becomes imperative to remain open to new or richer meanings that emerge from data versus relying on traditional meanings often associated with a particular phenomenon (Crotty, 1998).

Research Context

Included in the description of the research context will be information regarding the University, demographic characteristics of Latino/a undergraduates enrolled, and details about Latino/a-specific campus initiatives. The research site was chosen due to the diversity of the Latina population attending the university and my familiarity with the campus.

University Context

This study occurred at the University of Maryland, a four-year public research university. During the Fall 2008 semester, 36,956 undergraduate, graduate, and professional students were enrolled (Office of Institutional Research, 2008). The undergraduate population consisted of 26,431 students; a larger percentage of male (52%)

versus female (48%) students were enrolled (Office of Institutional Research, 2008). The racial/ethnic diversity of full-time and part-time degree-seeking undergraduate students included the following: 57% White (non-Hispanic); 15% Asian or Pacific Islander; 13% Black (non-Hispanic); 6% Hispanic; .3% American Indian/Alaska Native; 7% Race/Ethnicity Unknown; 2% International (Office of Institutional Research, 2008). In Fall 2008, 41% of undergraduate students lived in college-owned, -operated, or -affiliated housing and 59% lived off campus (Office of Institutional Research, 2008). The average age of full-time degree-seeking undergraduates was 20 years old (Office of Institutional Research, 2008).

The University mission lists as one of its goals the following diversity-related objective and outcome:

Ensure a university environment that is inclusive as well as diverse and that fosters a spirit of community among faculty, staff, and students by increasing the diversity of its faculty and staff; by recruiting outstanding and diverse graduate and undergraduate students; by improving the graduation rate of ethnic minority students; and by building a greater sense of community among faculty, staff, students, and alumni. (University of Maryland, 2000, para. 10)

A campus website noted that the university is known nationally and internationally for its equity and diversity initiatives (Office of Human Relations Programs, n.d.). The University offers several diversity resources and initiatives, including a multicultural programming and advocacy office, an office focused on recruiting and retaining diverse graduate students, cultural and academic support services, academic programs (e.g., Afro-American Studies, LGBT Studies, Maryland Institute for Minority Achievement

and Urban Education), a diversity course requirement, and a university council for equity and diversity (University of Maryland, n.d.).

Latino/a Campus Resources

Prominent campus resources that have a Latino/a focus are present at the University. The activism of a Latino/a student organization during Spring 2005 influenced the creation of a full-time Latino/a coordinator position, which was filled in Fall 2005 (Butler, 2005). The Latino/a coordinator position was created due in part to frustrations expressed by students at town hall meetings regarding the lack of resources for Latino/a students, who were cited as often being first-generation college students and the first generation in the United States (Butler, 2005). The Latino/a coordinator reported to a student activities office, but the reporting line moved to a newly created multicultural programming and advocacy office in Spring 2006; both offices were in the Division of Student Affairs. Prior to Fall 2005, a Latino/a part-time graduate assistant position in a student activities office facilitated programs and advocated for Latino/a students. Two graduate assistants also provided support for Black and Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender students. A full-time coordinator and graduate assistant offered support services and programs for Asian Pacific American students. The University has 10 active Latino/a-based student organizations, including four undergraduate organizations, two Latino fraternities, two Latina sororities, and two Latino/a graduate organizations. The four undergraduate organizations include a Latino/a student newspaper (La Voz), a Latino/a student association (Latino Student Union), the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, and a group consisting of representatives

from Latino/a student organizations who coordinate Hispanic Heritage Month events (Hispanic Heritage Month Coalition).

The University offers curricular options that have a Latino/a focus. A U.S. Latina/o Studies course focused on the experiences of Latinos/as in the United States was offered in Fall 2007; two courses were available during the Spring 2008 semester (American Studies, n.d.; Butler, 2005). U.S. Latina/o Studies courses were offered on a two-year trial in order to explore the possibility of developing a U.S. Latina/o Studies Program and Minor (Hernandez, 2009). A proposal submitted by faculty members to establish a Latina/o Studies Program and Minor was denied by university administrators; however, student activism during Spring 2008 resulted in the approval of the Program and Minor (Hernandez, 2009). An undergraduate certificate is available through Latin American Studies. Since 2004, a Latino/a leadership course has been offered each spring by the College of Education in collaboration with an office in student affairs that offers curricular and co-curricular leadership experiences and a multicultural programming and advocacy office.

Since 2005, spearheaded by a Latino doctoral student, the Office of the Provost has organized an annual Latino/a graduation ceremony to recognize graduating Latino/a undergraduate and graduate students. It is also important to note that, during the summer of 2007, a Latina administrator who worked in an academic affairs unit with the mission of offering services and programming to support the academic needs of underrepresented students passed away. She was the only full-time Latina administrator in that office and worked closely with the Latino/a community on and off campus. A few other faculty and

staff, including a Latina faculty member, have played a significant role in supporting Latino/a students.

Latino/a Students at the University

In the Fall 2008 semester, Latino/a students accounted for 6% of the full-time and part-time degree-seeking undergraduate population at the University of Maryland (Institutional Research Planning & Assessment, 2008). A higher percentage of Latina (55%) students than Latino (45%) students were enrolled (Institutional Research Planning & Assessment, 2008). Latino/a first-time first-year students entering the institution in the Fall 2004 semester had lower retention and graduation rates in comparison to their peers. In Fall 2004, Latino/a students had a retention and graduation rate of 52% after four years, 72% after five years, and 75% after six years in comparison to the 63% four-year, 79% five-year, and 82% six-year rates for all undergraduate students (Institutional Research Planning & Assessment, n.d.). Latina students had much higher retention and graduation rates after four years (63%), five years (82%), and six years (84%) than the Latino four-year (38%), five-year (61%), and six-year (64%) rates (Institutional Research Planning & Assessment, n.d.).

The University does not collect data regarding the ethnic background of Latino/a students enrolled at the institution. However, a survey is administered to a sample of incoming first-year students that asks Latino/a participants to report their ethnic background. Prior to the beginning of the Fall 2006 semester, 249 (8.2%) of the 3041 students in the sample identified as Hispanic/Latino/Chicano (Risco, 2007b). The Hispanic/Latino/Chicano respondents reported having a full or partial association with the following countries: 21 South America (e.g., Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Argentina),

22 Puerto Rico, 12 Central America (e.g., El Salvador, Panama, Guatemala), 9 Cuba, 6 Mexico, 3 Dominican Republic (Risco, 2007a). These data may not be representative of the campus population, but provide some contextual information regarding the ethnic background of Latino/a students enrolled at the University.

Surrounding Geographic Area

The University of Maryland is located in College Park, MD, which is a part of the diverse Washington, DC metropolitan area. Less than one mile from the University is Langley Park, MD, a neighborhood primarily comprised of Latino/a immigrants from Central America (Hanna, 2003). In Maryland, Central Americans (24.6%), Mexicans (17.5%), and South Americans (11.3%) were the three largest Latino/a groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b). Among Central Americans, groups with a Salvadoran (15.1%), Guatemalan (3.6%), and Honduran (1.8%) background had the three highest percentages (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b). Peruvians (2.8%), Colombians (2.3%), and Bolivians (1.3%) were the three largest groups among South Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b). The ethnic diversity of the Latino/a population in the geographic area (i.e., District of Columbia, Virginia) identified as primarily Central American, Mexican, and South American; a large percentage of Puerto Ricans also resided in Virginia (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a, 2000c).

Sampling

Purposeful sampling strategies are used in qualitative studies in order to sample for information-rich cases that might be appropriate in terms of shedding light on a phenomenon of interest (Jones et al., 2006). Sampling evolves during the research process as a result of engaging in data collection and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The sampling criteria and theoretical sampling procedures that guided this study will be introduced.

Sampling Criteria

The sampling criteria guided the selection of participants who could provide a deeper understanding of Latina students' experiences as Latina first-generation college students. Sampling criteria included the selection of Latina full-time undergraduate students who identified as first-generation college students. Female students who self-identified as Latina were eligible to participate in the study. First-generation college students eligible to participate included individuals whose parents' educational background did not exceed high school in the U.S. or some postsecondary education outside of the United States, and if a sibling had not preceded them in attending college.

When data collection began, I was open to interviewing Latino men and Latina women. Few of the Latino men who expressed interest in the study met the definition of a first-generation college student. One of the three Latino men who completed an interest form met the sampling criteria. Two of the Latino students were not considered first-generation college students because they had a sibling who preceded them in attending college. In keeping with purposeful sampling strategies, I decided to focus on Latina women in order to explore information-rich cases (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006; Patton, 2002), which would allow for an in-depth exploration of participants' understanding of being a Latina first-generation college student.

The rising number of Latinas, in comparison to Latinos, attending institutions of higher education and the lack of research that considers parental education completed outside of the United States deserved exploration. The decision to consider students with

a parent who attended some postsecondary education outside of the United States as first-generation college students was informed, in part, by the pilot interviews. Two of the three individuals who participated in a pilot interview had a parent who pursued educational experiences (i.e., some college, attended culinary school) in the United States after high school. There were similarities in how the three students spoke about their experiences as Latino/a first-generation college students, which included being unable to receive assistance from their parents in understanding college processes. Based on the pilot interviews, it seemed appropriate to explore the experiences of students with a parent who attended some postsecondary education outside of the United States as first-generation college students. A more inclusive definition of a first-generation college student is considered through the inclusion of participants with a parent who attended some postsecondary education outside of the United States. The majority of the students' parents completed their educational experiences in a Latin American country, which included four parents who attended or completed a certificate at a vocational school.

Sample Size

Qualitative studies usually involve small sample sizes that have been purposefully selected (Patton, 2002). Selecting a purposeful sample allows for in-depth exploration of a particular phenomenon through the selection of information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). Sampling decisions should be guided by the methodological approach and purpose of a study (Jones et al., 2006). The selection of 10 to 12 Latinas was anticipated due to the sample size that has proven adequate for other grounded theory studies involving college students. Brown Leonard (2007) explored the experiences of 10 college students with integrative learning. Stevens (2004) explored the gay identity development of 11 gay

male college students. Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005) conducted a study focused on the leadership identity development of 13 college students. Twelve Latina students participated in this study.

Sampling Strategies

Criterion and maximum variation sampling strategies were used to identify participants. Criterion sampling involved the selection of students who met criteria identified as important prior to the start of the study (Patton, 2002). The common selection criteria shared by all of the participants was their self-identification as full-time Latina college students who also met my definition of a first-generation college student. Maximum variation sampling was also employed in order to identify participants who possessed diverse characteristics and criteria in an effort to better understand similarities and differences that might emerge within the sample (Patton, 2002). Efforts were made to maximize the variation within the sample by selecting individuals who could provide a comprehensive picture of diverse experiences and perspectives that may have been influenced by their race/ethnicity, year in college, living situation (i.e., on-campus, off-campus, off-campus with family), and transfer student status.

Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling strategies are typically used in grounded theory studies (Charmaz, 2003; Fassinger, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and guided sampling decisions. Sampling decisions were made using theoretical sampling in order to further develop conceptual themes (Charmaz, 2006) and to address any gaps in the emerging theory through the use of constant comparisons (Charmaz, 2000, 2003, 2006). In keeping with theoretical sampling procedures, sampling decisions were made while data analysis

was being conducted (Fassinger, 2005). Theoretical sampling strategies challenge researchers to question their interpretations of the data throughout the research process by incorporating diverse perspectives that are important to the development of the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It has been recommended that theoretical sampling occur later in a study to allow the data and theory to emerge without being forced or closing data analysis too early (Charmaz, 2000, 2003). Theoretical sampling guards against oversampling (Fassinger, 2005) and concludes when saturation has been reached or no new insights emerge from further data collection (Charmaz, 2006; Fassinger, 2005).

Sampling decisions were also guided by coding procedures (i.e., open coding and selective or focused coding) used in this study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Sampling was open to students who could provide an in-depth understanding of being a Latina first-generation college student because theoretically relevant concepts that might guide sampling decisions had not yet emerged (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Sampling ended when theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2006; Jones et al., 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) or redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was reached. Theoretical saturation occurs when “no new or relevant data seem to emerge” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 212). Preliminary conceptual themes began to emerge during the first interview and continued to take shape as data collection proceeded.

Participant Recruitment

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval, Latino/a students were invited to participate in the study via an email invitation (Appendix A). Students were invited to participate primarily through four methods. First, email invitations were sent to an on-campus Latino/a listserv containing the names of more than 250 Latino/a

students, faculty, and staff. The email announcement was also sent to several Latino/a-based student organization listservs. Second, specific faculty members, staff, and graduate students who worked closely with Latino/a students were sent a flyer and an email containing information about the study. Snowball sampling strategies (Mertens, 2005) were employed because individuals were asked to share information regarding the study with Latino/a students who might fit the sampling criteria. At least one Latina faculty member announced the study in a Latino/a-focused class that she taught. A Latino staff person was instrumental in publicizing the study to Latino/a students via listservs and a social networking site (i.e., Facebook). His assistance in publicizing the study was valuable due to his association with the Latino/a community at the University for over 12 years as an undergraduate student, master's student, and full-time employee. A staff member who worked in an office that offered a peer mentoring program for Latino/a first-year students was also asked to disseminate information about the study. Third, flyers announcing the study were posted in offices (e.g., academic support office for minority students) and buildings (e.g., building that housed the Spanish department) that received a lot of Latino/a student traffic. Fourth, I announced the study during a Latino/a leadership course and a Latino/a student organization meeting. As an incentive to participate in the study, students were given \$25 after participating in the first interview and an additional \$25 after completing the final interview.

Individuals who expressed interest in participating in the study were asked to complete an interest form (Appendix B) in order to obtain demographic information that would be used to make sampling decisions. All of the students, with the exception of one, chose to complete an online version of the interest form versus a paper copy.

Twenty-two students, which included 17 women and 5 men, expressed interest in participating in the study. Of the 22 students who expressed interest in the study, 16 women and 3 men completed an interest form. Two of the men did not meet the sampling criteria due to having a sibling who preceded them in attending college. Latina students who met the sampling criteria were contacted to schedule an interview.

Data Sources and Collection

Grounded theory provides strategies that can be used to analyze data, but does not specify methods for collecting data (Charmaz, 2000, 2003). The primary source of data was collected from interviews. In addition, the participants were asked to submit and discuss the meaning of an artifact that had significance for them as Latina first-generation college students. Strategies adopted in order to develop rapport with participants are also described.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 Latina first-generation college students. The semi-structured format supported the interviewing approach most commonly used in grounded theory studies (Fassinger, 2005). A semi-structured interview format provided some structure in terms of the organization and presentation of questions, but enabled me to ask participants open-ended questions to obtain further clarification (Fassinger, 2005). Prior to beginning the study, the following individuals were asked to review and provide feedback on the interview questions: a Chicana first-generation college student who graduated with a master's degree in college student personnel, an African American woman with a doctoral degree in school psychology who also served as the inquiry auditor, and a male doctoral student in a college student

personnel program who identified as a Dominican and Puerto Rican first-generation college student.

In keeping with suggestions regarding the development of interview questions for a grounded theory study, questions were initially developed based on concepts deemed important through a review of the literature, my experience, and preliminary fieldwork (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The interview protocol (Appendix C) guided data collection. The interview protocol was pilot tested with a Latino master's student who identified as Mexican American and two Latinas who received undergraduate degrees the previous year from the University; one of the Latinas identified as Puerto Rican and the other as Peruvian. Two of the pilot interviews were conducted in-person; the third interview, with the Puerto Rican alumna, was conducted over the phone because she lived in another state. The pilot interviews allowed me to get feedback on the interview protocol from Latinos/as who identified as first-generation college students. The three individuals who participated in the pilot interviews seemed to have a similar understanding of being Latino/a first-generation college students.

The first interview with participants included questions that allowed me to get acquainted with the students (e.g., major, ethnicity) and to learn about their family (e.g., family composition, parents' educational background). Also explored during the first interview were the participants' paths into higher education, what it meant for the students to be the first in their family to attend college, and their experiences as Latina first-generation college students in the academic and social environments of the University. During the second interview, participants were asked when they were most aware of being a Latina first-generation college student, what being a Latina first-

generation college student represented for them, the strengths associated with being a Latina first-generation college student, and the individuals and factors that contributed to their success. In addition, participants were invited to share and discuss the significance of an artifact that had meaning for them as Latina first-generation college students. The focus of the follow-up interview was to obtain feedback from the students regarding the preliminary conceptual themes that emerged from the study.

The Latina students were interviewed twice over a span of two months, in April and May 2008. Participant selection ended and interviews concluded when redundancy was reached (Brown et al., 2002). The duration of each interview was between 60-90 minutes. Interviewing the students multiple times gave me a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2005).

The interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed by the researcher or a transcriptionist. I transcribed the initial eight interviews. Three individuals transcribed the remaining interviews. One transcriptionist transcribed 12 digital files and the seven follow-up interviews. Another person transcribed three interviews. A third transcriptionist transcribed one interview. Digital files were sent to the transcriptionists via email. The transcriptionists returned completed transcripts to me via email. After transcribing an interview or receiving a transcription, I listened to each digital recording and read the corresponding transcription to ensure that the interviews were captured accurately; any errors were corrected.

A transcription of each interview was sent to the participants via email approximately one week after an interview occurred so that the students could review, verify the accuracy of the transcripts, and offer any clarifications. A hard copy of the

first interview transcript was sent to one participant who preferred to receive the document via campus mail. Students were asked to send any edits to me, via email or campus mail, within a week of receiving the transcript. Each participant was given an additional opportunity to provide edits or further clarifications verbally during the second interview. All of the students provided feedback regarding the first transcript; seven sent comments via email and five shared observations during the second interview. Five students provided comments on the second interview transcript via email. Everyone provided feedback via email regarding her participant profile. Students confirmed the accuracy of the transcript or profile, addressed questions that I raised (e.g., confirmed distance of family home from the University, clarified inaudible remarks, elaborated on a particular experience), and provided comments (e.g., additional details, minor edits) based on their review of materials.

An invitation was extended to the students to participate in an optional individual interview towards the end of the study to provide feedback on the preliminary themes that emerged from the study (Brown et al., 2002). Participants were asked to comment on each theme, including whether they thought the themes applied to them and their experiences as Latina first-generation college students. I also asked the students to provide recommendations regarding descriptions of the themes. Seven students participated in a follow-up individual interview approximately one year after data collection began. Five follow-up interviews took place in-person and two were conducted over the phone due to scheduling conflicts.

Artifacts from Participants

Grounded theory studies frequently rely solely upon interview data; however, this approach can limit the development of theory (Charmaz, 2005). Participants were asked to share an artifact that had meaning for them as a Latina first-generation college student during the second interview. Inviting the Latina participants to submit an artifact provided another data source and an additional outlet for the students to express themselves. Students were reminded via email to bring an artifact to the second interview. All of the participants shared at least one artifact; four students brought multiple items. A few individuals also commented on other items that they considered bringing to the interview. Five students discussed the significance of one or more pictures of family members (e.g., mother, siblings, cousins). Two participants played a song. Other artifacts included a flag representing the participant's parents' home country, a sweatshirt for a Latina sorority, a diary, a graduate school application, a college transcript, a skirt worn as a member of a Bolivian dance group, and a book used by the mother of a participant to teach her how to read and write in Spanish as a child.

The Latina participants noted that the artifacts were a source of motivation and pride. The majority of the artifacts reminded the students of the sacrifice, hard work, and support of their parents. Most of the items served as reminders of where the students and their parents started and where the participants and their family were now. The Latina participants had an awareness and appreciation for their parents' journey, particularly emigrating from their home country to the United States. The students felt that they were able to attend college and achieve success due to the sacrifice of their parents. Other artifacts were described as representing a connection to their culture and "roots" (e.g., a

song, pictures, book used as a child to learn how to read and write in Spanish). The artifacts of two students highlighted personal achievements, which they felt were a reflection of their hard work (i.e., unofficial grade transcript, graduate school application), and for one participant, a source of pride because she achieved her parents' wishes. For one participant, a diary represented the "façade" that she had to present to family members, professors, and peers who did not understand her experiences as a Latina first-generation college student.

Rapport Building

Patton (2002) noted the importance of establishing rapport while at the same time maintaining neutrality so that participants feel comfortable, and not judged, sharing their perspective. Rapport and trust can be developed by asking good questions (Jones et al., 2006). Attention was given to the development and ordering of interview questions. Questions that seemed to have lower risk were asked first, followed by inquiries that might be perceived as involving more risk. Consideration was also given to moments of silence that arose during the interviews. Attempting to understand the meaning behind moments of silence can inform the development of conceptual themes and the grounded theory, particularly if the silence of participants suggests a lack of understanding or awareness, an inability to express thoughts or feelings, or power dynamics (Charmaz, 2005). In order to develop rapport and trust, interviews were held in a private location that proved safe and convenient for the students (Jones et al., 2006).

Data Analysis

The goal of grounded theory is to develop a theory that has been grounded in data. Theory development begins with the coding of data (Charmaz, 2003). The coding

strategies used to analyze the data will be discussed in addition to the role that memo writing, triangulation, and theoretical sensitivity played in the analysis of data.

Coding Strategies

Coding strategies enable researchers to make meaning of narrative data (Fassinger, 2005). Coding within grounded theory involves asking questions of the data in order to better understand the phenomenon being studied (Charmaz, 2006). Data analysis was conducted using open and selective coding strategies. The coding strategies used for this study were guided by the work of Charmaz (2000, 2003, 2005, 2006) and informed by Fassinger (2005) and Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998).

Open coding. Within open or initial coding, the researcher is open to any theoretical insights that might emerge from the data (Charmaz, 2006). I read and reviewed each transcript prior to beginning open coding. Open coding began with line-by-line coding (Charmaz, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Each line of the interview transcripts was coded. Each word, phrase, or sentence was coded into a concept that best represented the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Coding each line of the data ensured that I adhered to the meaning that participants gave to data versus applying my own beliefs or biases (Charmaz, 2000, 2003, 2006). Line-by-line coding also facilitated the use of theoretical sensitivity (Charmaz, 2005). Close interaction with the data provided guidance regarding additional areas needing further exploration (Charmaz, 2000, 2003, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Charmaz (2006) offered the following suggestions with regards to engaging in open coding:

1. Remain open
2. Stay close to the data

3. Keep your codes simple and precise
4. Construct short codes
5. Preserve actions
6. Compare data with data
7. Move quickly through the data. (p. 49)

In most cases, initial codes were developed using the actual words of participants in an effort to ensure that the codes were grounded in the data. *In vivo* codes, that is, codes that represent the actual words or meaning of a participant (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), were used. Charmaz (2006) encouraged the use of gerunds because focusing on the actions and processes of individuals gives insight into the meaning that these experiences have for participants (Charmaz, 2005). Identifying actions and processes can be facilitated by asking questions of the data, such as what, how, and when (Charmaz, 2006). Constant comparisons of the data were made in order to discover similarities and differences that exist, including comments made by a participant within a particular interview (Charmaz, 2006).

Data became conceptualized versus summarized as questions were asked of the data and constant comparisons were made (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The conceptual codes that emerged from line-by-line coding were typed into a table that contained two columns, one column included the interview data and the other the concepts to ensure that the conceptual themes and emerging theory were grounded in the data. My analysis of the data produced 914 initial codes.

Selective coding. Selective or focused coding enabled me as the researcher to check the fit between initial codes, conceptual themes, and the emerging theory (Charmaz, 2003). This phase of the coding process built upon the first phase, open coding, to conceptualize large sections of data (Charmaz, 2006). Concepts developed

during open coding were grouped into themes that were named as a result of making constant comparisons (Jones et al., 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Conceptual themes were developed based on a review of codes and memos. Memos aided the analysis process due to writing about the data, codes, conceptual themes, and reflections or questions that emerged while analyzing the data (Charmaz, 2006).

Concepts are a significant phenomenon, issue, or event (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Concepts were considered provisional (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) until they could be further refined through additional data collection and the making of constant comparisons. Constant comparisons were made between the data and conceptual themes to ensure that the emerging theory was grounded in the data (Fassinger, 2005). The grounded theory was developed as a result of the data analysis process, which included a review of memos and coded transcripts.

My analysis of the 914 initial codes produced 24 preliminary conceptual themes. Preliminary conceptual themes, which represented significant and frequently cited themes from the data, began to emerge from memos written during data collection and data analysis. Initial codes that were more descriptive in nature (e.g., demographic information about participants, specifics about family composition) were eliminated, as well as any duplicate codes. The initial codes were sorted and grouped under themes that emerged from the data. Asking questions of the data and making constant comparisons aided in identifying the preliminary conceptual themes. The 24 preliminary conceptual themes tended to cluster into 13 major themes and 11 subthemes. The major themes that contained subthemes served as organizing frameworks or umbrella terms. The name of a major theme and accompanying subthemes were descriptive of conceptual themes that

tended to cluster together to describe a particular phenomenon. The major themes and subthemes assist in conveying participants' understanding of being Latina first-generation college students as well as the strengths associated with being a Latina first-generation college student.

The conceptual themes were shared with the peer debriefers and the seven students who participated in follow-up interviews. In alignment with the emerging process of coding (Charmaz, 2006), a few of the preliminary conceptual themes were further refined and reconceptualized as a result of feedback from participants and the peer debriefers. Feedback received from the participants and peer debriefers assisted me in more accurately conceptualizing and conveying the themes. For example, navigating two worlds became navigating multiple worlds due to feedback received from participants during the follow-up interviews. The majority of the 24 preliminary conceptual themes remained relatively unchanged; however, changes occurred to how some of the themes and subthemes were clustered. Eighteen conceptual themes, which consisted of 6 major themes and 12 subthemes, addressed the first research question about Latina students' understanding of being a Latina first-generation college student. Six conceptual themes were descriptive of the second research question, which explored the strengths that participants associated with being Latina first-generation college students.

Memo Writing

Within grounded theory, data analysis usually begins early through the writing of memos. Writing memos can help a researcher sort data and explore codes (Charmaz, 2003). Memo-writing can also assist with documenting and accelerating the analysis

process (Charmaz, 2006). The writing of memos can guide future decisions regarding data collection and can help in identifying gaps in the analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

Focusing on actions and processes as well as unstated assumptions (Charmaz, 2006) and unspoken meanings (Charmaz, 2000, 2003) regarding concepts in memos can assist in better understanding an emerging conceptual theme. Memos were written after each interview and during open and selective coding. Memos were dated and written in an informal manner in order to record observations, reflections, or questions that emerged while analyzing the data. Each memo included a title as well as raw data in an effort to further define the codes being explored (Charmaz, 2006). Memos were also written about constant comparisons made between data from the same participant at different points, codes with other codes, conceptual themes with other conceptual themes, and conceptual themes with new data in order to further define the conceptual themes (Charmaz, 2006). Reading and sorting the memos informed the development of conceptual themes and the grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998).

Triangulation

Triangulation can strengthen a study and deepen the understanding of a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The trustworthiness of a study can be enhanced through the use of triangulation, which assists in authenticating the findings (Jones et al., 2006). Patton (1990) identified four types of triangulation: methods triangulation, triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation, theory/perspective triangulation. Aspects of two approaches, triangulation of sources and analyst triangulation, were used in this study.

In addition to participating in interviews, students were asked to submit an artifact, an additional source of data. The artifact allowed participants to share an item that had meaning for them as Latina first-generation college students. Each participant shared at least one artifact. Data from the interviews and artifacts informed the development of conceptual themes and the grounded theory.

In support of analyst triangulation, participants were asked to provide feedback on the accuracy of the findings and interpretations made by the researcher through the use of member-checking (Jones et al., 2006). Participants had an opportunity to clarify or correct their interview transcripts and were invited to provide feedback on preliminary conceptual themes by participating in an optional individual interview approximately one year after data collection began. Seven of the 12 students participated in a follow-up individual interview. Five face-to-face interviews were conducted in April 2009, and two phone interviews occurred in June 2009.

Theoretical Sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity assists researchers in making meaning of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Theoretical sensitivity is informed by prior reading, experiences, and the analysis process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In order to achieve theoretical sensitivity, the researcher must be open to what emerges from the data and avoid entering the research process with preconceived ideas regarding the data (Glaser, 1978). My knowledge of the literature, professional and personal experiences, and engagement in the analytic process informed my theoretical sensitivity.

Literature. My knowledge of literature regarding Latino/a students and first-generation college students assisted me in making meaning of the data. As a graduate

student and student affairs professional, I have read an extensive amount of literature regarding Latino/a students and first-generation college students. I have also explored in greater depth topics related to the higher education experiences of Latino/a first-generation college students through the writing of research papers. The limited number of studies (Donovan, 2006) and personal narratives (Lara, 1992; Rendón 1996) that focused specifically on Latina first-generation college students underscored the importance of remaining open to whatever emerged from the data. An awareness of literature provides points of comparison through which the grounded theory can be viewed and judgments can be made regarding how each might inform the other (Charmaz, 2006).

Professional experience. My professional experiences also contributed to my theoretical sensitivity. I have worked with Latino/a students and first-generation college students through several full-time professional positions, graduate assistantships, and paraprofessional roles at diverse institutional types located in the Midwest, on the east coast, and in the mid-Atlantic. Particularly salient experiences that added to my theoretical sensitivity included serving as the director of a Latino/a residential program house, advising Latino/a student organizations, co-teaching a Latino/a leadership course, and serving as an informal campus resource for the Latino/a community. I have also worked with three summer academic programs designed to support and prepare underrepresented racial/ethnic minority students and first-generation college students to enter higher education. Working at research universities, an Ivy League institution, commuter campuses, and residential campuses has sensitized me to the unique

experiences of Latina first-generation college students from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds and geographic locations.

My sensitivity to issues of class, gender, race, and power allowed me to be attuned to these dynamics during data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). My involvement for over two and a half years on a research team that explored the college access, experiences, and success of Latino/a students at the University of Maryland sensitized me to the experiences of Latino/a students in the mid-Atlantic region. These experiences informed my perspective as I engaged in data analysis. However, data were coded using the words and meaning of the participants to ensure that the emerging theoretical framework was grounded in the data. The use of member-checking, peer debriefers, and an inquiry auditor further supported the trustworthiness of this study.

Personal experience. My experiences as a Mexican-American first-generation college student assisted me in understanding the meaning that Latina first-generation college students gave to being Latina first-generation college students. Experiences that I have had as a Latina first-generation college student who entered and navigated through an undergraduate, master's, and doctoral program provided valuable perspectives that added to my theoretical sensitivity. I was also aware of geographic distinctions and the racial/ethnic diversity of Latina students at the research site, which differed in some respects from those of my own experience. The Latino/a students enrolled at the research site primarily identified as Central and South American. My previous work with Latino/a students (e.g., Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Cuban) never involved a critical mass of students from Central and South America. My association with the University of Maryland for approximately five years sensitized me to the unique

experiences of Central and South American students in the mid-Atlantic region. However, any biases or assumptions that I may have carried into the research process were challenged as a result of this theoretical sensitivity, but also due to involving racially/ethnically diverse individuals in the study (e.g., pilot interviews, peer debriefers, inquiry auditor). The inquiry auditor and peer debriefers were asked to question any biases or assumptions that I may have made during data analysis and ensured that the emerging theory was grounded in the experiences of the participants. The diverse perspectives and experiences of these individuals assisted me in making meaning of the data.

Analytical process. Involvement in the analytical process and becoming immersed in the data can contribute to an increased understanding of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Strauss and Corbin (1990) discussed four techniques that can be used by researchers to enhance theoretical sensitivity: (a) questioning the data with a series of general (e.g., who, when, where, what, how, why) and temporal (e.g., frequency, duration, rate, timing) questions; (b) analyzing a word, phrase, or sentence to explore its possible meanings; (c) making constant comparisons; and (d) questioning the use of “never” and “always.” Gerunds were used in order to focus on processes versus offering descriptive accounts of individuals (Charmaz, 2006). These techniques assisted with data collection and analysis, and proved helpful in questioning my assumptions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Writing in a journal allowed me to reflect on questions that emerged while engaging in the research process. Methodological decisions were also documented in the journal.

Trustworthiness

The quality of a qualitative study can be evaluated based on its trustworthiness, which requires that the researcher take steps to ensure “continuity and congruence” (Jones et al., 2006, p. 99) throughout the study. In qualitative research, determining the trustworthiness of a study is associated with the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability must be met in a qualitative study in order for an individual to have confidence in the findings and for the study to be considered trustworthy. A reflexive journal is also believed to assist in establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Methodological decisions were documented in a journal throughout the research process. Writing in a journal allowed me to reflect on my role as the researcher and interpretations that I made throughout the research process. Additionally, writing in a journal allowed me to become more aware of my biases.

Credibility

The credibility of a qualitative study relates to the extent to which there is agreement between the perspectives offered by participants and the interpretations of the researcher (Mertens, 2005). Multiple strategies can be used to demonstrate the credibility of a study’s findings and interpretations, including prolonged engagement with the research site and participants, triangulation, peer debriefers, and member checking strategies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2005). Prolonged engagement occurred with the students through two interviews that took place over a span of two months and through a follow-up individual interview. All participants shared an artifact (e.g., picture,

song) during the second interview that had special meaning for them as Latina first-generation college students. The artifacts provided an additional data source that was considered in conjunction with the interview data. Feedback was received regarding the preliminary conceptual themes from seven students who were available to participate in a follow-up interview approximately one year after data collection. Data were triangulated in order to compare data received at different times using multiple qualitative methods (Patton, 1990).

Peer debriefers can add to the credibility of a study by providing an “external check” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301) of the research process. Two Latina doctoral students served as peer debriefers. One of the peer debriefers identified as Mexican-American and was born in the United States. The other peer debriefer identified as Salvadoran, earned two undergraduate degrees from the research site in December 2002, and immigrated to the United States, more specifically, the Washington, DC area, when she was seven years old. Both individuals identified as first-generation college students.

I met with the peer debriefers at least two times over the duration of the study, and we communicated on several occasions via email and telephone. An initial joint meeting was held with the peer debriefers in order to share information about the study, participants, and expectations regarding their role. Electronic copies of the transcripts were sent to the peer debriefers. The peer debriefers read the transcripts in order to develop a level of understanding of the data that would allow them to ask questions of me about decisions made during data analysis to ensure that the findings were grounded in the experiences of the participants. In June 2009, I met with the peer debriefers individually in order to discuss the preliminary conceptual themes that emerged from the

study. The peer debriefers also reviewed and provided feedback on Chapter IV, the grounded theory, the visual representation, and Chapter V via additional individual meetings, phone conversations, or email. Based on the feedback received, I posed questions to the peer debriefers or provided further clarification.

The peer debriefers raised questions regarding my interpretations in order to ensure that my findings were grounded in the data. For example, one of the peer debriefers questioned the appropriateness of the metaphor, navigating multiple worlds, to describe the grounded theory of Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students. She questioned whether navigating two worlds was more appropriate based on the data. This was a reasonable question, particularly because I initially entitled the metaphor, navigating two worlds. However, participants during each of the follow-up interviews provided feedback that indicated that "multiple" was more appropriate than "two" because they engaged with family members, but also different campus communities. The peer debriefers also offered advice regarding other possible names for conceptual themes, based on their understanding of the data. For example, we discussed whether "exploring" or "developing" seemed appropriate for the conceptual theme entitled developing a deeper understanding of being Latina.

The peer debriefers raised good questions in their review of Chapter IV, which prompted me to refer back to the data on a couple of occasions to ensure that I represented the experiences of the participants accurately. For example, one of the peer debriefers questioned whether all of the students expressed a desire to become involved in the Latino/a community, including a student who, she recalled, seemed uninterested in

doing so. During the first interview, the student did not discuss being involved in the Latino/a community, but she did during the second interview.

Involving participants in member checking is crucial (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and one of the most important (Mertens, 2005) steps to enhancing the credibility of a study. Conducting member checks with participants in formal and informal ways allowed me to verify my interpretations of the data that were collected and analyzed (Mertens, 2005). Participants were involved in two forms of member checking. First, participants were sent a copy of their transcribed interview approximately one week after each interview in order to review the document and offer any corrections or clarifications. Second, students were invited to participate in an optional individual interview in order to provide feedback on the preliminary themes. I also conducted an informal member check during interviews by asking participants to clarify or expound upon particular responses or questions.

Participants provided valuable feedback throughout the research process. An example was already shared about feedback received from participants during follow-up interviews regarding the metaphor navigating multiple worlds. An additional example from the follow-up interviews included a discussion regarding the important role that the participants' mothers played in their lives as Latina first-generation college students. Two of the seven students who participated in a follow-up interview felt that their parents played equally important roles. However, I shared with the students that they primarily provided examples during the interviews regarding support from their mothers. During the follow-up interview, the two participants indicated that both were true, the influential

role of their mothers and fathers. The influential role that mothers played in the lives of the students emerged as a theme for the majority, if not all, of the students.

Transferability

Within qualitative research, it is important to present data in the form of thick description so that the transferability of a study can be assessed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2005). Transferability can be determined by providing a thick description or detailed explanation of the time, location, context, and culture associated with a research site so that an individual can determine how similar one site might be with another (Mertens, 2005). The research setting, participants, methodology, and grounded theory are described in detail so that readers can determine the transferability of the study. Direct quotes are also provided to further describe conceptual themes.

Dependability

Dependability within a qualitative study is similar to reliability in a quantitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability audits can “attest to the quality and appropriateness of the inquiry process” (Mertens, 2005, p. 257). The dependability of a study can be enhanced by involving an inquiry auditor in the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mertens, 2005). An inquiry auditor can attest to the accuracy of the results by reviewing all coding materials to determine if the findings were grounded in the data. An inquiry auditor can also establish confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Additional details regarding the inquiry auditor in this study will be discussed in the next section.

Confirmability

A confirmability audit and dependability audit can be conducted concurrently (Mertens, 2005). An inquiry auditor can determine the confirmability of a study,

including whether the qualitative data can be traced back to its source and if the interpretations of the data appear logical (Mertens, 2005). The inquiry auditor should be knowledgeable of key aspects of the study, but uninvolved in the meaning-making processes in which peer debriefers participate (Brown et al., 2002). The inquiry auditor for this study was an African American woman who completed a grounded theory dissertation. The inquiry auditor reviewed research materials in order to address the confirmability and dependability of the study. The inquiry auditor was involved in the early stages of the study so that I could familiarize her with the inquiry auditor role, the study, participants, and key methodological decisions.

The inquiry auditor was given access to data, memos, and coding materials so that she could determine if my interpretations and the emerging theory were indeed grounded in the data. In June 2009, preliminary conceptual themes were shared with the inquiry auditor during a face-to-face meeting. After the inquiry auditor reported that she found evidence that the preliminary conceptual themes were grounded in the data, I discussed with her feedback received from students who participated in follow-up interviews. This discussion with the inquiry auditor helped me to further refine the conceptual themes, which included changing the name of one of the themes from navigating two worlds to navigating multiple worlds. She also read chapters of the dissertation, including a thorough reading of Chapters IV and V. At the completion of the study, the inquiry auditor commented on the dependability and confirmability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A memo from the inquiry auditor that attests to the accuracy of the findings and grounded theory is in Appendix F.

Ethics

Several measures were taken to do no harm to participants (Jones et al., 2006). Ethical guidelines related to acquiring informed consent, a commitment to maintaining confidentiality, and notifying participants of consequences were implemented (Kvale, 1996). Each participant was asked to complete a consent form (Appendix D) prior to beginning the first interview. The consent form included the purpose of the study, a statement on confidentiality, and a description of any risks and benefits associated with participating in the study. Participants were asked to provide a pseudonym at the start of the study to protect their confidentiality.

The names of individuals and offices referenced were protected through the use of pseudonyms. Specific information about the identity of a participant or other individuals was not reported or associated with the transcripts and data. In some cases, the identity of an individual or office was masked in order to minimize the possibility of being recognized. Data and transcripts were kept in a safe and secured location. Even though identifying information was not included in the transcripts or other research materials, the importance of keeping documents in a safe and secured location was reiterated to the inquiry auditor and peer debriefers in order to emphasize the importance of confidentiality. The rights of participants were also protected by the Institutional Review Board; approval was received prior to conducting the study.

Researcher Reflexivity

The researcher serves as the instrument in qualitative research; thus, information should be shared regarding the expertise of the researcher as well as any personal associations that exist with the area of study (Brown et al., 2002) due to the influence that

these experiences might have on the research process (Charmaz, 2005). Identifying as a Latina first-generation college student informed my interest in this area of study as well as my desire to continue working professionally in roles that will allow me to support Students of Color and first-generation college students. My perspective has been informed by a working-class background and growing up in a Mexican-American family. My background and perspective proved helpful in understanding how participants made meaning of their experiences as Latina first-generation college students. I was cognizant of how the experiences of participants may differ from my own with regards to cultural factors, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and many other areas. Individuals who had diverse experiences and backgrounds were intentionally involved at various stages in the study through a variety of roles (e.g., provided feedback on interview questions, participated in pilot interviews, served as peer debriefers) so that they could challenge my interpretations and assumptions throughout the research process. I reflected on my role in the research process and the influence that my perspective and biases might have on the study through writing in a reflexive journal (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The research site was chosen due to my familiarity with the campus, but also based on the insight that might be gained from studying the experiences of diverse Latina first-generation college students at this particular institution. My familiarity with the campus and moderate involvement with the Latino/a community at the research site provided me with an awareness of key issues and individuals on the campus that proved helpful in gaining access to and building trust among participants. I worked with Latina undergraduates at this institution in formal and informal ways. I co-taught a Latino/a leadership course in the Spring 2004 semester, conducted interviews with Latino/a

students in the Spring 2005 semester in conjunction with a larger research project focused on understanding the access and success of Latino/a first-year and continuing students, and volunteered at or attended Latino/a student events at the University between Fall 2003 and Spring 2008. The involvement that I had with Latino/a undergraduates at the University did not endanger my objectivity or students' confidentiality due to the length of time that passed between my direct engagement with Latino/a students (e.g., Latino/a leadership course instructor, Latino/a research team) and this study.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology for this constructivist grounded theory study that explored Latina students' understanding of their identity as Latina first-generation college students. In the next chapter I will present the findings.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Chapter IV presents the findings from this grounded theory study. I explored the understanding that Latina students, who were the first in their family to go to college, had of being a Latina first-generation college student. Twelve Latina first-generation college students were interviewed twice during the Spring 2008 semester. Seven of the 12 students participated in an optional follow-up interview approximately one year after data collection began. Line-by-line coding of each transcript resulted in over 900 initial codes. Eighteen conceptual themes emerged, and formed the foundation for a grounded theory of Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students.

I present participant profiles as well as the conceptual themes that emerged from this study. The conceptual themes are explained using thick description, which includes direct quotes from the participants. The strengths that participants associated with being Latina first-generation college students are presented. I conclude with a discussion of the grounded theory of Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students that emerged from the study.

Participant Profiles

Brief descriptions of each participant are provided using pseudonyms selected by the students. Each participant was given an opportunity to review and provide feedback on her respective profile to ensure that the description was accurate and to obtain agreement on the content. Summary information regarding each participant is presented in Table 1. The profiles include self-reported information regarding the students during the time the interviews occurred. Six students provided updated information regarding pertinent areas included in the profiles. Updated information was obtained from four

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Latina First-Generation College Student Participants

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Ethnicity/ Race</i>	<i>Generational Status in U.S.</i>	<i>Language Spoken in Home</i>	<i>Mother's Highest Education</i>	<i>Father's Highest Education</i>
Anna	Senior	Salvadoran	2	English	6th in El Salvador	Completed higher than 6th in El Salvador
Eve	Senior	Guatemalan/ Salvadoran	2	Spanish	3rd in Guatemala	2nd in El Salvador
Jen	Senior	Ecuadoran	1.5	Spanish	HS in Ecuador	HS in Ecuador
Jenny	First-year	Dominican	2	Spanish	HS in Dominican Republic	8th in Dominican Republic
Jessica	Junior	Bolivian	1	Spanish/ English	HS in Bolivia	College certificate - car mechanics and painting in Brazil
Maricela	Senior	Mexican/ Honduran	2	Spanish/ English	11th in Mexico	Some college in Honduras
Marilee	Junior	Mexican	2	Spanish/ English	HS in U.S. - immigrated at 16	HS in Mexico
Mimi	First-year	Salvadoran	2	Spanish	8th in El Salvador	None
Reina	Senior	Salvadoran	2	English	Equivalent of AA - secretarial work in El Salvador	Did not know
Rosa	Junior	Salvadoran/ Black	2	Spanish	3rd in El Salvador	Did not know
Roxy	First-year	Bolivian	1.5	Spanish	HS in Bolivia	Technical degree - airplane traffic control in Bolivia
Yesenia	Senior	Salvadoran	2	Spanish	3rd in El Salvador	6th in El Salvador

students who participated in a follow-up interview in April and June of 2009 and two students who were unable to participate in a follow-up interview who provided new information via email. Descriptions include the following information for each student: year in college, major, ethnic background, generational status in the United States, parents' educational background, living situation (e.g., on campus, off campus with family), and participation in curricular and co-curricular experiences on campus and off campus.

All of the Latina first-generation college students were enrolled as full-time students at the University of Maryland. Six of the students were seniors. Five of the six seniors graduated at the end of the Spring 2008 semester, and the remaining senior graduated in Spring 2009. Three juniors participated in the study, including a student who was in her first semester at the University, after transferring from a two-year college. Among the remaining two juniors, one student graduated in December 2008 and another in Spring 2009. Three first-year students were in the sample. The participants had majors associated with five Colleges or Schools. Six students had majors within the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences (i.e., psychology, government and politics, sociology, criminal justice, economics) and two had a major associated with the College of Arts and Humanities (i.e., communication, studio art, Spanish). One participant had a major in the School of Public Health (i.e., family science) and another in the School of Business (i.e., marketing). One student had a double major in the College of Arts and Humanities and the College of Education. One participant had yet to enter a College or School because she was undecided about her major.

The parents of all of the Latina students were born outside of the United States, with the exception of the father of one student. Nine of the participants were born in the United States and three students were born in a Latin American country. Two students immigrated to Maryland with their family as pre-teens, and the remaining student who was born outside of the United States immigrated during her early teens. The majority of the participants' parents completed high school or middle school in their home country. The mother of one student completed a high school degree in the United States; she emigrated from Mexico to the United States when she was 16. Two of the students did not know the educational background of their fathers. The parents of four of the students indicated that they had a parent who attended the equivalent of a vocational school in a Latin American country. Table 1 contains additional information regarding the highest level of education completed by the participants' parents. All of the students had immediate family members, and in many cases extended family members, who lived within 10-45 minutes of the University.

Anna

Anna, a senior who planned to graduate in May, majored in studio art with a graphic design concentration. Anna was initially interested in architecture, but was discouraged by an advisor who told Anna that she would not meet the requirements. Anna was interested in teaching art or English as a Second Language (ESOL). Anna and her younger brother were born in Virginia and grew up in Maryland. Her parents and older sister were born in El Salvador. Anna noted that she was in her "mom's belly when she was crossing over." After graduating from college, Anna planned on traveling for the first time to El Salvador. Anna was raised by her mother. Her parents completed their

schooling in El Salvador. Anna's mother finished the sixth grade. Anna did not know the highest educational level completed by her father; however, she knew that he attended a higher grade level than her mother. Anna preceded her older sister in attending college. Anna's sister was unable to attend college immediately after graduating from high school due to not having legal residency in the United States. Before Anna's sister obtained residency in the United States, she received a certification in nursing from a community college in Maryland. Anna's brother attended a two-year college in Maryland, but did not complete a degree. Anna lived with her mother and siblings while in college. The primary language spoken in Anna's home has changed over time. Initially, Anna's family spoke only Spanish at home, followed by English and Spanish, and now English was the primary language spoken in her home.

Since her first year in college, Anna has held leadership positions in a campus chapter of a national tutoring program for elementary school children. Anna's involvement in the tutoring program was one of the highlights of her college experience. Anna completed an internship related to her major, took two Spanish courses, and was involved in an arts education student organization. Anna noted that her involvement may have been limited due to her family's religious beliefs. She grew up in a strict Protestant church that had conservative views regarding the dress of women and "everything" was viewed as a "sin." Anna experienced conflicts with her mother who would often question what Anna was doing. She stopped attending church during her senior year in college. During a follow-up communication, Anna shared that she received a permanent position as a receptionist with a public relations agency, which is where she worked as a

temporary employee during college. She wanted to continue working with the agency until she gained admission to a master's program in elementary and secondary education.

Eve

Eve was a senior majoring in criminal justice with a minor in Spanish Language and Cultures and U.S. Latina/o Studies, and expected to graduate at the end of the summer. Over the summer, she planned on applying for a permanent position with the court system where she previously completed an internship. Eve was admitted to the University through a summer program that facilitates the access and success of students by providing academic and personal support services. She was born in Washington, DC, but grew up in Maryland. Eve's mother was born in Guatemala and her father in El Salvador. Her parents' early educational experiences occurred in their home countries; her mother completed the third grade and her father the second grade. Eve's father ended his schooling after the second grade in order to work to support his family in El Salvador. Eve's mother took night classes in the United States to learn English. Spanish was the primary language spoken at home. Eve had three younger brothers, who were 15, 11, and 9 years old.

Eve shared that her mother believed that Eve was "brave" due to "stepping up" to her protective father by participating in afterschool activities when she was younger, attending precollege programs outside of Maryland, and going to college. Eve noted that her father was not as supportive of her participation in these experiences as her mother due to his unfamiliarity with these opportunities and being overly protective of his only daughter. Eve was very involved with a Latina sorority and was a member of the Latino Student Union. In addition, she studied abroad in the Caribbean during a winter term

session. Eve lived on campus her first year and with her parents the next three years.

Eve appreciated that her parents did not want her to work during college. Eve noted that her parents wanted Eve to focus on college and to be available to assist in caring for her siblings, when needed, without having to worry about working.

Jen

Jen was a senior majoring in Spanish and Secondary Education. After graduating, she planned on teaching Spanish at a high school in Maryland and completing an additional year at the University to obtain a master's degree. Jen, her parents, and younger sister were born in Ecuador. Jen's family moved to Maryland when she was 13 years old. Jen identified herself as a foreign born, naturalized citizen. She entered the U.S. educational system in the eighth grade and took ESOL classes through the 10th grade. Jen's mother completed a high school degree in Ecuador by attending night school when Jen was 10 or 12 years old. Jen's father completed high school in Ecuador. Her sister was a first-year student at the University. Spanish was the primary language spoken at home. Jen was a confident student involved in on campus and off campus experiences.

Jen held a leadership position with the Latino/a newspaper on campus, participated in high school outreach programs hosted by the Latino Student Union, and was in a Spanish honor society. Jen was involved with a student organization that had a Latin American focus during her first year in college, but the group became inactive her sophomore year. Jen volunteered in the community, including at educational summits and events hosted by the Embassy of Spain and the Embassy of Mexico. In addition, she worked 10-15 hours a week in a work-study position in one of the University's colleges.

Jen lived on campus during the Spring semester of her first and second year of college as well as her junior year in college. Jen lived with her parents during the Fall semester of her first and second year in college as well as her senior year. Living with her parents allowed Jen to save enough money to live on campus. Jen was unable to live on campus her senior year due to the unavailability of housing for seniors. Jen took classes in the Spanish Department and was writing an honor's thesis.

Jenny

Jenny was a first-year student who was undecided about her major, although she was interested in Spanish, public health, and international business. She was initially interested in majoring in pharmacy; however, becoming involved in the Latino Student Union prompted Jenny to instead explore a major that would allow her to “help” the Latino/a community. Jenny was born in Washington, DC, but moved to Maryland at the age of eight. Her parents were born in the Dominican Republic. Jenny's parents completed their education in the Dominican Republic; her mother completed high school and her father the eighth grade. Jenny's brother was a senior in high school. The primary language spoken at home was Spanish.

As a first-year student, Jenny became very involved on campus; she intentionally sought out opportunities to gain new experiences and meet people. Jenny also believed that becoming involved in Latino/a student organizations would give her an outlet to voice her opinion about problems facing Latino/a students, who she felt were not a “priority” on campus versus other groups. She was particularly concerned about the small number of Latinos/as enrolled at the University and advocating for a U.S. Latina/o Studies minor. Jenny was involved with the Latino Student Union's freshman council

and joined a Latina sorority. In addition, she was involved with a student organization that engaged in service at children's hospitals. Jenny took a course in the U.S. Latina/o Studies Program. She lived on campus.

Jessica

Jessica was a junior majoring in economics, and anticipated graduating after an additional year. She changed her major from pre-med to economics during her sophomore year. Jessica and her parents were born in Bolivia. She was three when her family moved from Bolivia to Maryland. Her brother was born in the United States, and was a freshman in high school. Jessica's mother and father completed high school in Bolivia. Her father attended an institute in Brazil for two years and received a specialized certificate in car mechanics and painting. Jessica and her mother lived in Bolivia during the first year of her father's studies, and then moved to the United States. Jessica did not know a lot about her father's program and noted that he was not working in his field of study. Spanish was the primary language spoken by her parents, while Jessica and her brother mostly spoke English.

Jessica lived in a residence hall on campus since her first year in college; however, she planned on living with her family during her senior year due to the unavailability of on-campus housing for seniors. She worked three hours a week with an off-campus business mentorship program and completed an internship at a law firm. Jessica held two on-campus jobs for short periods of time, including a fundraising position and working at the University library. Jessica's Latina roommates influenced her involvement in the Latino/a community. She joined her roommates in attending

events sponsored by Latino/a organizations. Jessica enjoyed the courses she took in Spanish Language and Cultures as well as a Latino/a leadership course.

Maricela

Maricela was a senior who majored in marketing and had a minor in Spanish Business and Cultures. After graduating, she debated whether to work in the area of marketing with a nonprofit agency that had an educational focus or in a commission-based position. Maricela shared during a follow-up communication that she decided to work with a nonprofit agency. She had an excitement for learning and was particularly proud of achieving a 3.5 GPA. Maricela was born in Baltimore, MD. Her mother was born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States when she was 18. Maricela's father was born in Honduras. Her mother attended high school in Mexico, but dropped out her senior year. Maricela's father attended college in Honduras for a couple of months before dropping out due to personal reasons, he then moved to the United States. Maricela's mother and father met in the United States. Maricela had three younger siblings, including a sister who recently graduated from high school and two brothers who were 12 and 9 years old. Spanish was the primary language spoken at home by her parents. Maricela and her siblings typically spoke to their mother and father in English.

As a first-year student, Maricela had a mentor through an office that provided academic support services and programs to underrepresented students. She also became involved with the Latino Student Union freshman council during her first year in college. Since her sophomore year, Maricela had been primarily involved in a Latina sorority and a Latino/a mentor program, which included holding leadership positions in both organizations. During her junior year, she was a mentor with a national tutoring program

for elementary school children and later held a leadership position in the group, which involved working 18 hours a week. During her senior year, Maricela lived off campus with friends due to the lack of University housing for seniors. Maricela moved into University/private partnership housing that served only University students.

Marilee

Marilee was a junior majoring in communication, and anticipated graduating in May 2010. She transferred from a local two-year college in Maryland where she received an associate's degree. Marilee was in her first semester at the University, transferring in during the Spring semester. She was born and raised in Maryland, and lived by herself in off-campus housing. During a follow-up interview, Marilee shared that she lived on campus during her second semester at the University. Marilee moved out of on-campus housing after one semester because she did not like living with individuals who were younger than her. Marilee's parents were born in Mexico. Her parents divorced when Marilee was in high school. Marilee's mother, who lived in Texas, moved to Texas after Marilee graduated from high school. Her father lived in Virginia. Marilee's mother immigrated to the United States when she was 16. Her mother graduated from high school in the United States, and her father graduated from high school in Mexico. Marilee had a younger sister who was in high school. Marilee's sister was living in Maryland with her father, but planned to return to Texas to live with her mother. Spanish and English were spoken at home.

During high school, Marilee applied to several universities outside of Maryland, but was not granted admission. Marilee's decision to stay in Maryland to attend a two-year college, despite her mother moving to Texas, demonstrated her commitment to

furthering her education. As she neared completion of an associate's degree, Marilee applied and was accepted to the universities that initially denied her admission. While attending the two-year college, she worked part-time and was a full-time student. At the University, Marilee sought out opportunities to meet people by attending Latino Student Union meetings and events, but had yet to find her niche.

Mimi

Mimi was in her first year at the University of Maryland, but had sophomore standing. She was a psychology major and expected to graduate in 2010. Mimi was born in Virginia, but lived in Maryland. Both of her parents were born in El Salvador. Her mother started, but did not complete the ninth grade in El Salvador due to getting married. Mimi's father did not go to school. Her parents took English classes in the United States; her father began taking classes recently. Spanish was the primary language spoken at home. Mimi had an older brother who completed high school and a younger brother who was in the sixth grade. Her older brother did not attend college, but his company paid for him to enroll in classes to become an engineer. She had an older sister who died before she was born.

Mimi noted that she can be "strong-willed," "stubborn," and "shy." She participated in a Latino/a mentor program as a mentee and had some involvement in an Anime student organization. Mimi indicated that she typically received good grades without needing to push herself too hard; however, she did face some academic challenges during her second semester in college. During a follow-up individual interview, Mimi noted that she took a Latino/a leadership course during her second year

at the University. She also obtained on-campus employment during the summer after her second year. Mimi lived with her parents.

Reina

Reina was a senior who majored in sociology and criminology/criminal justice. She anticipated graduating after an additional year due to pursuing a double major and changing her major from business to sociology and criminal justice. Reina was interested in attending graduate school for a degree in social work. She was born in Washington, DC, but grew up in Maryland. Her parents were born in El Salvador. Reina was raised by her mother. She believed that her mother obtained the equivalent of an associate's degree focused on secretarial work in El Salvador. Reina did not know her father's educational background. She had two younger sisters, one in high school and one in middle school. English was the primary language spoken at home.

Reina was an active student leader on campus. Early in her college career, Reina co-founded a social action student organization that focused on issues of race, created an afterschool program, and participated in a living-learning program. As a senior, Reina held an executive board position in a Latina sorority and was a mentor in a Latino/a mentoring program. She applied for a leadership position with the mentor program for the upcoming year. Out of a desire to study abroad, Reina participated in an international alternative spring break trip to Peru. She planned on serving as an alternative spring break trip leader in the upcoming year. In addition, she worked on campus as an accounting assistant for six hours a week. Reina lived on campus the first three years of college. Reina moved off campus to live with her cousin during her senior year due to the unavailability of on-campus housing. Reina also participated in a University research

program designed to increase the number of underrepresented students pursuing graduate school and doctoral studies.

Rosa

Rosa identified as a junior and indicated that she would graduate after an additional semester with a degree in family science. Rosa initially attended a two-year college located approximately two and a half hours from her home for one year, and then transferred and attended for one year a four-year university located three hours from her home. She lived on campus at both institutions, which were located in Maryland. Rosa enrolled at the University of Maryland in 2004. She was born in Washington, DC, but grew up in Maryland. She identified as biracial due to having a Salvadoran mother and her father being Black. Rosa's mother and her five (half) siblings were born in El Salvador. Her mother immigrated to the United States approximately 11 years prior to Rosa's birth. Her siblings immigrated to the United States when Rosa was five years old. Rosa did not have a relationship with her father; however, she indicated that he was born in the United States. Rosa did not know her father's educational background. Rosa's mother completed the third grade in El Salvador. Her siblings ranged in age from 36 to 42 years old. Some of her siblings completed high school or attended a technical school in El Salvador. A few of her siblings took English classes in the United States at an area high school. Rosa lived with her mother and godmother. Spanish was the primary language spoken at home.

Rosa found it difficult to become involved in co-curricular experiences because of school and family obligations. She had a strong desire to help children, particularly Latinos/as from "troubled neighborhoods" who had similar experiences to her own. Rosa

worked with an afterschool program associated with a church for 18 hours a week. In addition, she assisted children with special needs at a health clinic through a summer internship sponsored by an academic department. Rosa took courses in the Spanish Department and the U.S. Latina/o Studies Program. She supported efforts aimed at passing a U.S. Latina/o Studies minor at the University.

Roxy

Roxy was a first-year student who majored in government and politics. She identified as a foreign born, naturalized citizen. Roxy, her parents, three sisters, and half-brother were born in Bolivia. Roxy's mother, father, and sisters moved to Maryland when Roxy was 10 years old; her brother immigrated to the United States later. Roxy's sisters were 16, 15, and 13, and her brother was 10. Roxy took ESOL classes for two years, in fifth and sixth grade, when she began attending school in the United States. Roxy noted that her mother "barely" graduated from high school in Bolivia. She believed that her father obtained a technical degree in airplane traffic control from a two-year institution in Bolivia, but he never worked in this field of study. Spanish was the primary language spoken at home.

Roxy lived in a residence hall on campus and was involved in a living-learning program. She was a highly involved student who participated in on-campus and off-campus activities. Roxy was involved with the Latino Student Union freshman council, held a leadership position with the Latino/a student newspaper, and participated in an off-campus Bolivian dance group with her family. She was also involved with a student group that advocated for a U.S. Latina/o Studies minor. Roxy took Spanish and Latin American history courses. She was interested in studying abroad in Bolivia, but found it

difficult due to the lack of a University-hosted program. Roxy shared during a follow-up communication that she studied abroad in Bolivia during her sophomore year, which demonstrated her commitment to returning to her home country.

Yesenia

Yesenia, a senior, majored in sociology and was working towards earning a certificate in Latin American Studies. After graduating, she planned on teaching for two years with a national teaching program and beginning a master's degree program in special education. She was born in Washington, DC, but grew up in Maryland. Both of her parents were born in El Salvador. Yesenia's mother completed the third grade and her father the sixth grade in El Salvador. Yesenia had one sister, a junior in high school. Spanish was the primary language spoken at home.

Yesenia experienced "culture shock" when she entered the predominantly White university due to attending a high school that was "90% Black." She was surprised to meet other Central Americans at the University because prior to college she had limited interaction with Latinos/as, particularly other Central Americans. The Latina students she knew who were Central American also tended not to go to college. As a first-year student, Yesenia sought out opportunities to become involved in the Latino/a community. Yesenia was an active student leader on campus. She lived in a living-learning program during her first two years, held several executive board positions within the Latino Student Union (LSU), and became a residence hall staff member during her sophomore year. During her senior year, Yesenia held an executive board position with the Latino Student Union and a Latina sorority. As a student leader in the Latino/a community, Yesenia wanted to help make the experiences of other Latino/a students better (e.g.,

encouraging student members of LSU to do well academically, engaging in high school outreach efforts to Latino/a students and parents). She lived on campus throughout college. Beginning with her first year in college, Yesenia worked on campus for 10 hours a week. Yesenia took courses in the Spanish Department.

Latina Students' Understanding of Being a Latina First-Generation College Student

Of the 24 conceptual themes that emerged from the 914 initial codes, 18 (Table 2) addressed the first research question. Eighteen conceptual themes, which consisted of 6 major themes and 12 subthemes, addressed the first research question about Latina students' understanding of being a Latina first-generation college student. The six major themes were Pioneering Higher Education, Building on Family Contributions, Balancing College and Family Responsibilities, Developing a Deeper Understanding of Being Latina, Giving Back, Experiencing Pride and Pressure. Building on Family Contributions encompassed four subthemes: Knowing and Respecting Family's Journey, Valuing of Education Instilled by Parents, Parents and Family Supportive, and Mothers Influential. Developing a Deeper Understanding of Being Latina included three subthemes: Negotiating Latino/a and "American" Cultural Values and Expectations, Exploring Latino/a Culture, and Combating Stereotypes. Giving Back contained three subthemes: Family, Community, and Peers. Experiencing Pride and Pressure included two subthemes, Experiencing Orgullo (Pride) and Managing Internal and External Pressures. Pioneering Higher Education and Balancing College and Family Responsibilities did not include any subthemes. These 18 conceptual themes informed the formation of a grounded theory of Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students.

Table 2

Conceptual Themes: Participants' Understanding of Being a Latina First-generation College Student

Pioneering Higher Education

Building on Family Contributions

- Knowing and Respecting Family's Journey
- Valuing of Education Instilled by Parents
- Parents and Family Supportive
- Mothers Influential

Balancing College and Family Responsibilities

Developing a Deeper Understanding of Being Latina

- Negotiating Latino/a and "American" Cultural Values and Expectations
- Exploring Latino/a Culture
- Combating Stereotypes

Giving Back

- Family
- Community
- Peers

Experiencing Pride and Pressure

- Experiencing Orgullo (Pride)
 - Managing Internal and External Pressures
-

Pioneering Higher Education

The participants described college as a stressful time, as well as an exciting time of discovery. The students essentially navigated college systems (e.g., college application process) and experiences on their own due to being the first in their family to attend college in the United States. Mimi noted that it was stressful "pioneering" higher education because she navigated college experiences on her own due to not having family members who could provide guidance. Participants wanted to assist their siblings and other Latino/a first-generation college students so that others could benefit from their "first discovery" of college. The Latina students displayed determination to enroll and

graduate from the University. The participants created and defined their own path into and through higher education.

Beginning in high school, Jen realized that being a first-generation college student meant taking care of college-related processes (e.g., applying to college, taking the SAT) on her own. Jen's parents encouraged Jen to go to college, but they could not offer additional assistance because they were unfamiliar with higher education experiences:

I think from the moment that I was thinking about going to college, so maybe my freshman year at high school, that's when I started to think about, "Wow, yeah, I'm first-generation and I have to do everything on my own," and I got to see that if I didn't do anything, nobody else was going to do anything . . . and if I wanted to go to college, I have to push hard on my own because I didn't have my parents to actually say, "Well, you have to take the PSATs, you have to take this, you have to do this," . . . But I think from that moment, I realized that I was first-generation and I was by myself, doing everything.

Mimi noted that she pioneered higher education because she did not have the college knowledge or "connections" that students who have parents who attended college possess. "Pioneering" higher education was stressful for Mimi, particularly because her mother did not understand the demands of college:

When I kinda need help understanding stuff about college and dealing with stuff about college . . . it comes to my mind that there isn't an older brother or cousin that I can go to . . . I'm kind of pioneering this whole higher education thing. . . . sometimes I get headaches 'cause I do stress a little, so I get headaches and I'm tired and I'm irritable and my mom doesn't understand. She's kinda like, "Well, I know it's school, but it's not that hard." It's like, "Come on, it's just school. I have to work eight hours and I'm exhausted." I'm like, "Yours is physical exhaustion. Mine is mental and emotional exhaustion," and she just doesn't get it 'cause she didn't go through it and I can't be mad at her for not getting it, but at the same time I'm like, "God, woman, understand. Just leave me be. You're lucky I'm not like some of those kids that break stuff when they get angry. I just shut up and lay in my room" . . .

Pioneering higher education also came with some uncertainty for Mimi who stated that she was "following the path that seems best right now. Frankly I don't know where it's

leading me, I don't know if it's wrong or right, all I can do is feel it out and hope for the best.”

All of the participants displayed a great deal of determination and commitment to enter and persist through the University. The path into higher education was particularly challenging for some of the Latina students. When Rosa was growing up, she did not feel that going to college would be possible because a college-going precedent did not exist within her family. In addition, teachers in Rosa's high school discouraged her from attending college. Rosa was “pushed” into a program in high school for students who were not doing well academically and was told by a teacher that she would probably not graduate from high school. Rosa was motivated by these challenging high school experiences. In 12th grade, Rosa worked her way into regular classes and eventually magnet courses so that she could attend college. The magnet courses offered Rosa “a little glimpse of college”; she enjoyed the challenge that these courses offered. Rosa's path into higher education included attending two institutions prior to enrolling in the University, including a two-year college located two and a half hours from her home:

I never really saw myself going to college actually 'cause you know no one in my family went to college. . . . I remember taking the C2 or C4 with my mom. The bus. And it would drive through here and I'm like oh what is that? Do only doctors and lawyers go there? And it was just like something that was way out of my league or I didn't really think about it until like my 11th grade in high school. And then it hit me, I'm like what am I doing after high school? And I'm like you know there's college, but I don't have money for that. . . . something about being in the house and just it didn't seem like I would be pushing myself hard enough. I don't know. I would have work around or other things that distracted me from school so I decided to go to the two-year college located farther from my home.

Yesenia noted that as a first-generation college student, she was accustomed to working “really hard and felt empowered by these experiences”:

. . . I really had to go out there, like my parents did their best to provide me with what I needed, but as far as things that I wanted, I had to work hard myself, and I think that gives you an appreciation for it, so you don't take anything for granted. . . . it pushes you, it makes you work harder . . . I've never regretted anything or been like, "Well, why did I have to do this?" You did it because you had to do it and at the end of the day, it made you a better person. So I think it also makes you stronger because you're really pushed to your limits, but I don't think there ever is a limit. I think the more you're pushed the more you do, so you just feel stronger and more empowered and more like, "OK, well, if I can do all this, how can I use it to help someone else?"

The students wanted to share what they learned as a result of "being the first" with their siblings and other Latino/a first-generation college students in order to make navigating higher education easier for others. Roxy found it difficult being "the first" to attend college because she did not understand higher education processes, but she looked forward to assisting her sister in navigating college systems:

. . . it was definitely harder being a first, the first. I mean I know that when my sister goes to college I'll help her out. She'll have an idea of how it is and what she needs to do basically. So I was kind of like the trial-and-error part of it, which makes it exciting, I guess. I was the first one to go to a dorm and so they have, they'll have the experience, but I'll have the first discovery kind of part of it.

As the eldest child in the family, Eve was able to "set the standard" for her brothers, particularly in terms of helping her parents understand facets of "American" culture. Eve wanted her brothers to "surpass" her and "do more than what" she did, and advised other Latino/a first-generation college students to "go outside the box 'cause there's more to the world than what you've been taught and which you see."

Building on Family Contributions

The path into higher education for the Latina students was attributed to the sacrifice and support of their parents. All of the participants had an awareness and respect for their parents' journey, particularly emigrating from their home country to the

United States, which was viewed as the starting point for their educational opportunities. Entering higher education was a goal that was nurtured by messages the participants received at a young age from their parents regarding the importance of education. The students appreciated the foundation their parents laid for them and the continued support offered by their family. The participants' mothers played a particularly influential role in the lives of the students.

Knowing and respecting family's journey. All of the participants had an awareness of the sacrifice and struggle that their parents endured immigrating to the United States from their home country. The Latina students viewed the sacrifice and support of their parents as a source of motivation. The students expressed that they were attending college for themselves as well as their family.

Roxy indicated that being the first in her family to attend college meant that her parents' struggle, particularly her mother's earlier experiences as an "illegal immigrant," was "worth it":

It means a lot . . . it also means that what my parents went through, my mom was an illegal immigrant, so it's like definitely much more difficult to live here, and especially in the times now. Thank god she's a resident. I guess it means that their struggle was worth it kind of and that I'm not really giving up what they gave me and what they try to give me, and also I try to work for other people kind of, for my family back in Bolivia, for my family here. It makes them proud and I guess, I mean, that makes me feel good.

Anna felt that being a Latina first-generation college student meant that her "mom's efforts aren't in vain . . . and her traveling and all that sacrifice and stuff for all of us was worthwhile." Anna was able to realize "los sueños Americanos," the American dream, due to the "sacrifice" of her mother. Anna appreciated the opportunities that were afforded to her, and as a result, she wanted to assist her mother and future generations:

It means having the opportunity to be something greater than your parents and family are, careerwise. . . . It means that all the efforts my mother made were not in vain and that the education she couldn't have I was able to have for her and myself. The education that can help me send her into early retirement and do things she never thought she would do (like run her own child care center or teach Spanish). It means that the next generations to come will not have to work as hard as the first generation and will become more successful in life. We will not be a working class but middle class. It means I made it, los sueños Americanos son realidad.

The artifacts that many of the students shared demonstrated the participants' awareness and respect for their parents' immigration stories. Rosa's artifact was a picture of her siblings and cousins in El Salvador that her mother took prior to immigrating to the United States. Rosa previously shared the picture in one of her Spanish courses, when she was asked to share an item that reminded her of migration or immigration. The picture reminded Rosa of her mother's difficult journey and was a source of motivation:

It's special to me when I see it 'cause I'm like, wow, she left her home and came here and then she brought everyone else and I'm like if she can do that, I can definitely commit to school. . . . even the tear is special 'cause it's like, she actually went through the whole you know crossing the border and hiding and coyotes. . . . And my mom came in 1975, so it took her, it was in November and she got here like in January. It took her a while to get here because she had to stay in different places.

Rosa shared the original picture, and noted that a large framed copy of the photo could be found in her home. Jenny's artifact, a flag of the Dominican Republic, reminded Jenny of where she "came from" and that her parents immigrated to the United States so that she could have the opportunity to go to college. The Dominican flag was located above Jenny's desk and served as a source of motivation:

The artifact I brought was the flag of the Dominican Republic, and that's where my parents are from . . . I keep it above my desk . . . I look at it as reminding me of where I came from, what my goal is, kind of, because it's like this is where my parents came from, and they left their country to come here just so I can have this opportunity, so I'm not gonna sit here and waste it, so I think it kind of motivates

me when I'm doing my work, I'm like, I have to do this, because this is what my parents came here for me to do. This was their intention of coming here.

Mimi shared a CD as her artifact and played the song "Mojado," meaning wetback in English, which is a derogatory term that has been used to describe Latino/a undocumented immigrants. The song reminded Mimi of her parents "crossing the border" and the struggles that many of her family members experienced as a result of immigrating to the United States:

I listened and I heard "Mojado" and that immediately brought about images of my parents crossing the border . . . the lyrics were just so powerful to me because it was just like it made so much sense. . . . I couldn't believe that he'd been able to say what so many people are feeling so well, and I don't know, it of course, it immediately brought thoughts of my parents and a lot of my family members and the fact that they've had to struggle so much. And so that's why that song became one of my favorites.

Mimi indicated that her parents shared their experiences with her because they did not want her to have to work as hard as they did and to emphasize the importance of going to college:

. . . They wanted to show me their struggle so that I could see just how bad it was and how I have a chance to never have to do that. Like my father is always saying, "I don't want you to end up scrubbing toilets like I have to. I don't want you to have to do that," and he told me how he worked so hard when he was a child. He was nine and he would go work the fields with my grandfather. He worked like a grown man. . . . they would have never made me live through that, but they wanted to tell me so that I could understand, so I could realize how bad it was . . . When they get older, I wanna be able to take care of them. I don't want them to have to work. . . . it was definitely important for them and for me that they tell me so that I could push myself and be able to help them out later on in life.

Valuing of education instilled by parents. The participants indicated that their parents instilled within them the importance of obtaining an education at a young age. Ten of the 12 participants knew that they would go to college at a young age due to the early messages conveyed by their parents. The remaining two participants noted that the

desire to attend college was fostered by the hope for something better, which was instilled within them by their parents. Many of the Latina students indicated that their parents wanted them to further their education because their parents were unable to do so.

Similar to other students, Jenny always knew that she “wanted to go to college.” Jenny’s parents expected Jenny to go to college, “we came here and now you have opportunity to go so we don't see why you wouldn't go." Many of Jenny’s peers did not enroll in college, but Jenny knew that she would enter higher education due to her mother’s encouragement:

. . . they always told me, after high school there’s always college. And then my mom would talk to me about how she never got the opportunity to go to college and how she would really love it if me and my brother would do good in school so that we would have the chance to go to college. . . . Towards junior year when I was really serious about applying to colleges, I think that’s when it really like hit me that, you know my parents have never gone to college, and I’m really allowed to do this, like go. . . . college has always been something that was talked about . . . I really think it was junior year when I really saw how many Latinas, at least from my school, ‘cause there were so many that were like, “No, I’m not going to college, I have to do this or this, I’m working,” and I’m like, “Oh, I’m going to college” . . .

Anna shared that her mother “made a priority of education” for Anna and her siblings, particularly because Anna’s mother only completed school through the sixth grade in El Salvador. Anna never questioned whether she would attend college, “It’s like when you get out of elementary school you go to middle school, middle school – high school, high school – college.” Anna understood that “to get anywhere in the world you have to go to college.” For Mimi, “there was never an option of not going” to college. Mimi’s mother communicated to Mimi very early on that she would attend college:

I always kinda knew when I was little because my mom would always be like, “Oh, you know, your father didn’t even get to go to elementary school. He has no schooling and I didn’t graduate from high school. You need to do something better with your life,” and then when my brother decided to take a different path,

it was kind of like, “OK, so I’m gonna be the first one in this family to go.” So I mean it was kinda like always present.

Growing up in Ecuador, Jen did not know what she wanted to do in life. After immigrating to the United States from Ecuador, Jen’s parents encouraged Jen “to go to college, you have to study.” Jen’s parents completed high school in Ecuador, and they wanted Jen to take advantage of educational opportunities available in the United States.

Two participants shared that it was important to their mothers that they obtain an education, as women, so that they would not have to depend on a man in the future.

Mimi shared that her mother began, but did not complete, the ninth grade in El Salvador because she married Mimi’s father. Mimi believed that her mother regretted not furthering her education beyond the 9th grade and moving away from her family in El Salvador because Mimi’s mother and father experienced problems in their marriage.

Mimi noted that her mother wanted Mimi to receive “a proper education” so that she could take care of herself in the future and not be dependent on a man:

. . . she didn’t finish high school. And she always regretted it. . . . She had a lot of problems with my father. And she said that it was probably because she married him so young, because she didn’t know any better. . . . And it was kinda like if she had had an education, a proper education, she could have done more with her life. She sees how my aunt and uncle, the ones who got an education over there, she sees how they live. And she’s kinda like “I could have given you guys that, I wouldn’t have to be here in this country that I don’t like at all.” And she’s never forgiven herself for not being there when my grandparents died. It was always very important for her that I get a proper education so that I never have to depend on a man, ever. And that I’d be able to defend myself later on in the future. I can get married and I can have kids, but if I get a divorce I can support myself. I don’t have to stay with a man who treats me badly.

Reina also received many early messages, from her mother and aunt, about the importance of going to school. Reina was encouraged to focus on school, and not on boys, so that she would not need to rely on anyone in the future:

Yeah, it's always been said in the family, "Oh, don't pay attention to boys. Make sure you get smart and make your money and," that's always been the message from my mother and then from my aunt also. . . . It's always like, "Do well in school. You should never rely on anybody else. You need to take care of yourself," and, "The only way you're gonna do anything is with a degree," so whatever lesson she wanted to get into me, she definitely got into me (laughter).

A couple of the participants shared that their parents were actively involved in assisting with homework or teaching them how to read, in English and Spanish for some students, when they were younger. Roxy believed that she experienced fewer academic challenges during her early educational experiences, in comparison to peers who also immigrated to the United States at a similar age, because she did not have to take ESOL classes and her mother assisted Roxy with homework. Jessica's mother also played a hands-on role in the early educational experiences of her children. Jessica's mother taught Jessica and her siblings "how to read or do work problems." Jessica felt that the assistance her mother provided through elementary school allowed her to have a smoother transition into the U.S. educational system. However, she believed that her parents "felt a little helpless not knowing how to guide" her beyond elementary school. Jessica immigrated to the United States when she was three years old from Bolivia. Anna noted that her mother taught Anna and her siblings Spanish using the books that her mother learned from as a child in El Salvador. Anna shared one of the books, a silabario, as her artifact. Anna viewed Spanish as a "bridge" that provided an important "connection" to her culture. The instruction that Anna's mother provided played an important role in assisting Anna in maintaining this "connection" to her culture:

This is a silabario and my mom learned how to read with this and she bought us several of these and we all learned how to read Spanish, read and write Spanish . . . I think I was 10 or 11 because that's when I remember I could read, and it was 'cause we were in church and all the kids knew how to read (in Spanish) except us. So my mom's like, "Uh, you guys gotta know." So she brought these books

and she taught us all. . . . that's the only connection I have to the culture basically, other than the food, is reading and writing it, because I don't speak it much. . . .

Four of the participants had a parent who attended some postsecondary education in a Latin American country. Roxy's father, Jessica's father, and Reina's mother graduated with a certificate or the equivalent of an associate's degree in a technical field (i.e., airplane traffic control, car mechanics/painting, secretarial studies). Maricela's father was enrolled in a math-related program at a college in Honduras, but dropped out after a couple of months. The participants noted that the educational systems in the United States and abroad were different, which prevented their parents from assisting with the college application process or other college-related experiences. Roxy always knew that she would go to college because her parents told her that she should attend, but also due to the "example" that her mother and father set:

I always knew I wanted to go to college just because . . . my mom and my dad told me, I mean it was definitely an option, but they enforced it. Like they said, "You should. You should really go to college," and it was also through their example. My dad, he went to college, but he never got really a chance to practice in his field and I don't even think that's what he's good at. . . . and my mom she didn't go to college at all, so I guess through them, I see what I could become and not necessarily follow them . . . they're my origins, but go further than them and I think that was their dream. And I'm not just doing it for them, I'm doing it for myself too, but they're definitely, they're an inspiration.

Roxy's father obtained the equivalent of a technical degree from an institution in Bolivia, where he studied to be an airplane traffic controller. Roxy's father could not assist Roxy in understanding the educational system in the United States, but Roxy shared that he did what he could, which included emphasizing the importance of obtaining an education since she was a child:

I think that it's much, much different, like college in Bolivia and then here. . . . I mean it definitely influenced him to push me, or to push us for an education, to have an education. Like I remember he was trying to teach me algebra when I

was in third grade . . . he would try to help us with our homework. He would do whatever he could, he would buy what we needed basically for school . . . I guess he was a provider. I guess that's as much as he could give, he wanted to provide us so that we could take advantage of the education. So I was pretty much by myself kind of, I felt. Like they didn't check up on my grades in high school . . . They didn't ask me if I had done my homework or they didn't tell me, "Have you done your applications yet?" or nothing of that sense. . . . I had to learn how to do it by myself and with my counselor. I mean, that was my help basically.

Reina's mother was unable to assist Reina with the college application process, but always encouraged her to "do well in school":

. . . she always pushed for me to do well in school. She was a single mom up until I was seven and she did Avon. . . . I guess I always wanted to be like my mom. I'd be like, "Mom, can you write down math problems for me or something?" 'Cause I always liked math when I was younger. And so she would do that and I would do my math. . . . I was highly discouraged from working because my job was to go to school and do well in school and it was pretty much my responsibility to figure out about college and scholarships and anything like that. My mom wasn't the type to do that type of research, like she couldn't do it, she just doesn't have that knowledge.

Marilee's and Rosa's mothers seemed to place more of an emphasis on doing well versus articulating a specific focus on obtaining an education. Marilee noted that her mother encouraged her to "do good things" and pushed her "for the better." Rosa noted that her journey into higher education was difficult, particularly because no one in her family spoke English or could assist her with homework when she was growing up. However, Rosa recognized the supportive role that her mother played, which included providing "moral support":

. . . I look at myself, and I'm like, you know it was hard for me to get here to the University of Maryland. . . . growing up having homework problems or just, I couldn't turn to anyone 'cause no one in my house really spoke English or understood what I was doing. You know I'm like how did I end up coming to the University of Maryland. You know part of it I think is the fact that my mom was always saying you have to do something with your life, you can't waste this opportunity. And taking Latino Studies classes, we talk about this type of thing a lot and it just, I put myself in my mom's situation. And I'm like if I were in her shoes and I had a daughter, it would be really hard, I would want my daughter to

do good, but how could I help her if I don't understand and the best that she did and she could do was give me, give me moral support and try to tell me to do the right thing and just you know things that she could do. I just feel that when Dr. Robles said that this study was going on I was like, it's possible for someone who comes from you know parents that don't have good educations to get somewhere. I was interested to see how many other people thought like me.

Parents and family supportive. The students received various forms of support from their family. The participants were particularly appreciative of the encouragement and emotional support that their family provided. Jenny noted that her family always knew that she would attend college. Jenny's family provided unconditional support, including when Jenny did not believe in herself:

My family . . . has always been very important to me, 'cause they've always been the people encouraging me. . . . there's times when you're not gonna believe in yourself, but I know my family is there . . . and then my parents, they just have always been there, supportive, through anything, and it's kind of like, they knew I was gonna go to college before I knew, they just always knew, like that's your next step, that's where you're going. So I know that's always helped, just to know that they've had the goals ahead of me since a young age. And then the rest of my family, they're just really supportive in general, just, they're so proud that they have a niece in college, so then that helps just to see them motivated about me . . .

Anna indicated that her mother, sister, and brother provided her with a "unique and perfect" form of support:

I know they've all believed in me and, I mean, whether they vocalize it or not, they supported me and they make sure that I'm mentally stable (laughter), keep to my sanity . . . The support of my family was a major factor in my success. They have trusted my judgment and supported my interests. The way we support each other is unique and perfect for me. Perfect because I feel safe and can speak my mind when in the company of my family.

Many of the participants shared that they were able to participate in college experiences (e.g., living on campus, participating in co-curricular activities) due to their family's encouragement and support. Eve noted that her parents did not want her to work

so that she could “get the full experience of college,” while also assisting with the care of her siblings:

They paid for much of the cost because my parents, they didn't want me to work, they didn't want me to work at all. . . . if they needed anything like picking up the boys or taking care of the boys so they can work, I was there to do that. That's how I basically worked. But they just wanted me to make sure that I wouldn't get burnt out by working and then going to school and then helping out with family and then doing schoolwork. . . . I looked at my schedule and my parents were like we don't want you to work . . . And I kinda felt bad but it's kinda like my parents, they want me to get the full experience of college and so they're like, you know, even if you have to get loans don't worry about it, we don't want you to stress yourself . . .

Many of the participants lived on campus despite having family members who lived within 10-45 minutes from the University. In most cases, the participants' parents supported their daughters' decisions to live on campus. Jessica noted that her mother wanted Jessica to live on campus so that she could get the “whole college experience”:

. . . I have, well, two older cousins that I have here and they live on campus. They live in Maryland as well, but their commute is about 40-45 minutes away. I'm only like 15 minutes, so it would make sense for me to live at home, but my mom just, she pushed for it. She knew that she wanted me to get the whole college experience. The fact that I can get more studying done here, just more work done here as opposed to going home, so she just understood that. And my dad didn't really, I thought he was gonna fight her on it, but he didn't fight her on it too much. . . . It was just kinda like, “OK, we'll see how things go.” So it was kinda assumed I guess that I would live on campus. . . .

Anna appreciated that her mother did not require her to pay rent or do many chores at home.

The participants received support from immediate and extended family members with the college search process and throughout college. Yesenia's mother, father, and sister went on college visits with Yesenia, making the trips a “family affair.” The college search process was “new” to Yesenia and her parents, which made the visits scary and

“exciting.” Two of Jessica’s cousins, aunt, and uncle offered assistance with the college application process:

. . . family has been very supportive, especially the two cousins that I have, her parents, his parents . . . “Hey, how are your college applications going? I heard this and I heard that.” Anytime he had some news or some type of advice he’d always call me, “When April was applying, this is what went wrong, so maybe you could do this instead,” so that was also encouraging. Family is very encouraging. My aunts and uncles always patted me on my back or something.

Maricela appreciated the support she received from her family, particularly from her father, who always believed that she would attend college. Initially, Maricela’s mother did not believe that Maricela could attend college due to financial reasons. Maricela was moved by her father’s offer to pay for her college expenses because she did not think that he was aware of how expensive it would be to attend the University. Maricela became emotional as she reflected on how appreciative she was of the support and encouragement that her parents provided throughout college:

I’m getting emotional, OK. My family has definitely contributed ‘cause they’ve, I’m gonna cry. I’m thinking about graduation. . . . they’ve done so much for me and, especially my dad, what really touches me is that, when I first applied to college, he’s like, “Don’t worry, Maricela, I’m gonna pay for it.” . . . he didn’t know that college was expensive and he just wanted to help me out. That was really important to me and it just showed that they really care. And then my mom, she’s always calling me, “How’s college? How’s everything,” and they always try to help me out by buying little things for me . . . They’ve just been so supportive of me. And it’s funny ‘cause at first my mom wasn’t . . . she didn’t know that it was possible, that I could actually go to college without paying for it, and now that she sees that it is possible, and I’m actually doing well, she’s actually encouraging me more and just really proud of me. . . .

Mothers influential. The mothers of the Latina students played a particularly influential role in the lives of the students. Two of the seven students who participated in a follow-up interview believed that their parents played an equally influential role;

however, both of these individuals shared examples during previous interviews that highlighted the important role that their mothers played in their lives.

Several of the Latina students' mothers played an active role in supporting the early educational experiences of their daughters. Roxy was very involved in high school activities due to the encouragement she received from her mother. Roxy was able to attend a summer program at Princeton University when she was in 10th grade because her mother went "door-to-door" with her to raise funds:

So in 10th grade I went to Princeton. It was really hard. . . . getting in was the easy way, I mean the easy part compared to getting the money for it because it cost a lot of money and we at the time couldn't afford it. So me and my mom went looking like door-to-door basically. We went to McDonald's, the banks and stuff asking for money that they could give us for scholarships, but we found it eventually, so I went.

Reina's mother was a strong role model for Reina, particularly being a single mother. She wanted to be just like her mother. The importance of obtaining an education at a young age was emphasized by Reina's mother:

. . . even though she hasn't really been involved with my school, she just wants me to do well, so I think that's really helped. . . . It's always like, "Do well in school. You should never rely on anybody else. You need to take care of yourself," type thing and, "The only way you're gonna do anything is with a degree," so whatever lesson she wanted to get into me, she definitely got into me (laughter).

Eve had a particularly close relationship with her mother as the only daughter in the family. Eve's mother had a level of "confidence" in Eve that her father never had:

I'm not saying that my dad hasn't done anything for me, but I think my mom already knew how successful I was gonna be. I think my mom just had that instinct. . . . before I started college, she went to church one Sunday and she lit a candle and she prayed that I would have a successful college career. . . . So then recently she just told me that she did that and I was like, "Why would you think I wouldn't do good though?" She's like, "No, I knew you would do good. I just wanted to make sure that you would do good safely. I didn't want anything to happen to you." . . .

Many of the participants expressed that their mothers were a source of motivation. Marilee shared that her mother “pushes” her for the “better,” “she does everything she can for me and maybe she might not have money to give me, but she’ll give me something to ease my mind or help me find a job.” Marilee thought about dropping out of college during her first semester at the University, but reconsidered because she did not want to disappoint her mother:

Yeah, I had my quitting moment. I was like, “Oh, my god!” but then you remember, you’re like, “Two years. Just two years. Just two years, you’re right there.” . . . I was like, “What would my mom think? No, no, I don’t want her to think I’m a failure or something because she believes in me.” So that kind of pushes me, like my mom is my pushing force for everything.

Marilee transferred into the University as a junior during the Spring semester, after graduating from a community college. She experienced a variety of academic adjustment issues (e.g., limited class options, developing study skills) and personal problems (e.g., breaking up with boyfriend, car accident) during her first semester at the University. Marilee noted that she was “stressed out with school,” was not doing well academically, and felt like a “failure.” Marilee shared that her mother was able to help her through this difficult time by reminding Marilee that she was “trying hard” and had “a lot going on.”

Balancing College and Family Responsibilities

All of the participants expressed feeling an increased sense of responsibility as a result of being a Latina first-generation college student. The Latina students were expected to engage with family members (e.g., spend time with family, care for siblings, assist with chores), but they were also personally committed to assisting family members. Managing the distinct values, expectations, and responsibilities associated both with being a college student and a member of their family often became challenging. College

responsibilities included attending class, studying, working, and participating in co-curricular experiences. Family responsibilities often involved caring for siblings, assisting with household chores, and spending time with family. The students found it particularly challenging to simultaneously engage in multiple worlds (e.g., studying at home) because their family did not understand the demands of college.

All of the participants felt a responsibility to assist family members, while they were in college and in the future. Eve was able to balance caring for her siblings with academic responsibilities by scheduling college classes around her brothers' school schedules:

Usually every year, every semester, I think except for one semester I was able to just arrange that time slot to be empty just in emergencies. Like if my mom wasn't able to pick them up or my dad, I was able to go pick them up. I also arranged where I can have at least one day, no classes . . . I was able to look for my internship and work at my internship. . . . also sometimes my brother in high school . . . pick him up from his games when my parents weren't able to. And I would have to take all of the other siblings as well. So it's like a Monday, Monday thru Sunday job, making sure you fit everything, family and schoolwork and your job, in my case my internship. You know just making sure you're doing everything that you need to do.

Eve also recognized the long-term responsibility she had to assist her family as a result of being the first to attend college:

. . . it's something to be proud of, but it's also a huge responsibility because you want to make sure that you're making your family proud. But at the same time it's kinda like you also want to make sure you get the best of your experience while here at an institution of higher learning. You know to be able to do more and help your family later on, that's basically the whole point. . . . you get your education you become someone better than what your parents were, that way when you're done and you've reached your goal, you can go back and help them just like they helped you. So I see it more as like a responsibility, but at the same time it's like an opportunity that my parents like they really fought for and they worked hard to get me through school so it's more like they're helping me so later on I can help them as well as my little ones.

Maricela felt she had “more responsibility” as a result of being the first in her family to go to college. She wanted to help her parents, family, and other Latino/a first-generation college students:

I guess it made me feel good in a way that, you know, I’m being the first one in my family . . . it made me feel that I had more responsibility now. I feel like if I live with my parents and do make a decent salary, I feel like I have a responsibility to help them out, and I have a responsibility to make them happy ‘cause that’s what I wanna do, I don’t wanna be selfish . . . I know they work really hard . . . I know that I have responsibilities after I attend college. . . . I take it very seriously ‘cause like I mentioned before, not a lot of Latinos make it this far . . . it means to have more responsibility and help out my family I guess. And I feel that it also means to help others as well . . . I actually did succeed in my college career, I should definitely help others as well, help other first-generation Latinos succeed as well and give them the resources or show them.

The participants often found it difficult to study while they were in their family’s home due to distractions and being asked to assist with household tasks. Jessica lived in a residence hall, and preferred studying on campus because there were fewer distractions than being at home:

Education from that standpoint, it’s just easier. You know, study groups, we always form up here at the library or something. It’s just easier, but at home there’s so many distractions and I feel like I have more obligations ‘cause I have to help out around the house as well, so that takes up a little more time.

It was difficult for Rosa to balance going to classes, working, helping her mother, and studying. She found it challenging to balance responsibilities at home and school because her mother did not understand the demands of college:

. . . actually yesterday I remember studying for a test and I was in the kitchen table and my mom was just, she was talking to me and "you have to do this and this." And I'm like “Mom, I'm studying,” but she doesn't understand, she never went through that. It's kind of frustrating sometimes . . . she understands that I'm in school, but I don't think she understands how much work has to be put into it. Or like there's so much going on and it's hard to balance like what's going on in the house and finding time to study and then like working and all these other things. That's something that’s been hard. Just like finding time. A lot of people have their parents to . . . support them, give them money, and for me it's, there's

going to school, going to work, helping my mom out, and then finding time for schoolwork.

Family responsibilities also made it difficult for Rosa to become involved co-curricular experiences:

. . . it's hard for me to get involved because when I come to school I have to set everything away and just focus on school. And as soon as I get to the house I'm piled with all these things, like do this, do that.

Many of the participants found it challenging to bridge or connect their roles and responsibilities as students and members of their family. Jen lived on campus for two years, which included the second semesters of her first and second year of college as well as her junior year. Jen found it difficult to study at home and did not feel she “fit in at home anymore” after living on campus:

. . . commuting the first semester didn't affect me at all because I was kinda used to you know being in and out. And then the second semester living on campus, that was great. . . . And then going back home again that was really tough. . . . I just didn't feel like I fit in at home anymore. . . . I used to rather stay on campus and do my work because it's impossible for me to do work at home. Because my parents would come in my room and they would like to talk . . . I can't close the door. It's just like something's wrong when you close the door so they always like me to keep the door open, but then they have sometimes the TV on or they're talking and they're so loud. . . . so I'd rather stay on campus a little more, a little late so I can actually get my things done and then go home and do whatever they want to do. But then they'll keep on calling me, why I wasn't home and trying to see where I'm at. . . .

Jenny and her parents went through a period of adjustment during the first year that Jenny lived on campus. Jenny noted that her parents did not understand that college commitments prevented her from going home more frequently:

. . . when I said I was living here on campus they really didn't understand why 'cause I was so close. . . . I knew I didn't wanna be a commuter. . . . Like your college experience is completely different living on campus and off campus. . . . I told them at least my first year I'd like to live on campus. So then after that they agreed. And then it was kinda hard for my mom especially 'cause she's like I've had you here for this long and then now to not see you every day is gonna be

hard. But I know she wanted me to come home all the time, all the time first semester, but then after a while I told her I can't come home all the time because it's like I might have work to do. I need to be in the library rather than being at home. So it's like after a while she understood that it's 'cause of gradeswise. . . . we've come to an understanding . . .

Yesenia and Marilee described strategies they implemented in order to manage navigating among multiple environments. Yesenia presented a “façade” to different individuals in order to manage the varying expectations that others had of her. Yesenia shared a diary as her artifact, which was symbolic of the “façade” she presented to different individuals, including professors, her family, and friends:

. . . a year ago we did an icebreaker and they're like “if you can pick an object that embodies who you are, what would you be” . . . I said a diary then so I'm gonna say the same thing now. And I think it's just because you don't really know what's written inside, I don't think anyone knows what's going on inside, but exteriorly, it's OK. . . . I think in any situation you have to put up like a facade, you have to put on something. So when you're in front of the classroom, you have to make sure the professor knows that you know what they're talking about, and when you're at home, you have [to] be OK because you don't want to put an extra burden on your parents, and when you're with your friends, I mean, it depends on the situation, but I think that there's so many things that you're balancing that internally no one really knows how you're dealing with all of it . . .

It was difficult for Marilee to speak with her mother and friends at times, because they did not understand the responsibilities that she had as a college student. Marilee adopted strategies that would allow her to study as well as maintain a relationship with her mother and friends:

. . . sometimes people that don't go to college or don't go through you know everything don't understand how much you have to study or how much you have to read. And it also goes along with my friends 'cause most of my friends didn't go to college either, and, those high school friends anyways. And they don't understand what it is to have to study or read or do whatever it is that you have to do and they're like you don't have time for me . . . So it's kind of hard to please everybody, but in the end that has been one of the hardest things to have to tell people I can't do this or I can't do that or whatever. . . . I kind of study a lot a lot a lot and then I'll hang out. And I'll call my mom and be like can I call you back at

night. . . . So I'll call her when I can't study, and she's like OK. And I give her the excuse free minutes you know. And I'll just make up excuses . . .

Developing a Deeper Understanding of Being Latina

Participants expressed a desire to engage with individuals who shared similar backgrounds, particularly other Latina first-generation college students, and to explore questions regarding their racial/ethnic identity. Some participants desired this connection in order to assist with the “culture shock” of attending a predominantly White institution. Other students noted that they had had limited interactions with the Latino/a community prior to college and were interested in learning more about their cultural identity, particularly as they encountered other Latino/a students at the University. Engaging in Latino/a-related curricular and co-curricular experiences assisted the participants in maintaining or strengthening their connection to Latino/a culture and provided the students support as they negotiated multiple roles as Latina first-generation college students. Engaging in Latino/a culture and “American” culture also raised questions for some students regarding their “fit” in both communities. Participants expressed an awareness of stereotypes regarding Latinos/as, which many turned into a source of motivation. The participants wanted to combat stereotypes about Latinos/as through their actions, by attending college.

Negotiating Latino/a and “American” cultural values and expectations.

Several participants described living in a “dual culture” due to engaging in the Latino/a culture of their family and the “American” culture of the University. Negotiating the Latino/a cultural values and expectations of their family with the dominant U.S. cultural values and expectations associated with the University shaped the development of multiple and intersecting dimensions of the participants’ identity as Latina first-

generation college students. Engaging in Latino/a culture and “American” culture prompted the students to reflect on their racial/ethnic identity and gender identity. Some of the participants felt like an “outsider” in both communities, while others felt that they were a “mix” of Latino/a culture and “American” culture. College experiences served to challenge in many cases the traditional gender role expectations held by the participants’ families and society regarding Latinas.

Yesenia described being raised in a “dual culture,” which involved growing up in a Salvadoran and Spanish-speaking home and attending “American” schools where English was spoken. Yesenia taught her parents “what it meant to go to college” while she was learning:

. . . I was raised in, I refer to it as a dual culture, because at home it was very like Salvadoran and Latino and we speak Spanish, but when I went to school, it was English and it was American and I was the only light-skinned person in my class. So I had to balance both worlds . . . growing up, my parents depended on me to do a lot of things, whether it was translation or filling out forms, and I saw other kids, you just give it to your parents and they take care of it, but my parents didn’t completely write in English, so I had to do it for myself. . . . my parents didn’t know exactly what it means to go to college, like it’s not just going to classes. So as I was learning what it meant going to college, having to explain it to them, which is hard.

Anna described feeling like an “outsider” among “Americans” as well as “older Salvadorans” who attended her church:

. . . Well with older Latinos, older Salvadorans in church usually because I had an accent with my Spanish. At least I would trip over my Spanish. And so they made it seem like, that I acted Americana, gringa. And I’m like OK, I’m gringa. I’m American and then you know I was with Americans . . . I didn’t feel accepted. . . . I felt like an outsider in both communities. . . . in college you realize that you’re not the only one, that the majority of Latinos feel like that. . . . I don’t know it’s just a lot that we don’t discuss and I think it’s unfortunate . . .

It was difficult for Mimi to reconcile the differing expectations she experienced as a result of engaging in the Salvadoran culture of her family and “American” culture:

. . . I complain sometimes, but my mom really is an amazing woman. And I do love her. It's just that she doesn't understand that this is a different place. . . . And it's just her wanting me to be two things at the same time, I think. She wants me to get my education and be independent . . . But she also wants me to stay at home and be the housewife and not be independent, depend on her. I'm like I can't do so many things at once. . . . our culture is different from the American culture and the norms. Like I've noticed also in the movies how it's a lot more individualistic. . . . they say follow your dream no matter who gets hurt, no matter what happens. . . . It's like no, everything isn't so idealistic and perfect in our culture (laughter). In Latino culture things are just different . . . You don't do a lot of the things that here are normal. And so you see all of this stuff in the media, what the family should be and then your family is completely different. And it's kinda like you're struggling for there to be only one image when there are two such great contrasts.

Mimi was trying to figure out who she was in “both worlds,” particularly because she felt different from her mother and friends, but also similar. Mimi determined that she was a “mix” of Salvadoran and “American” culture:

I came to understand that I'm a mix, I have so many different parts to me. I'm Catholic . . . and I'm Salvadoreña, and I'm American and I can't be like some girls who don't care about their family. I'm part of my family and they're an important part of me and a lot of my decision involves them. . . . I was raised to consider my parents and how they would feel and my family and their expectations of me . . . in our culture how a girl acts reflects on her parents and I've always had that mentality. . . . I think very differently, my values are very different, but then it's like I see how my mother says she was raised and I'm like, “I'm not like my mother either,” I'm not like her at all. . . . so I have these contrasting images . . . I'm kinda like where do I fit in that? . . . through realizing that I'm not American or that independent . . . follow your dreams thing, but I'm also not Salvadoreña in the sense that I'm not submissive and I obey everything they tell me. I realize that I have my own mind, I have my own thoughts, I have my own dreams, and they don't agree with my parents, but that doesn't mean I'm gonna disrespect them. . . . they're my life, but at the same time, they're not my life. I have my own life. . . . just through all that finding myself and figuring out who I was in both worlds, I don't know, I think I've found a pretty good balance.

College experiences served to challenge the participants' previous understanding of gender roles, more specifically, the traditional gender role expectations held by their family and society regarding the role of Latinas. In high school, Eve began challenging the traditional gender role expectations held by her father by becoming involved in

afterschool activities. Eve noted that many of the opportunities available to women in the United States were new to her father because these same experiences were not available to women in El Salvador, where he grew up. Eve believed that Latinas are “undermined” because of their gender:

. . . we are undermined as Latinas because of the fact that we’re women, I’d say to Latinas that you can go further than what you have been taught. And I say that because . . . my dad was like, “Soccer is for men. Women don’t play soccer.” And I proved him wrong (laughter) and it’s kinda like, you know back home in your country it’s kinda like you just have the housewife, she cooks, she cleans, she raises the kids while the man goes out, works, comes back, chills, doesn’t do anything, and watches T.V. . . . it’s different here, it’s not like that and that’s something that my dad has learned ‘cause my dad just, just because he’s from that culture, as well as my mom, that’s how they were at first . . . my mom has gone outside the gender role, as well as my dad. . . . It has taken him awhile, but he’s got it, he’s getting the hang of it. . . . the father wants to keep us in a little box . . . and put us in little pink outfits, it’s kinda like, you only dance ballet, you don’t do sports. And then the boy it’s like, “Yeah, he plays sports. Boys don’t cry, da-da-da-da,” like it just makes our life a little bit, not life harder, but it just makes our . . . trug to our success a little bit harder, just breaking those gender roles, those boundaries that we kinda get as children.

Eve felt that she faced additional challenges as a “girl” versus what she may have experienced as a boy due to being her father’s first and only daughter. She also believed that it was more difficult for her father to adapt to “American” culture than her mother.

Exploring Latino/a culture. Engaging in Latino/a-focused curricular and co-curricular experiences provided the participants with opportunities to explore and deepen their understanding of their racial/ethnic identity. Participants were developing an understanding of what it meant to be Latina and “American,” particularly as the students navigated between their family and University environments. Many of the participants expressed that they were determining their “fit” in Latino/a culture and “American” culture. Engaging with other Latina first-generation college students provided participants with opportunities to connect with their racial/ethnic identity, a support

network based on gender and race/ethnicity, and assistance navigating multiple environments as first-generation college students.

Rosa felt “very like Latina, whatever that means” because she grew up around her mother’s Salvadoran culture. Rosa indicated that she lacked an awareness of her African American background because her father was not involved in her life. As a child, Rosa recalled feeling like she did not “fit in” with other Latino/a children who were also receiving their first communion. Rosa identified with Latino/a culture, but felt that something was “missing”:

I remember, I really didn't like fit in with the group, I had the culture, the Latino culture, but there was always something missing. It was like I was lacking for something that I didn't know. But as I grew, I learned to go and learn about my other side.

Rosa explored her “other side” by enrolling in college courses and attending campus events that would allow her to develop a deeper understanding of her African American background because she felt that she lacked “that knowledge or that culture.” Taking courses in U.S. Latina/o Studies and African American Studies allowed Rosa to explore aspects of her biracial background:

Well, school has helped me a lot ‘cause I’ve taken the Latino Studies courses and they have educated me a lot on like history and stuff and also the African American Studies courses . . . and just events that go on on campus, you know, that talk about empowerment of different people and I just feel that if the little I can do by educating myself or educating others, you know once I learn stuff, I think that it’s a little helpful.

Roxy was interested in studying abroad in Bolivia to learn about “indigenous people and Bolivian history” because she immigrated to the United States from Bolivia with her family when she was 10 years old and never returned:

. . . I want to study about indigenous people and Bolivian history because I’ve never kind of had that experience and there’s also like an opportunity of learning

Quechua (common indigenous language). . . . and especially since I don't know that much about Bolivia anymore, since it's been so long, I haven't gone back yet.

Some participants did not “feel Latina” due to the lack of interaction with Latinos/as prior to college and during college. Anna enrolled in two Spanish courses at the University in order to improve her ability to read and write in Spanish. Anna didn't “feel Latina” and noted that she had limited opportunities to interact with Latinos/as in school, beginning in elementary school and continuing through college:

. . . I don't even feel Latina. . . . since I've always been in gifted programs since third grade there aren't many Latinas or Latinos in it and so it's not like I can sit there and talk Spanish with them all the time. . . . the only time I could talk Spanish was when I was at home and when I went to church. And that's the only way I maintained it. So that's depressing and it sort of continued here at the college level too just 'cause that's how it is. Especially since I wasn't living on campus either and LSU was not that great, organized-wise.

Anna also felt “rejected” by Salvadorans and “Americans,” which made it difficult for her to identify with both communities:

. . . my first language was Spanish so that's all I knew and that's all of the food I ate too (laughter). I considered myself Salvadoreña, but then as I got older I was like I don't even know the place. I don't really know about the culture, the history, I mean why do we eat the food we eat type of thing, the customs, why? No, I didn't know any of that so I didn't consider myself Salvadoreña. I was like I'm American. And then it's like no you're not American because you aren't White . . . and you don't come from Europe or you're not from Native American descent type of thing. . . . but I was born here type of thing, I know English . . . Then I was Latin American. Now I don't know. I haven't been asked in a while . . . I guess I would just say I'm Latin American. Because I felt rejected by Salvadorans. . . . And then I felt rejected from Americans. . . . it's like I'm in . . . no man's land. . . .

Jessica was surprised that she felt comfortable interacting with Latino/a students and faculty in the two Latino/a-focused courses in which she was enrolled. She was interested in exploring questions that she had about herself, as a Latina, and how others, particularly White students, viewed Latinos/as. Jessica asked me at the end of the second interview how I thought White people viewed Latinos/as:

In terms of what I asked you, I just, I never asked anybody else, “How do you see us?” Especially in my last two classes, we talk about how we feel towards them, how we feel about ourselves, and what we’ve done and just amongst ourselves as Latinos, but I don’t know what their perspective is . . . I know everybody has different opinions, but just curious to see what it is that they think. This last class we had, Latino leadership, we actually had, because my first Spanish class was just all Spanish people. This one, it was Latinos and a couple of, three or four White guys, so it was interesting to hear their perspective on a lot of things, like what they had to say. . . . they learned a lot too, took a lot back with them . . . our perspective on the world and just so many things that we talk about. And I wish they would’ve talked more though because I’ve always wanted to hear their perspective . . .

Jessica wanted to become more involved in the Latino/a community during the upcoming year, her last year at the University. Participating in Latino/a-focused courses allowed Jessica to connect with Latino/a students, faculty, and culture in a way that she had never done before, “I love the culture, but I don’t know why I never looked for it on campus.” Jessica noted that over the length of a semester, “you can definitely form a relationship because of I guess identity or something.”

Many participants wanted to engage in opportunities that would allow them to maintain a connection to the Latino/a community and Latino/a culture. For over a year, Roxy danced every Sunday in an off-campus Bolivian dance group with her family. Dancing allowed Roxy to connect with her family and culture. For her artifact, Roxy shared one of the skirts that she wore to dance. She also played a saya, a popular form of Bolivian music, entitled “Bolivia.” Roxy explained that Bolivians associate sayas with a sense of pride for Bolivia and respect for women:

. . . I just like the music a lot and we dance it, so it’s something that I guess identifies me. . . . It makes me feel proud. . . . proud of my country basically . . . and songs about women nowadays are not very, like they’re not very nice to us (laugh), but if you hear a song about a woman here, it’s not, it’s like a woman is the sun to me, kind of like that, more romantic. . . . and that song especially represents kind of what we feel. Like we remember Bolivia . . . but we always will have it with us whenever we’re here or away, so that’s why I like that song a

lot, it kind of represents, I think it represents what a lot of Bolivians (laugh) or people feel when they're away, so Bolivia or home (laugh).

Roxy noted that dancing held a lot of meaning for her; she liked the music and looked forward to dancing after “a hard week of school.” Roxy also felt a connection to her family and “culture” when she attended dance practice on Sundays, “Whenever I’m dancing, when we’re going to dance, it’s like the family thing, but when we’re dancing it’s like me and the music.”

Many of the participants valued the support that they received from peers who had similar backgrounds (e.g., Latino/a first-generation college students), particularly attending a predominantly White institution. Jenny was able to adjust to attending a predominantly White institution, after being in the “majority” in high school, by participating in the Latino Student Union (LSU). As a result of being in the “minority” at the University, Jenny became more aware of challenges facing Latino/a college students (e.g., low enrollment numbers of Latinos/as attending the University, difficulties associated with passing a U.S. Latina/o Studies minor):

. . . my high school . . . was mostly African American and Latino so it was like I was surrounded by the same groups all the time. And then you come here and then you’re not the majority anymore, not like in high school. . . . Being involved in issues concerning Latinos is just a way to voice your opinion and just to acknowledge the problems that do exist. ‘Cause I know Latinos on this campus really don't have as much priority I guess as other people. And I think it's just important to like advance them, advance these things that we don't have I guess. It's just like it's more so now in college that I see the problems. In high school you can't really see it when you're surrounded by those people, you're like we're fine. But it's like here you're kind of more aware of it or the situation.

Participating in LSU allowed Yesenia to deal with the “culture shock” of attending a predominantly White university, particularly after attending a high school that was “90% Black.” Interacting with Latino/a students, especially other Salvadorans, was a new

experience for Yesenia. Yesenia was surprised to discover that other Salvadorans attended the University because she was “always the only Latina” in school:

. . . I was always the only Latina in all of my classrooms and it's been like that ever since elementary school. And I was used to being the only one. And I looked around and I was the only light-skinned person and that to me was normal. And to come to Maryland and to come to a predominantly White environment that was a culture shock for me. . . . At first it was really uncomfortable being around other Latinos. And I remember the first LSU meeting I went to. . . what struck me was that the majority were Salvadoran. And I was like where did they come from 'cause I just wasn't expecting to see so many. . . . I was expecting like Mexican or Puerto Rican because that's all that I had heard about or those were the majority of people who went to my church. So I was like where did all these Salvadorans come from and what are they all doing in college? Like there's other people like me that are here. . . . And I was shy, I just didn't know how to relate to them. Yeah we're like the same ethnicity, but I don't know, I wasn't the type to just spark up a conversation. . . . I guess I dealt with the culture shock of being at a largely White institution by throwing myself into the Latino community, which was also a shock in itself because I never had that.

Yesenia enjoyed her involvement in the Latino/a community because this was the first time she had been a part of a group that was “invested” in the Latino/a community. She continued her involvement in the Latino/a community and eventually held several executive board positions in the Latino Student Union. Marilee was in her first semester at the University when she participated in the study, and was trying to determine where she “fit in.” Marilee was interested in meeting people who shared commonalities with her, “my thing right now is just the culture . . . I don't wanna lose my culture and I just wanna be around people who are like me, if not like close to being me (laughter).”

Five of the 12 participants were involved in one of the two Latina sororities on campus. These women felt a stronger connection to their sorority than other student organizations because of the relationship that they developed with Latinas who shared similar interests. Prior to joining her Latina sorority, Reina saw few Latinos/as on campus. She felt “more at home” after becoming involved in her sorority, “it was ideally

what I had wanted. It was a group of Latinas that were pushing for higher education, for something more, and still have that cultural ties that I have as well.” Reina learned more about herself, as a Latina, and others as a result of her involvement in the sorority:

Well, I joined my sorority, that’s the Latin sorority, for that main reason, is to share that culture and understanding and just get to know more about myself and learn more about others. Then in doing so it’s opened up like networking opportunities with other Latinos on campus and other Greek Latinos around the area. . . . If I hadn’t, I think I would have had a lot more difficulty in regards to being Latina. I could have probably found other networks because I was involved in other organizations, but strictly Latinos, it was primarily through my sorority.

Reina explored other student organizations, but ultimately found her “fit” with a Latina sorority. During Reina’s sophomore year, she felt more welcomed at a Latina sorority event than she did with the Latino Student Union. Reina was also involved in an “activist” group on campus that tended to focus on Black and White race issues, but she didn’t feel she could “fit into that conversation.” Reina was attracted to her sorority because the organization provided her with a female support network that was committed to engaging in community service opportunities and academic success:

. . . I was really into activist stuff, so that’s why I was in the community group on campus, but a lot of discussions were just like on race, of Black and White. And I was like, “Well, I can’t fit into either one and if I did, I still can’t fully relate to either one” . . . I guess that’s kinda why I looked into LSU, but I didn’t really feel all the way welcome. And as I mentioned before, my roommate, she was looking into sororities and she was like, “Oh, why don’t you check it out,” ‘cause I got invited and she was like, “Just go and see. It doesn’t hurt to go and see.” So I went and I also knew that I guess I couldn’t just have guy friends forever (laughter), so I was like, “Well, I don’t know, maybe female support,” and then the fact that it was academic-based and the community service, and that’s what I wanted to do. . . .

For Maricela, interacting with Latinos/as in college was a new experience because she previously attended schools that were predominantly White prior to entering the

University. She made a conscious decision to learn more about Latino/a culture in college:

. . . in high school or before high school I really wasn't into my culture as I would have liked to be because I didn't have Latina friends and my family we didn't go to parties or I really didn't know much about my culture. Actually it was when I went to Mexico the year I graduated high school, that's when I was like wow my culture is important, I love it and I want to learn more. And then when I came here to Maryland, that's when I wanted to learn about my culture and I figured why not join these organizations with people that are Latina, maybe they can teach me things, and I've learned a lot and I'm really, I'm really happy that I have Latina friends 'cause before I didn't have any. . . .

Maricela “felt comfortable” attending predominantly White schools prior to college, but developed over time a stronger connection to Latinas at the University. Maricela developed a particularly strong bond with the women in her sorority based on gender and sharing a similar racial/ethnic background. Maricela noted that she “didn't feel as connected” to White students as she did with her “Latina friends” in college:

. . . they have the same goals, we come from the same background . . . my best friends they're all in my sorority. They're all Latinas . . . I've never had Latina friends before. I just feel really comfortable with them.

Joining a Latina sorority allowed Maricela to “find” herself. Maricela shared, “I really didn't know who I was because all my life I've been surrounded by Americans, I really didn't know about my culture.” Her sorority sisters were a source of motivation because they were also successful Latina first-generation college students:

It felt nice to see that I actually had peers and Latinas, it wasn't only me being a first-generation, 'cause when I came here to college I didn't really see a lot of Latinas . . . just knowing that most of them are first-generation Latinas, it made me feel good that it is possible, other people can do it as well.

Maricela indicated that her family was more “Americanized” because they did not listen to Latino/a popular music and her siblings preferred eating “American food” versus more cultural meals. She shared that her father did not want her to attend parties or for her

family to listen to Latino/a popular music due to his strict Jewish beliefs. Maricela became “more exposed” to her “culture” as a result of listening to the Latino/a music of her Salvadoran roommate and attending Latino/a events and organizational meetings together.

Combating stereotypes. Participants expressed an awareness of stereotypes commonly held about the Latino/a community, but they also had a desire to combat these stereotypes through their actions. The students were particularly interested in combating stereotypes regarding Latinas and Latino/a first-generation college students. The societal stereotypes mentioned most often by the participants included the belief that Latinos/as are not attending institutions of higher education and that Latinas will become pregnant at a young age. The participants wanted to challenge the belief, particularly within Latino/a culture, that Latinas must fulfill traditional gender roles. The majority of participants tended to turn an awareness of stereotypes, based on gender and race/ethnicity, into a source of motivation.

Participants felt that being a Latina first-generation college student meant accomplishing what many, according to societal expectations, did not think would be possible. Jessica associated achievement and pride with being a Latina first-generation college student because this meant that she had “gone against” stereotypes:

. . . Just knowing that you have gone against all of maybe the stereotypes that you get about being in college and just feeling so self-fulfilled and kinda showing everybody else that, “Yes, I can do this too,” and showing other people that, “Yeah, we can help you. I did it, it’s not that big of a deal.”

For Reina, being a Latina first-generation college student represented “struggle and achievement.” Reina commented that being a first-generation college student meant overcoming “barriers,” “stereotypes,” and succeeding:

. . . being able to overcome anything . . . any type of barriers or any type of stereotypes or anything like that and being able to succeed . . . being able to hold a diploma and being like, “I did it, I made it.”

Maricela noted that Latino/a first-generation college students are successful because they have succeeded despite having limited resources, particularly in comparison to non-Latino/a students:

. . . I feel it’s like not [the] norm to go to college. Like Latino, it’s you know, working hard, not getting paid good, or, I don’t wanna have stereotypes, but that’s what I think, like cleaning or hard labor construction, that’s what I think, but then when you add first-generation college student, I feel it’s someone who’s worked really hard. I’m not saying that others haven’t worked hard, but someone who’s worked really hard, someone who has goals, really good goals in their lives and is successful, I guess. Because if a first-generation Latina can go to school, I feel like they can do anything, ‘cause it’s just different, as opposed to American and Caucasian, African American students. I feel they have more resources here as opposed to Latino students ‘cause . . . I’m not saying it means more, but I feel like a first-generation Latina . . . I feel they’re really powerful, a powerful person, they’re really successful, for real, to not have as much resources as other ethnicities have, I feel like it’s a big deal.

The participants’ desire to combat stereotypes regarding Latinos/as was a source of motivation for the students. Mimi began the second interview by sharing a personal reflection she had since the first interview regarding the racism and stereotypes that many people possess about Latinos/as. Mimi recognized that she was one of only a few of her friends who entered higher education, but she noted that attending an institution of higher education did not exempt Latino/a college students from stereotypes:

I was kind of talking with my friends and for some reason we dove into the topic of how now there’s a lot of racism against us, against Latinos in general. . . . even when you’re in college, there’s always a kind of stereotype and prejudice against you. You might not have an accent or you might not, you might have even been born here, but still people just see somebody who crossed the border illegally and an alien, and we were just talking about how ridiculous all of it is and I was just kind of reflecting on my friends from when I was younger and how we all had these huge plans and it’s like, I don’t know, the situations, the environment, it’s like out of all my friends, I’m one out of maybe five that actually made it to college. Everybody else is off with kids or they just went straight and got a job

and a bunch of other stuff and I don't know, it's kind of curious, I guess. How life has changed everybody's dreams I guess.

Through her actions, Jenny wanted to demonstrate to others that Latino/a students are attending college and that it is possible to enroll in an institution of higher education:

I think I really wanna get out there more. Show myself and show people kind of like there are Latinos on this campus that are going to college, pursuing higher education. . . . it just makes me want to go out more and show face kind of. To show people, 'cause you know I think a lot of people don't think that there are that many Latinos and really at the University of Maryland there are. I just wanna show that it's doable, it's possible.

Jen believed that stereotypes regarding Latinos/as motivated her to show others “yes, we can do it”:

. . . Like everybody when they see someone who's Hispanic they're like "you're not gonna make it anywhere, you're not gonna be successful." If you make it, you're one of the lucky ones. One of the 6% in this University basically. . . . it really has influenced me and has really pushed me to show yes we can do it. I think from my start here I mean people think that I wasn't gonna learn English until four years from there to showing that I was able to do it and actually graduating from high school. Because you know people have doubts and it's understandable because you never know where people are coming from. . . . it has affected me tremendously . . . I guess in a way it has helped me to push myself harder and to show that I could be at the same level as someone who's fluent or I could be higher than them. . . . it's just this feeling that you need to open more paths for people who are coming. . . . like you may be not migrating so recently, but someone who, maybe Hispanic, maybe it's Black, maybe it's Asian, wherever they're coming from. . . .

Reina noted that Latinas face a “double barrier” because of their racial/ethnic background and gender. Marilee encouraged girls, particularly within the Latino/a community, to challenge traditionally held beliefs regarding the role of women, including the conservative views held by their family:

. . . for girls, I think it's a lot harder than for a guy . . . it's a male-dominated world especially in Latino cultures. So I would say, “You know, a woman is supposed to be at home and do this and do that, but she needs to think outside the box and not wake up at five in the morning to cook, but wake up at five in the morning to study,” because later on she can have someone to cook for her, and

she could afford it. . . . It's a lot harder if you're a woman . . . especially if you come from a really strict old-time kinda family. . . . just work hard and even though your family says this or that, later on when they see all the advantages and everything that you have, they're gonna be like, "Oh, she was right," . . . and that'll make her feel good (laughter).

Eve noted that she contended with the "traditional stereotypes" held by her father regarding the roles of women. Eve's father feared that Eve would drop out of school or get pregnant because some of these same things occurred to a few of Eve's cousins. Eve advised Latina first-generation college students to challenge traditional beliefs regarding the role of women. Roxy felt Latina first-generation college students challenged expected roles for women in Latino/a culture by attending college:

. . . I think women, especially in our culture, we are more, less independent. I know my mother's, like small things, she cooks for him (her husband) every day, she serves him breakfast . . . I don't see it as a bad thing, but it's not like he can't do his breakfast (laugh), things like that. So it's harder for women who have been in the mindset that they have to serve someone, like their husbands when they get married or when they can only take care of their children. So when a woman comes to college or a woman does something independently, I think it's a breakthrough in our perception, in our culture (laugh), and so being a woman here, a Latina woman, I think it's more, not harder, but it shows a lot more . . . it shows that we are not just in that mindset anymore. We're growing from our history, so just like women from any other race has.

All of the participants expressed an awareness of societal stereotypes regarding Latinas becoming pregnant at a young age. By attending college, Mimi wanted to challenge commonly held stereotypes regarding Latinas becoming pregnant at a young age:

I was so sick of the stereotype of Latina women where, you know we get ourselves pregnant at 15 or something. I was sick and tired of that. And I wanted to prove that we're capable of more and that we're smart and we can get into college and we can compete. And I guess proving that really kept me going a lot.

Mimi felt a responsibility to challenge stereotypes about Latinas:

. . . I feel like Latinas don't really get a voice. . . . I don't know if it's stereotypical to think that way, but there aren't many of us that really manage to make it to college because there's so many other things going on. So I feel that we need to

get out there so that they can know that we're not just their cleaning people. And that's what comes to my mind because my friend told me that, it was in another university, but her mom went into one of the bathrooms to check it out and she was asked by a student there, "are you gonna clean right now?" And you know my friend's mom didn't have any cleaning gear and she wasn't dressed to clean. And so I'm just kind of like, *gasp*, it was very aggravating.

Giving Back

All of the participants expressed a desire to give back to their family, community, and peers. The participants felt a sense of responsibility to help others, particularly their family and individuals who had similar backgrounds as their own (e.g., Latinos/as, first-generation college students, individuals from low-income backgrounds). All of the participants recognized and appreciated how their parents' sacrifice and support, particularly immigrating to the United States, enabled them to enter higher education. As a result, the participants wanted to one day give back to their family financially and serve as a role model to younger relatives. Participants wanted to show their relatives and other Latinos/as that attending college is possible by providing guidance regarding the college application process and higher education experiences. The participants were involved in the Latino/a community on campus and off campus in some capacity, including college outreach efforts to Latino/a middle school and high school students. Participants' desire to give back to the Latino/a community was also reflected in decisions made regarding their majors and possible career paths.

Family. The majority of participants wanted others, particularly younger relatives, to benefit from their experiences as the first to apply to college and to engage in college experiences. Rosa wanted to serve as an example for her nieces and nephews so that they would know at a young age that going to college was possible, particularly because she was not aware that college was an option as a child. Rosa and other students

exposed their families to college experiences by inviting them to participate in an annual campus visit day:

I brought my family to Maryland Day and I remember my little nephew, he was really happy and he was like “oh thank you.” . . . he was really excited and I’m like I never got this when I was a kid and I’m glad that I exposed them to this and just the little things like that that you know make me realize that oh I have this route so I can show it to family members.

For Anna, being a Latina first-generation college student involved a responsibility to help others. Similar to Rosa, Anna wanted to expose her family and friends to college experiences so that they knew that entering higher education was a possibility:

. . . the facet that comes to my head is “si se puede” [yes we can]. Showing that it’s not race that holds us back, it’s not culture that holds us back type of thing. . . . there’s the will, there’s the power, there’s really nothing that separates us from other people. Like citizens of this nation, we often view education as the key . . . I invited . . . my neighbors and some family friends to my graduation, so even though I’m not close with them, I want the kids to be exposed to college and I want them to know that this is definitely one of their possibilities and to take into consideration this possibility in the future. . . .

Jenny also wanted to serve as an example for her relatives:

To me it means I’m setting an example for the rest of my cousins ‘cause I am one of the older ones in my family. . . . one of my aunts has 10 kids. And from those 10, one has already completed college. . . . all the other ones have kinda trailed off. . . . there’s still four younger ones and my younger brother and I’m like if I go to college and I show them the benefits that I’m gaining from it maybe that’s gonna help them. . . . So it’s kinda like I want to set an example for them. ‘Cause I know if I don’t go to school then they’re gonna be like why do I have to go. So it’s like I really wanna set an example . . .

Roxy indicated that being a first-generation college student was difficult, but having the “first discovery” of college was also exciting. Roxy approached college with a “trial-and-error” perspective, and wanted to provide guidance to her sister when she entered college:

. . . it was definitely harder being a first, the first. . . . when my sister goes to college I’ll help her out. She’ll have an idea of how it is and what she needs to do

basically. So I was kind of like the trial-and-error part of it, which makes it exciting I guess. I was the first one to go to a dorm and so they have, they'll have the experience, but I'll have the first discovery kind of part of it.

Participants wanted to assist their family financially, while they were in college and after graduating. Anna received loans at two different times in order to move out of her family's home and into an apartment, but instead gave the funding to her family.

Anna felt "a little sacrifice" was "nothing in comparison" to what her mother did for

Anna and her siblings:

I had enough money to live by myself, but at the time there was nobody to live with me. . . . the money I took out I used it to sort of finance our family so I didn't have it anymore. And then the same thing happened again. . . . if I would've lived on campus I would have had a loan yes, but it would have been my loan versus the loan I took out to help out my family. Which I mean it's fine, but sometimes it's just like it's the whole issue with my mom being a single-woman type of thing. . . . she sacrificed everything for us so a little sacrifice from us on our part is nothing in comparison to what she did. Yeah that's how I have to look at it and not be like a little American brat (laughter). . . . I just have to deal with that with myself and not being a little American brat (laughter).

Anna noted that her mother has been working since the age of six, which served as a source of motivation for Anna and her siblings to work in order to give their mother "a break." Maricela was glad that she would make more money than her parents as a college graduate, but felt some guilt in thinking about how hard her parents worked to earn a living. After graduating, Maricela wanted to assist her parents financially so that they could "enjoy their lives":

. . . at first I was like, "Wow, I'm making more than my parents." . . . that's kind of good, but in a way, no, it's not really good. Like poor things, they worked really hard to make their money and I'm probably not gonna have a job where I need to have like extensive labor. My job is probably gonna be simple, sitting at a desk doing things and making more money and it's actually nice, it's a good feeling, but in a way I feel kind of bad. I kinda hope that my parents had the same opportunities as I did here in the States and, again, I really wanna help them out. I want them to enjoy their lives now.

Community. The majority of participants were interested in choosing a major and career path or becoming involved in co-curricular experiences that would allow them to give back to the Latino/a community. Jenny’s involvement in the Latino Student Union prompted her to choose a major in a health-related field so that she could help the Latino/a community:

. . . when I first came here I was thinking pharmacy. . . . I think getting really involved with Latino Student Union, I kinda changed my major around. . . . now I’m geared more towards a major that’s gonna help the Latino community. That’s why I want to go into something like public health and then double major with Spanish. That way I can help not only people that speak English I guess, but those that don’t really know the English language that well. And I wanna just find a way to kinda help the community at large more than just focus on one type of health care. So I wanna do some kind of administrative work to be able to help them provide better health care . . .

Roxy wanted to return to Bolivia to work in the government of her home country to help all Bolivians, but was particularly interested in assisting children and mothers. The desire that Roxy had to return to Bolivia motivated her “to push harder,” even when she was stressed about school, to achieve this “dream”:

. . . when I mean helping my country, I mean helping all . . . I mean all Bolivians (laugh). . . . I really wanna help kids, but I think kids can be helped mostly by the emphasis you put on them. . . . in the government, if they make laws that make education, or make policies to make education a priority, which is what I think it should be, then that means it’s gonna have an impact on them. . . . in the end, I’ll help children or moms, small groups like that, by fixing policies or something like that.

Rosa shared that her mother instilled within her a desire “to help people that are less fortunate.” Rosa’s decision to major in family science with a minor in U.S. Latina/o Studies was influenced by her interest in helping the Latino/a community, students “at-risk,” and her own personal experiences. She wanted to help individuals who went through similar experiences to her own:

I want to do family therapy or just you know something to help, especially the Latino community and that's why I'm trying to do a minor in Latino Studies . . . that's what I look forward to doing, working with Latino families. 'Cause I know firsthand struggles that people go through.

With a major in family studies, Rosa wanted to work with individuals who were “adopted and biracially adopted.” Her interest in biracial adoptions was likely influenced by her experiences as a biracial individual, but also her boyfriend, who was adopted. Rosa discussed working with children who were from a similar background to her own, in this case kids with special needs, in order to show them that college is possible:

. . . just looking at the Latino children and just you know talking to them, and a lot of them come from troubled neighborhoods where their parents work all day and some of their siblings are involved in gangs and stuff. And they would ask me, "oh you come to the school, wow." And a lot of them would be like, "you're not Latina." They're like, "you wouldn't understand me." I would be like “don't think that I don't because my household is probably just the same as yours.” And they're like, "I don't know if I would ever make it here." That right there was special to me because I'm like I need to keep in touch with children who have been through similar things that I have to let them know that it's possible. . . . right now I'm trying to internship for a national agency that focuses on supporting children and families. . . . my boyfriend actually, he's been in foster care for all his life. Just knowing his life experiences I just want to help people who have been through that. . . .

Anna served as a tutor and held several leadership positions in a national reading and math afterschool program for elementary school children during her four years at the University. The majority of the children participating in the afterschool program were Latino/a and Black. She noted that the program was hosted at the University in order to show the children “there's a lot of people at college and you can make it too.” Anna explored several different majors, but decided to focus on art because she wanted to teach art or become an ESOL teacher. Anna wanted a major and career path that would allow her to help others:

. . . because I like science, I was like, “What requires science and art?” and architecture came to mind, but I was like, ”I can get more money with engineering and I’m good at math and science,” but I don’t know, it just worked out that I’d go back to art. . . . even though that might be a way for me to make money, it’s not really gratifying for me if it’s not really helping anybody. . . . I know where I came from, I know there’s a lot of people like me and I want to make sure that the people know that they can, I mean, a lot of things can hold them back, but you can still go for it . . . because I know when I was younger I had problems reading, but I was really good at math. Like in 1st grade, I was horrible at math and everything, but it wasn’t because I didn’t know, it was because I couldn’t read it, the instructions, so, and understand it. I know there’s a lot of kids like that . . .

All of the students participated in college outreach opportunities; many of the visits were organized by the Latino Student Union (LSU). Jenny found her involvement in the Latino Student Union rewarding because the group allowed her to meet people who had similar backgrounds as well as engage in high school outreach activities. Members of LSU visited Jenny’s high school when she was a senior, so she wanted to help students in a similar way:

. . . it was really I guess rewarding to meet other people like me. And then it's just the activities that they do, the community service, it's all geared towards helping the Latino community outside of Maryland. I know they visit high schools talking about higher education and they help them. ‘Cause I remember in my 12th grade year when LSU came to my school. And I remember it was about six or seven panelists and they spoke about how they faced just the same obstacles we were facing. They got their financial aid, they applied to Maryland, and they’re here. So I know I remember that from my high school years. And it's like that's why I would like to go. ‘Cause it's like maybe just a little bit of what they said I took in, and now I'm here so I'd like to do the same.

Marilee was in her first semester at the University when she participated in an LSU-sponsored college outreach visit to the high school that she attended. She enjoyed encouraging others to attend college. Marilee shared information about her college experience, which began at a community college, during a college outreach visit to her high school:

. . . I did some community service with the LSU about, at high schools, it was like coming to college and what my experience was. . . . I told them, “I didn’t do too well in high school,” and it was actually at my high school, I was like, “I didn’t do too well here. I didn’t get accepted anywhere. I went to a community college. Now I’m at Maryland . . . you tell your stories and then it’s just that little thing that just kinda makes people think and maybe change their mind about what they’re doing. So I like to do that, I like to talk (laughter).

Maricela wanted “a career advocating higher education to minority students,” particularly Latino/a students, because she didn’t feel that many Latinos/as see college as “the norm.” As a result of encouraging younger relatives to attend college, participating in college outreach visits, as well as tutoring and mentoring children, Maricela wanted to help change the belief held by many Latinos/as that “after you graduate high school you have to go and do work or labor”:

I feel it's really important to inform students as young as like their primary education about the importance of college ‘cause you need to prepare them, because when it comes to high school and you tell them, it's kind of too late. I've always been really passionate about school especially higher education now that I'm gonna graduate, like I'm really passionate about it.

Peers. Yesenia noted that Latino/a first-generation college students are “selfless” in terms of giving time to their family, friends, and community. She believed that the values that Latino/a student leaders have to empower “younger generations” and to make improvements for future college students was instilled in them by their parents:

. . . the same struggle with balancing, that’s also a strength . . . if you talk to several Latino first-generation students and you talk about what they do, I think it’s kind of overwhelming how much they take on, at least for my friends. . . . thinking about the people that I know, they’re very selfless with their time and try to contribute a lot to the community . . . we don’t think, “Me, here, now,” we think our family, our friends, our community, broader spectrum, how does what we do now affect them later. So I think people just have a more general scope of what’s going on and are more willing to dedicate their time because they understand the struggle that it took to get there. So while we’re here, trying to make a difference, and then empowering younger generations so that when we graduate that work continues, or so that they’re receiving something better than we were here. . . . kind of like when your parents are raising you and giving you

better, as students I think we kind of internalize that and then still use those same values here. . . . And I think just having that understanding and that consciousness of other people is a strong value that comes from being both a minority and the first one.

Marilee noted that her mother was the “voice of responsibility” for Marilee when she was younger, encouraging her to avoid underage drinking and drugs, and to do her homework.

Marilee viewed herself as the “voice of responsibility” for her friends in terms of encouraging them to go to college:

I’m like the sermon, like priest kinda thing for school. Like all of my friends or people, “You should go to college. You need to better yourself. We’re Latinos.” . . . I’m big on talking about going to school and I started saying, “There’s scholarships, there’s this, there’s that, there’s this and here and there,” I just talk about it a lot to a lot of people to try to influence them to go to school ‘cause it’s good for them . . .

Marilee would drive her friends through the campus in an effort to show them that they “could be here.”

Reina was a mentor in a Latino/a mentoring program because she felt that she would have benefited from having a mentor as a first-year student, and wanted to help others:

I just joined the Latino/a mentor program this year. I became a mentor. . . . I realized had I really known about that program when I was a freshman it would have probably been helpful because you’re matched up with a freshman or a transfer student and you go to events on campus and you know you just help them transfer over into college life. And so I decided to participate in that in hopes to really help somebody because I felt that I needed that when I was a freshman. . . .

Maricela was motivated to stay involved as a participant and student leader in a Latino/a mentor program on campus throughout her college years in order to help students who had questions regarding what classes to take and other academic concerns. Yesenia enjoyed being involved on campus and wanted to assist other students, particularly commuters:

. . . I just enjoy that experience outside of the classroom so much. And I know not to take it for granted because so many of my peers are commuters and I have the luxury of being on campus. If it is 12:00 a.m. and I'm still at a meeting, my dorm is five minutes away so it's fine. But I know other people can't do that . . . I know that my experience is kind of different from other people and I just want to do what I can to make sure that even though they have to drive for an hour at least the time that they're here they are doing well also or that they're able to enjoy it. I just think that I'm so passionate about being involved and different leadership positions that I've taken on to make other people's experiences a little bit better. And for the LSU board, we had a retreat in January. And I made all of them write down their GPAs anonymously on a piece of paper so I could look at them just to see where they stand. Because like I said I've seen so many people drop out of school. And I'm like you guys cannot drop out of school just because you're involved in LSU, that's counterproductive.

Experiencing Pride and Pressure

The participants experienced feelings of pride and pressure as a result of being the first in their family to attend college in the United States. The participants and their family were proud of the students' accomplishments. A sense of pride was felt by the participants who believed they were accomplishing what was viewed as not the "norm" for Latinos/as to enroll in higher education. The participants were also proud of their parents for immigrating to the United States so that their children could have additional opportunities. Feelings of pride were often associated with a variety of internal and external pressures. The participants felt an internal pressure as a result of navigating higher education systems on their own, particularly because no one in their family was able to assist in understanding college experiences. In addition, as the first in their family to attend college in the United States, the participants experienced pressure due to the high expectations that family members and the students had of themselves for their success. All of the students articulated a sense of responsibility to give back to their family and others, particularly in light of the sacrifices that their parents endured on their

behalf, and worried at times whether they could adequately assist their family after graduating.

Experiencing orgullo (pride). Being a Latina first-generation college student was a source of pride for the participants and their family. The participants were proud that they were attending college, particularly due to the societal misconception that Latinos/as are not attending institutions of higher education. The students were also proud of their parents for immigrating to the United States, which provided the students with the opportunity to attend college. A few students were proud of their academic accomplishments and the knowledge that they gained as a result of being in college.

The participants were proud that they essentially entered higher education and navigated college experiences on their own. Being a Latina first-generation college student was a source of pride for Roxy because she was able to enter higher education despite not having anyone to “guide” her through the process:

It means pride (laugh). Pride and determination, it's very hard to come to college by itself, but when you don't have a precedent or don't have someone to guide you with coming to college, then it's harder. So I'm proud that I've been able to do it and determined . . . I can graduate from here, and if I want, I can go to graduate school or something. So pride basically.

Maricela was proud to be a Latina first-generation college student because going to college was not seen as “the norm” for Latinas. Challenging this misconception served as a source of motivation. Maricela wanted to achieve her goals of graduating with a bachelor's degree and one day obtaining a master's degree:

I'm just really proud of my studies and being first-generation Latina. . . . being Latina in general, I feel like it's not the norm to go to college and obtain a degree and this can actually, encourages me more, to not only finish my studies, after I finish my undergraduate, but to pursue higher education. I really wanna pursue my master's, 'cause I feel like if I do well here, I feel like I can do good at graduate school as well.

Marilee felt a sense of pride or “orgullo” because she was achieving more than what was expected of her by some of her extended family members. Marilee was particularly proud of her accomplishments because she had lived on her own since the age of 17 and received little assistance from others:

It's a pride . . . I don't know how to say it in English, un orgullo. . . . I made something of myself and I can do this . . . they said that I was one of the bad kids and like it turned out that it was totally the opposite. You know I was one of the good kids and my sister is kinda the bad kid now . . . It just makes me feel really good about myself that I've been able also to accomplish it on my own. You know my parents were never able to give me money for school. Everything has come out of my pocket in addition to housing and everything like that. Like I've had no help and I've been living on my own since I was 17.

Mimi was proud to be in college, but felt a greater sense of pride that her parents took the “risk” to immigrate to the United States so that her family could achieve the “American dream.” For Mimi, achieving the “American dream” involved being able to attend college:

I can't even begin to imagine what it was like for them to leave El Salvador, for both of them to leave their son who was only three years old, to leave their parents, their brothers and sisters, everything they'd ever known and cared for. Just pick up and leave and go into this strange country, which was hostile to them. I've heard of the walks, of how horrible they are, and my mom said she actually had to swim across the Rio Grande, and it's like it was so hard for them to get here and then not just getting here, but actually living here. . . . I'm proud of the fact that they didn't forget their family because a lot of people come over here and forget about the family they left behind . . . they've come so far from having nothing in El Salvador to now, we have a house, we have cars, we, and it's not just the material stuff, it's like I'm here, I'm getting an education, I'm bettering myself. It's like we're living the American dream. They came over here and I have a chance to be something better than they could've ever been if they had stayed in El Salvador . . . I'm just so proud of them for having taken that risk and coming this far.

Similarly, Jessica was proud that her parents immigrated to the United States from Bolivia in order to give Jessica and her brother additional educational opportunities. Jessica was proud that she was achieving her parents' wishes, by attending college. She

wanted to obtain an undergraduate degree and attend graduate school, for herself and her parents. Yesenia was proud to be a first-generation college student, particularly as she thought about the opportunities she had at the age of 18, in comparison to her mother, who at the same age was enduring the difficult journey of immigrating to the United States:

I think pride . . . I think of my mother and I think of where she was at my age . . . when I was 18, I was graduating high school and getting ready for college, but I had a roof over my head and I had everything I needed. At 18, my mother was going from El Salvador to the United States by herself, by land, which is really dangerous . . . I look at her life and I don't think that I would've had the courage to do what she did, especially by myself, and so I think that I was blessed enough that I didn't have to do what she did because she did it for me, but I can still work hard through a different venue. . . . she was the first in her family to immigrate to the United States and she opened the doors for other people, so I can kind of reflect that, but in a different way . . . they always shared stories with me about when they were coming here and she would always say, "I wish I could have gone to school more because if I had gone to school more, then I wouldn't have this job which I hate . . ." So kind of allowing them to live vicariously through me and so one day be in a position where I can give them something better since they worked hard their entire lives. I think that brings a sense of pride that, yeah, because we know how much work it took to get here.

The participants also felt a sense of personal pride as a result of being Latina first-generation college students and their academic accomplishments. Maricela was particularly proud of receiving academic honors. Maricela shared a copy of her unofficial transcript as her artifact, which highlighted that her GPA increased each semester:

I guess just looking at my cumulative GPA thus far, it's a 3.452 and my goal was to graduate with a 3.5 and I'm really happy that I've done really well. . . . it's hard to maintain a good GPA . . . it just shows how hard I worked toward this goal, you know, being a first-generation Latina and just doing well in school. . . . I was in academic honors starting fall '06 and I stayed on there and I know I'm gonna be on academic honors in spring . . . it just kind of makes me feel proud that I am a first-generation Latina student and doing well with my studies . . . I feel like if I can do it, anyone else can. . . .

Marilee was proud to tell her friends that she attended the University, and enjoyed the reaction she received when she mentioned attending the University, “Wow! She’s smart (laughter).” Marilee was also proud of the knowledge she gained as a result of being in college:

. . . I kinda like my history class, she would give us diaries to read, she would give us excerpts from speeches and things like that and it was kind of like, it made you think a little more outside of the box, like it wasn’t so, you know, “Green is a color.” It was like, “Green,” and then you had to figure out, you know it’s a color, but how does this apply, it makes you think a little bit more. And it was kind of cool ‘cause you would learn about actual people and actual history and things like that. . . . I kinda liked thinking outside of the box. It was interesting because then you can go back and be like, “Oh, I read a book about this and that,” and like it made me proud ‘cause like, “Oh, I read my first books at Maryland,” so yeah (laughter).

Graduating from college was a particularly proud moment for the participants and their family. Anna noted that her mother encouraged her to attend the University graduation ceremony because of the meaning that this would have for her family. Anna shared that her mother wanted Anna “to walk across the stage for everybody else” because she was the first one in her family to graduate from college. Maricela’s immediate and extended family members were proud that Maricela was graduating from college; some of her extended family members traveled from New Orleans and Mexico to attend her graduation. Maricela was more cognizant of being a Latina first-generation college student when she reflected on her upcoming graduation and how proud her family was of her. Maricela was the first person from her immediate family and her father’s extended family to attend college. Graduating was particularly meaningful to Maricela due to her mother’s initial belief that Maricela would not attend college because they could not “afford it”:

. . . when I was applying for college and my parents, yeah, they didn't really know about the process and the perception they had like, "Oh, you're not going to college." Especially my mom, "You're not gonna go to college, we can't afford it." . . . it really hit me . . . being the first, first Latina generation . . . I think probably when we started calling all my aunts and uncles for my graduation. Everyone was so proud of me and they kept on reiterating it to me, it seemed like, "Oh, you know, you're the first one in our family," especially my dad's side of the family, "to go to college. You're gonna be successful and this and that." Just talking to my family especially reassured me or made me aware that wow, this is a big deal, I am the first one in my family, my dad's side of the family, to get a degree, but my mom's side, they all got degrees in Mexico, so, but not my mom, my mom didn't.

Marilee noted that her mother was proud that Marilee earned an associate's degree at a community college, prior to entering the University, and wanted Marilee to participate in the graduation ceremony. Marilee's mother wanted to fly from Texas to Maryland to attend the graduation ceremony.

Managing internal and external pressures. The participants associated a weight or pressure with being a Latina first-generation college student. Balancing academic and family responsibilities was stressful for many participants, particularly because they were pioneering higher education on their own and their parents did not understand the responsibilities that they had as college students (e.g., studying, involvement in co-curricular experiences). The increased sense of responsibility the participants felt to assist their family and others also carried a weight. The participants worried at times whether they would meet the expectations that their family and others had of them.

The "big weight" that Jen felt on her "shoulders" was due to the high expectations that her family in Ecuador and Spain had of her to succeed, despite living in the United States for only a relatively short period of time:

I think it's a big weight on my shoulders. I mean I don't feel that they expect me to be a scientist or whatever. They just expect me to find something that I like and they're proud. . . . I think I'm doing a big influence on my family in Ecuador as well because they, now everybody's looking around it's just like oh you know she can do it . . . But I feel like yeah it's a big pressure for me to have this thing. Because I also have family in Spain, and I have cousins who are also almost my same age and they're always like "wow how do you do it, how did you do it?" You know it's only eight years, it's not that much, it's not like I grew up here . . . I feel that I'm also a role model for other people as well. . . . I don't feel the pressure, but I feel that I have so much to give and I feel that all this stuff that I've gone through . . . maybe some stuff I did wrong and some stuff that I did right, and other stuff that I found out. I feel that I need to share it. . . .

In addition to academic pressures related to completing a thesis and determining her plans after graduation, Jen experienced some pressure from her parents regarding her choice of major. Jen shared that her parents did not support her decision to become a teacher because they did not feel that teaching would garner a high salary and respect:

. . . I feel the pressure of trying to finish my thesis. . . . And also the pressure that now you're thrown into, I guess, real life and having to find out what to do. . . . And then the pressure from my parents too because now they expect me to do much better 'cause I feel that you know yes it's this high up here college degree so you should be high up here in salary. . . . So they expect you do, say doctor, lawyer, teacher. So it's like if you don't have those it's like why are you gonna go to college then? Then what for, if you don't have a career, if you don't know exactly where you're going. Why? . . . And if your family's not helping you then it's really tough. . . . education is not valued. So if you do it, if you become a teacher it's like why, why did you even want to be a teacher. You're not gonna be well paid, you're gonna have a lot of work, and the students are not going to treat you well so why are you getting yourself into that. So at the beginning that was the problem with my parents. My parents were not supporting my major. They say well why, there are so many other things that you can do. . . . they would try to tell me that yeah in Ecuador it's not valued either so why. . . .

It was difficult for the participants to discuss academic demands with members of their family due to their family's lack of understanding of college experiences. Rosa felt pressure from her family because they had high expectations for her to succeed, but they did not understand her experiences as a college student:

Well there's a lot of pressure. Everyone is like, go, go, go, but no one really knows exactly what's going on. Every now and then they'll be like, oh so when are you graduating? What are you doing? What are you gonna do after you graduate? . . . I'll talk to my sisters about the courses that I'm taking and they're like oh interesting. But it's a lot of pressure. . . . I think of the day when I do graduate. I think of how happy and proud my mom will be. And like that's mainly my motivation, well and what I want to do with my life. Like I can see my mom, like after all her hard work, she'll be like, oh OK, it paid off.

Rosa felt she had to “read or study twice as hard” because she did not grow up in a household that discussed topics covered in class:

It has been frustrating, but it's just, it's like more pressure for me. Like even going to classes where there's a lot of discussion and I don't really have a lot of background on the information. I feel like I have to read or study twice as hard just so I can answer the question or, it's, no one in my house was talking about American history. I have to learn it on my own. So I just have to try twice as hard.

Mimi contended with pressure from her parents as well as the stress of academic demands:

They're proud, yeah, they're proud. I hope. (laughter) They better be proud. But it's like nothing's really changed. My brother I guess kinda asks me if I'm sure, 'cause he knows the pressure that my mom and my dad can put on us. And he didn't want me to rebel the way he did. So he kinda makes sure that I'm really OK. Like whenever they ask, even if I'm stressing over a test or what not. They ask if everything is OK and I'm like everything is fine. I mean I'm not gonna tell them, no I'm like two seconds from suicide 'cause I don't know what I'm gonna do with this paper. It's just like everything's OK. So he makes sure that everything really is OK.

Participants described feeling stressed and becoming sick in some cases as a result of trying to meet academic demands. Maricela noted that she almost had an anxiety attack due to balancing a full course schedule, participating in campus activities, dealing with personal and family issues, as well as the passing of a Latina administrator on campus:

. . . Just doing my sorority, working, school . . . I was taking 18 credits and doing the Latino/a mentor program, Cecilia passed away so it was really hard to like get

that going and my boyfriend like wasn't, he graduated already and then my family . . . We kind of went through a tough time with my sister . . . Just all that together kind of was stressful because I had to take care of my studies, my boyfriend, my family, my sorority, the Latino/a mentor program, that I feel like I struggled. . . . 'Cause it was hard at first to try to make sure everything is fine and I pay attention to like everybody. Yeah it was a struggle that I wanted to not be involved in anything anymore 'cause I didn't, actually I didn't give time to myself. Like I would always give time to other people . . . Sometimes I was close to having like anxiety attacks and things like that but I feel like I get those once in a while. I'm like oh my god I feel like I have too much responsibility but then I've learned that you have to relax and have time to yourself. So that's a struggle.

Maricela felt she inherited a propensity to become anxious from her mother. Earlier in her college career, Maricela wanted to get a 4.0 GPA and would cry at times if she did not get the grades she wanted. She wanted a good GPA in order to go to graduate school. Maricela shared that she became less stressed about her grades after learning that some of her friends who had a lower GPA were successful after graduating. Anna became stressed and sick from having a demanding arts course and professor, a full course load, a job, and an internship. She developed shingles and the flu due to the stress of having a professor who she felt did not take into account different ability levels. Anna also found it stressful to complete weekly assignments because she did not have easy access to the necessary computer programs during class or at home as a result of not having a laptop.

Many of the students felt a responsibility to help their family, especially after graduating. Participants embraced this responsibility to assist family members, but expressed some concern over whether they would be able to adequately care for their parents and siblings in the future. Eve wanted to repay her parents one day for the assistance they provided, which included helping her parents financially and contributing to the college funds of her siblings. She felt it was her responsibility to take care of her

brothers if anything ever happened to her parents. Eve worried at times whether she would be able to provide for her parents and siblings in the future:

. . . Your family has helped you so much to get through, now it's kinda like you have to help your family. That's what we're taught. I know once I start working and making money, I know to help my parents with bills, start helping my brothers save money for their college experience. Because my parents are not getting younger, they're getting older, they will retire, and I have a little one that's eight years old . . . God willing, my parents are still here, but if they're not, they know that he'll be in good hands. . . . Latin families, they think that way, "If I'm not here, you're responsible for your little, your brothers," or, "When we're old, you're gonna have to step up to the plate." It's a huge responsibility. It freaks me out sometimes because it's kinda like, "Oh, my god, what if I won't be able to take care of them, what if I can't do it." . . . that's the whole point. You do it to better yourself . . . but you also do it to better your family.

Reina and Yesenia felt pressure as a result of being leaders in the Latino/a community on campus. Reina was happy to be in a position to serve as a role model, but she also found it challenging, "I mean it's really great because I'm setting the standards and I'm gonna make sure I set them high and really encourage, but it's a difficult task." Reina commented on the pressure she felt and that Latino/a students experience as a result of holding leadership positions on campus and being "spread too thinly":

. . . being first-generation, we're just so busy, like the leaders on campus are worn out, like we get spread too thinly because of things and I don't know where the motivational factor lies to get other Latinos involved and if there's more involvement, maybe we could succeed more. . . . that has always been a concern amongst leaders, is just like how do we motivate other Latinos to get involved and take leadership roles and I guess part of that is also, maybe like the pressure that we put on one another. Since most of us commute, the time involvement. . . . that's like a really big thing . . .

Yesenia described the pressure she experienced as the president of a Latino/a student organization on campus. Initially, she experienced self-doubt regarding her ability to lead an executive board that depended on her without having previous leadership experiences:

. . . when I first became president, I doubted that I could do that . . . one thing led to another and there I am, president with a board of nine people who had no prior leadership experience. And I'm like, "How am I going to do this? How do I lead people who are supposed to be leading other people?" So I did doubt myself because I'm like, "How am I gonna do this? They're depending on me," and I just felt a lot of pressure. So I talked to one of my advisors and he gave me a lot of advice and just tried to help me work things out, which helped a lot, but that frustration of not, like that doubt, I only shared it with a few people because I didn't want people to be afraid or to think, "Well, if she doesn't know what she's doing, then how are we supposed to know what we're doing?" . . . I just figured out who I can go to and who I can communicate with on certain things.

Strengths of Being a Latina First-Generation College Student

Six of the 24 conceptual themes that emerged from the 914 initial codes addressed the second research question, which explored the strengths that participants associated with being a Latina first-generation college student. The strengths were derived from my analysis of the data. Conceptual themes emerged regarding strengths the participants exhibited as Latina first-generation college students, but also those students identified and associated with being Latina first-generation college students. The following six strengths were identified: Family, Latino/a Culture, Spanish Language/Being Bilingual, Determination, Support Network – Prior to College and During College, and Sense of Responsibility to Help Others.

Immediate and extended family members played an important role in students' lives. A couple of students indicated that "family" is particularly important to Latinos/as and Latino/a culture. Students indicated that family members were a source of "support," "encouragement," and "motivation" prior to and during college. Several students indicated that their parents could not provide assistance with understanding college processes; however, their family supported them in other ways (e.g., parents instilled a value of education at a young age, immigrating to the United States so that the

participants could have additional opportunities). The students often mentioned that their parents and extended family members who did not live in the United States served as a source of motivation. For Jen, knowing that her parents and family (e.g., grandparents, uncles, aunts) in Ecuador wanted her to be successful helped Jen to not feel “alone.” Jen doubted at times whether she would complete college, but her family’s encouragement supported her in persisting. Jen was told by family members that she would “finish” college even if it took her four, six, or ten years. As the first in her family to attend college, Jen wanted to show her family in Ecuador that graduating from college was possible. Words of encouragement from family members during “tough times” and the financial assistance provided for tuition and books were also appreciated by the students.

Participants viewed Latino/a culture as a strength associated with being a Latina first-generation college student. The importance of Latino/a culture was evident as the students expressed an awareness of their parents’ experiences in their home country and immigrating to the United States. Each of the students also demonstrated a desire to develop a deeper understanding of their Latina identity, which further emphasizes the importance of Latino/a culture to the participants. The students tended to explore or maintain a connection with Latino/a culture by becoming involved in Latino/a-focused organizations, enrolling in Latino/a courses, or exploring Latino/a-related topics in course assignments. Yesenia indicated that she advocated for Latino/a Studies courses because she wanted first-year students to benefit from these experiences in the future. Maricela did not feel “in touch with her Latino roots” when she was growing up, but this changed after she entered the University due to her involvement in Latino/a co-curricular (e.g., peer interaction, Latina sorority involvement) and curricular experiences.

Being bilingual, speaking English and Spanish, was a strength participants associated with being a Latina first-generation college student. All of the participants indicated that they could speak English and Spanish. Many of the students enrolled in Spanish courses in order to improve their level of competency of the language. Mimi viewed speaking English and Spanish as giving Latinos/as “an edge” due to the growing Latino/a population in the United States. Maricela also felt that the “market” was looking for educated Latino/a students who could serve an increasingly diverse clientele. Several of the students thought that being bilingual would be attractive to employers, who would need employees who can communicate to Latino/a customers. A few participants believed that being bilingual would result in increased pay in the future. Eve mentioned that she was presented with additional opportunities at her internship site due to being able to speak Spanish.

Determination was identified by participants as a strength that Latina first-generation college students possess. As Latina first-generation college students, the participants also exhibited determination in terms of entering and persisting through higher education. Participants’ determination to attend college and receive an undergraduate degree was fueled by an awareness of their parents’ sacrifice and support. Mimi indicated that Latino/a students “work a little harder” and do not take “for granted” the opportunity to attend college, unlike some non-Latino/a students whose parents are paying for their children’s education. Mimi also noted that Latino/a students “know what our parents went through to get us here. We know what we went through to get here. Yeah, we don’t take it for granted.” As the first in their family to attend an institution of higher education in the United States, Latina first-generation college students were

unable to ask family members for advice about college experiences. According to Marilee, Latina first-generation college students have to be “strong” and have “perseverance” because it is “harder” for students who are the first in their family to experience college due to not being able to receive assistance from family members. Participants were particularly proud of being Latina first-generation college students because they were achieving what was viewed as not the norm for Latinos/as, attending an institution of higher education. The students wanted to combat stereotypes about Latinos/as not attending institutions of higher education, in part, to demonstrate to others that it is possible to attend and graduate from college.

The support network described by the Latina participants emerged as a strength associated with being a Latina first-generation college student. The students’ support network included primarily family members and peers, but several students mentioned receiving assistance from Latino/a faculty and staff and other individuals (e.g., family friends, middle school teacher, high school guidance counselor, a priest). Immediate and extended family members provided words of encouragement, served as a source of motivation, and offered financial assistance. Jenny appreciated being able to “hop on the bus” to visit her cousins who lived near the University and that her aunt would bring her food to campus. Anna indicated that the support her mother and siblings provided was “unique and perfect” for her. She knew that her family “believed” in her, even when they did not “vocalize it.” In addition, Anna was not expected to pay rent to live at home or assist in household chores. Peers (e.g., members of student organizations, sorority sisters, friends from high school) played an integral role in the lives of the students. Many of the participants appreciated receiving support and guidance from their peers, particularly

from other Latina students. The five students who were members of a Latina sorority valued having a female support network of individuals who had similar values and experiences. For Reina, she “felt more at home” when she joined her Latina sorority than with any other organization. Jenny’s sorority sisters helped her to develop as a student leader and motivated her to do well academically. Maricela believed that her Latina roommate and sorority sisters helped her to learn more about Latino/a culture. One of Eve’s sorority sisters gave her advice about how to talk with her parents about wanting to study abroad, something with which her parents were unfamiliar. In addition, many of the students referenced teachers and counselors from early educational experiences who encouraged the participants to attend college, provided assistance with the college application process, or continued to serve as a resource while the students were enrolled at the University.

Each of the students felt a sense of responsibility to help others as a result of being the first in their family to attend college. Participants were committed to giving back to their family, peers, and the Latino/a community. Most of the students selected a major and career path that would allow them to assist the Latino/a community in some capacity. Almost all of the participants expressed a desire to serve as a role model for younger siblings, cousins, high school students, or middle school children. Yesenia noted that Latino/a first-generation college students “are selfless” and “contribute a lot to the community” because they are aware of the “struggle that it took to get here.” She also mentioned that the desire Latino/a first-generation college students have to assist younger students is due to internalizing the “values” that their parents instilled within them. According to Yesenia, Latina first-generation college students are motivated to help

others because they were influenced by their parents' example, who worked to make a "better" life for their children. For Yesenia, a "consciousness of other people is a strong value that comes from being both a minority and the first one" to attend college. Most of the students selected a major and career path that would allow them to assist the Latino/a community in some capacity.

Identity as a Latina First-generation College Student: A Grounded Theory

A grounded theory and a conceptual model (Figure 1) describing Latina students' understanding of their identity as Latina first-generation college students are presented. There were similarities in how the participants experienced being Latina first-generation college students. Core identities represented multiple and intersecting dimensions that were salient to the participants' identity as Latina first-generation college students. Core identities were further shaped by the students' engagement in multiple worlds.

The design of the conceptual model (Figure 1) is similar to a gyroscope. The upright orientation of a gyroscope is maintained due to the spinning of the rotor or disc around a spin axis (Bernstein, 2008; "Gyroscope," n.d.). The spin axis and disc located in the center of the device are surrounded by an internal ring (gimbal), external ring (gimbal), and support frame ("Gyroscope," n.d.). The internal and external rings are connected to a support frame, which is mounted on a base. The force exerted by the spin axis and disc cause the internal ring and external ring to spin in opposing directions, which allows the device to maintain an upright orientation. A spinning gyroscope seems to defy gravity due to the counterbalancing forces of the rings. If the device stops spinning, the gyroscope will fall. Similarities can be drawn between the design of a

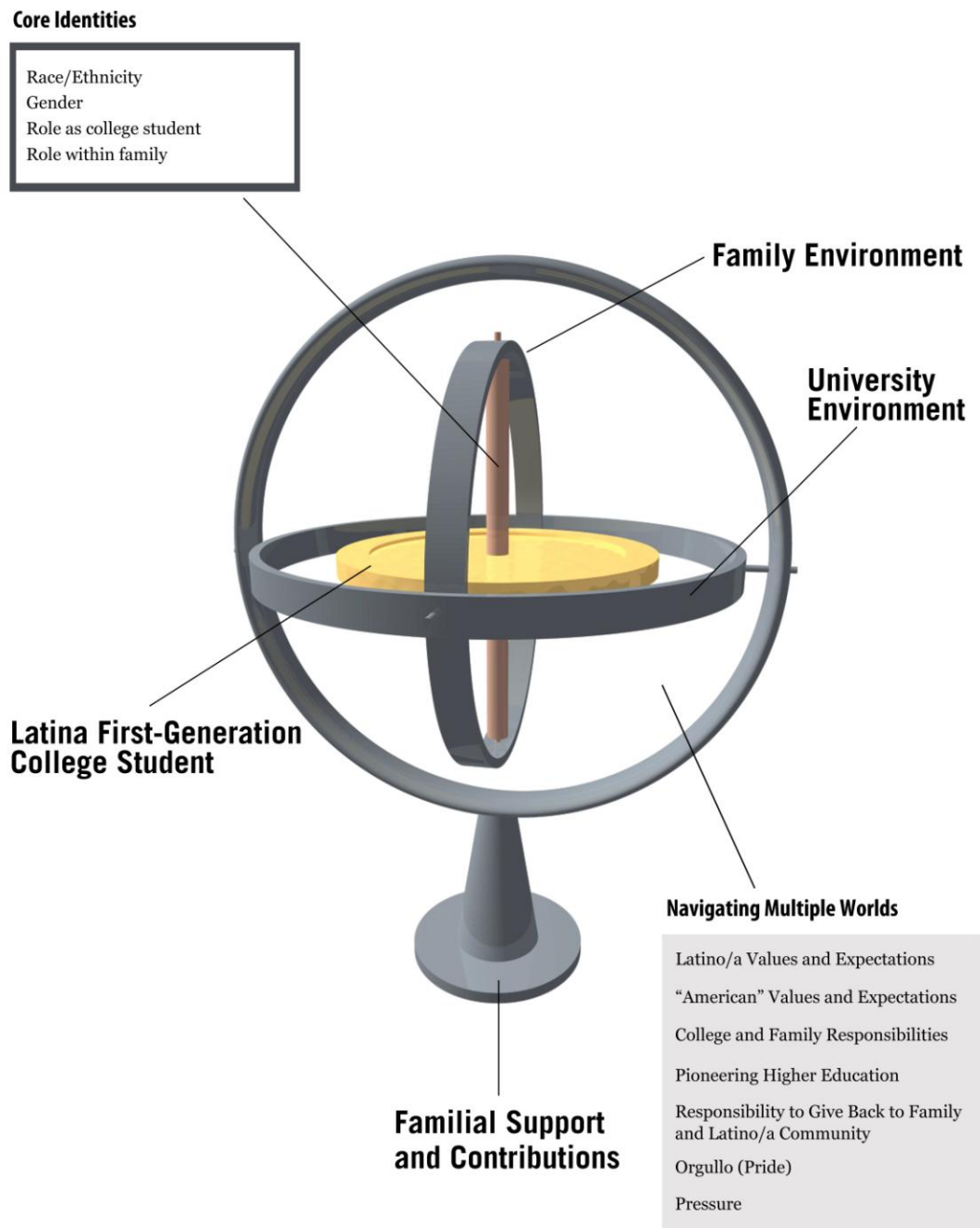


Figure 1: Model of Latina Students’ Identity as a Latina First-generation College Student

gyroscope and the dynamic experiences of Latina students as Latina first-generation college students.

The model is not intended to provide a summary of the conceptual themes that emerged from the study, but rather presents a theoretical depiction of identity as a Latina first-generation college student. The center axis symbolizes the core identities that were salient to the participants' identity as Latina first-generation college students: race/ethnicity, gender, role as college student, and role within family. The disk (rotor) located in the center of the model represents the student. The large rings (gimbals) in the conceptual model represent two particularly salient environments, the Family Environment and the University Environment, in which Latina first-generation college students engage. The outermost ring (support frame) bounds the experiences of the participants. The space inside of the support frame and rings represents salient factors that Latina first-generation college students negotiate as a result of engaging in culturally and educationally distinct environments: Latino/a values and expectations, "American" values and expectations, college and family responsibilities, pioneering higher education, responsibility to give back to family and Latino/a community, and pressure and pride. Latina first-generation college students experienced an added pressure as a result of moving in and out of culturally and educationally distinct environments. The students also received support from these distinct environments. The base of the visual representation illustrates the foundational support Latina first-generation college students receive from family members.

Similarities can be drawn between the experiences of Latina first-generation college students and the counterbalancing forces that allow a gyroscope to maintain an

upright orientation. The conceptual model (Figure 1) does not demonstrate motion, but movement does occur as Latina first-generation college students engage in experiences with family members and University communities. Core and intersecting dimensions of Latina participants' identity as Latina first-generation college students were influenced by the students' engagement in distinct environments, which also contributed to the pressure and support experienced. Support Latina first-generation college students receive from the Family Environment and the University Environment (e.g., engaging with Latino/a peers) provide students with resources to manage challenges that arise from engaging in distinct environments. The support and assistance received from one or more environments can provide Latina first-generation college students with a sense of balance and aid in their persistence. The description that follows elaborates on dimensions of a model of Latina students' identity as a Latina first-generation college student.

Navigating Multiple Worlds

This grounded theory uses the metaphor of navigating multiple worlds to describe the experiences of Latina first-generation college students as they move in and out of distinct environments. Navigating multiple worlds influenced multiple and intersecting dimensions of the participants' identity as Latina first-generation college students. Engaging in the Family Environment and the University Environment were particularly salient to Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students. In Figure 1, the Family Environment includes direct and indirect engagement with family members. Latina students tended to engage directly with family members in their family's home as well as on campus (e.g., campus or home visits, phone conversations with parents or siblings). Indirect engagement included moments when the students

worried or thought about their parents and siblings (e.g., mother's health, behavior of siblings, financial issues, sacrifice and support of family members). Engagement in the University Environment included, for example, participation in curricular and co-curricular experiences, studying, and interacting with Latino/a and non-Latino/a peers.

Latina first-generation college students live at the intersection of educationally and culturally distinct environments. In addition to engaging in college experiences that were new to the students and their family, Latina first-generation college students participated in environments that were described culturally as primarily Latino/a and others as primarily "American." Participants tended to associate Latino/a culture with their family and "American" culture with the University. Latina first-generation college students also had opportunities to engage in Latino/a-related curricular and co-curricular experiences in the University Environment. Engaging in culturally distinct environments was described particularly well by two participants who both referenced living in a "dual culture" and needing to balance living in "both worlds" when referring to their engagement in the Salvadoran culture of their family and in "American" schools. One of the students described being a "mix" of "both worlds" because she did not completely or solely identify with Salvadoran culture or "American" culture. Engaging in "both worlds" was also referenced by one of these students when describing her experiences as the first from her family to "navigate through the college system." Higher education experiences were new to the participants and their family. Students were engaging in the "first discovery" of the University or pioneering higher education from the perspective of their family and within the University. The Latina students' identity as a Latina first-generation college student was established in relationship to and interdependent of the

distinct environments in which the participants engaged; the students often straddled multiple roles and environments.

Being a Latina first-generation college student involved living at the intersection of multiple worlds, which included experiences as “the first” to attend an institution of higher education and engaging in both Latino/a culture and “American” culture. The participants’ identity as a Latina first-generation college student was influenced by the students’ negotiation of the culturally distinct values, expectations, and responsibilities associated with being a college student and member of their family. Participants described the Latino/a culture of their family as being family-oriented and the “American” culture of the University as having a focus on the individual. Core identities (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, role as college student, role within family) as Latina first-generation college students were influenced by the negotiation of the Latino/a cultural values, expectations, and responsibilities of their family with the “American” values, expectations, and responsibilities of the University. Latina first-generation college students also negotiated educationally distinct environments due to engaging in the “first discovery” of higher education and “being the first” from their family to attend college.

Dissonance often emerged when participants simultaneously engaged in multiple environments and roles. Latina first-generation college students balanced a concern for family with an increased focus on the individual, an “American” value that was associated with being a college student. Balancing college and family responsibilities was difficult for many of the participants particularly because of their parents’ lack of understanding of college responsibilities. For example, the students indicated that their parents did not understand the academic demands associated with being a college student

or the rationale behind becoming involved in curricular and co-curricular experiences (e.g., participating in student organizations, engaging in research experiences, studying abroad). Additionally, the Latina students often found it difficult to study in their family home due to the expectation that they should engage in family activities (e.g., spend time with family, assist with household chores, care for siblings). The importance of family was also demonstrated by the sense of responsibility that the students expressed to assist family members. The students wanted to assist their family while they were attending college and after graduating in order to “give back” in recognition of their parents’ sacrifice and support. The desire to “give back” was evident in the decisions that the students made regarding their selection of a major, career aspirations, and participation in co-curricular experiences. The participants also expressed a desire to “give back” to the Latino/a community and individuals who shared similar backgrounds as their own (e.g., first-generation college students, individuals from low-socioeconomic backgrounds). A sense of pressure and pride were associated with being a Latina first-generation college student.

Core Identities as Latina First-generation College Students

Core identities (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, role as college student, role within family), which were salient dimensions of the participants’ identity as Latina first-generation college students, intersected and were experienced simultaneously by the students. The Latina students’ engagement in curricular and co-curricular experiences played a particularly important role in the development of the participants’ racial/ethnic identity and gender identity. Many of the students coped with the “culture shock” of attending a predominantly White institution by engaging in the Latino/a community at the

University. Participants became involved in the Latino/a community because they were interested in maintaining a connection with Latino/a culture while others wanted to learn more about their cultural identity due to having limited interactions with Latinos/as prior to college. The influence of Latino/a culture and “American” culture on Latina students’ identity as Latina first-generation college students was evident as the participants raised questions regarding their “fit” both in Latino/a culture and in “American” culture. Some participants did not “feel Latina” while others felt they were a “mix” of “both worlds.” The participants seemed to be developing a bicultural identity as a result of engaging in Latino/a culture and “American” culture.

Latina first-generation college students negotiated differing gender role expectations for men and women as a result of engaging in Latino/a culture and “American” culture. Latino/a cultural perspectives and “American” cultural perspectives regarding the roles of women came into conflict at times. The increased sense of independence the students described experiencing as a result of becoming college students came into conflict with Latino/a traditional gender role expectations. The conservative and traditional viewpoints of the participants’ parents seemed to stem from a concern for their daughters and being unfamiliar with higher education experiences. The Latina participants received encouragement from Latina first-generation college student peers to explore new opportunities (e.g., studying abroad, joining a sorority) and were offered advice about how to reconcile the often conservative and traditional views of their parents. Latina students’ conceptions of gender role expectations for women were also informed by societal stereotypes of Latinas. Participants expressed an awareness of societal stereotypes regarding Latinos/as, including a belief that Latinos/as are not

attending institutions of higher education and that Latinas become pregnant at a young age. All of the participants expressed a desire to challenge societal stereotypes, particularly of Latinas, through their attendance in college.

Pressure and Support

Participants described feeling an increased pressure as a result of being Latina first-generation college students. Pressure was associated with being the first from their family to enter an institution of higher education while also engaging in the “first discovery” of the University. The Latina students described navigating higher education virtually on their own due to their family’s unfamiliarity with college experiences. The Latina first-generation college students in this study rarely sought assistance from faculty, staff, and student support offices.

Latina first-generation college students found support in each of the environments in which they engaged, which assisted them in navigating multiple worlds. Participants articulated receiving foundational forms of support from family members, especially through early messages instilled by their parents regarding the importance of obtaining an education. Latina first-generation college students were motivated by the sacrifice and struggle that their parents endured, particularly immigrating to the United States, so that the students could have additional opportunities. Peers were an integral source of support for Latina first-generation college students. Peers influenced the development of core identities (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, role as college student, role within family) and provided guidance to students as they navigated multiple worlds and roles. Engaging with Latino/a students and in Latino/a-focused curricular and co-curricular experiences provided participants with opportunities to explore and understand multiple dimensions

of their identity as Latina first-generation college students. Engaging with Latino/a students and non-Latino/a students caused some students to question their “fit” in Latino/a culture and on other occasions their “fit” with “American” culture.

Summary

Participants were negotiating the distinct values, expectations, and responsibilities associated with being a college student and a member of their family. Multiple and intersecting dimensions of participants’ identity as Latina first-generation college students were developed as a result of engaging in Latino/a culture and “American” culture. Students experienced added pressures as a result of navigating multiple worlds, but also felt a great sense of pride as a result of being the first from their families to attend higher education. Engaging with family members and the on-campus Latino/a community, for many students, provided the Latina participants with the support needed to navigate within and between multiple environments.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this constructivist grounded theory study was to explore Latina students' understanding of their identity as Latina first-generation college students. The study was guided by two research questions:

1. For Latina students who are the first in their family to go to college, what is their understanding of being a Latina first-generation college student?
2. What strengths do Latina first-generation college students associate with being a Latina first-generation college student?

A grounded theory of Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students is presented. The theory is grounded in the data collected from the participants and provides a framework that can be used to understand Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students.

In this chapter, I discuss the theory in relationship to literature. I also review areas where the findings agreed with and differed from existing research. Limitations of the study are presented. I conclude with a discussion of implications for research, theory, and practice as well as the strengths of the study.

Discussion of Findings in Relationship to Theory and Literature

An emphasis was placed on discussing key findings in relationship to research that aids in understanding Latina students' identity as a Latina first-generation college student. Research and identity development literature can assist in understanding aspects of the core identities and experiences that were salient to Latina first-generation college students. The lack of research focused on identity as a Latina first-generation college student makes individual theories particularly helpful in terms of understanding the

intersection of multiple identities that informed this grounded theory of identity as a Latina first-generation college student. I first discuss navigating multiple worlds, the metaphor describing the grounded theory, in relationship to literature. Second, the grounded theory is discussed in relationship to theory-based studies that explored the multiple dimensions of identity development of college women, Latino/a racial/ethnic identity development, and development of a first-generation college student identity. Third, sources of pressure and support that the participants experienced as Latina first-generation college students are discussed in relationship to research. Fourth, the important role that family members play in the experiences of Latina first-generation college students will be highlighted. Finally, literature will be discussed in relationship to the findings of the second research question pertaining to the strengths associated with being a Latina first-generation college student.

Navigating Multiple Worlds

The metaphor, navigating multiple worlds, is used to describe the engagement of Latina students in culturally and educationally distinct environments (i.e., Family Environment, University Environment), that inform the participants' identity as Latina first-generation college students. Latina first-generation college students navigate multiple worlds due to their engagement in Latino/a culture and "American" culture, but also as a result of engaging in the University Environment and their Family Environment as the first to attend an institution of higher education. Several researchers have written similarly about the experiences of Latinos/as (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Hernandez, 2002; Torres, 1999) and first-generation college students (London, 1989; Orbe, 2004, 2008) in terms of engaging in dual cultures. Orbe (2008) noted that first-

generation college students “negotiate the alien culture of the academy against that of home” (p. 82). Hernandez (2002) reported that Latino/a first-year students felt “torn between two cultures” (p. 77), Hispanic and American culture, as a result of being bicultural and attending a predominantly White institution. Anzaldúa (1987) indicated that living on the borderlands or at the intersection of two or more cultures, including Mexican and Anglo cultures, influences the identity development of Chicanas.

Living at the intersection of culturally and educationally distinct environments influenced multiple and intersecting dimensions of participants’ identity as Latina first-generation college students, but also produced an added pressure. The Latina participants experienced an increased pressure as a result of being Latina first-generation college students, which was similar to the tension that Latinos/as (Anzaldúa, 1987) and first-generation college students (Orbe, 2008) experience. Anzaldúa (1987) suggested that individuals experience tension if they are not considered a part of the dominant culture because of their race, language, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Orbe (2008) described the tension experienced by first-generation college students who felt similar to and different from family members as a result of their status as first-generation college students. The negotiation of these tensions influenced the development of a first-generation college student identity (Orbe, 2008) and a new mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987). For example, a new mestiza consciousness develops as a result of engaging in distinct experiences based on sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, gender, and social class in the United States (Anzaldúa, 1987). Similarly, having an identity as a Latina first-generation college student entailed a continual negotiation of

multiple roles and environments that were further distinguished by the reconciliation of Latino/a and “American” cultural values, expectations, and responsibilities.

The grounded theory confirms the findings of researchers who described the dynamic experiences of Latinos/as (Anzaldúa, 1987) and first-generation college students (Orbe, 2008). However, the grounded theory also advances the work of Anzaldúa (1987) and Orbe (2008) through the presentation of a model that demonstrates the intersection of core identities (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, role as college student, role within family) that are salient to an identity as a Latina first-generation college student. Additionally, the model emerged from a racially/ethnically diverse sample of individuals who identified as primarily Central American and South American. Anzaldúa’s work is primarily based on the experiences of Chicanas.

Core Identities of Latina First-generation College Students

Core identities are dimensions that were salient to the Latina students’ identity as Latina first-generation college students. Participants’ race/ethnicity, gender, role as a college student, and role within family were particularly salient to the participants’ experiences as Latina first-generation college students. Other dimensions, such as religion, were salient for some of the women as Latina first-generation college students, but did not emerge as significant for all of the participants. The saliency for participants of being first-generation college students is consistent with the findings in Orbe (2004, 2008). Orbe (2004) reported that Students of Color, students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds, and nontraditional female students tend to have a highly-salient first-generation college student identity, which is descriptive of the Latina first-generation college students who participated in this study. However, Orbe (2008) found that other

dimensions (e.g., race/ethnicity, SES, age, gender, sexual orientation) were also central to the development of a first-generation college student identity, which supports the findings of this study about the saliency of the core identities (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, role as a college student, role within family) to the Latina participants' identity as Latina first-generation college students.

The identity development of college students is shaped by contextual influences (Jones, 1997; Jones & McEwen, 2000; McEwen, 2003) and the environment (Torres, 2003). Jones (1997) and Jones and McEwen (2000) noted that the identity development process of female college students is shaped by contextual influences (e.g., family background, sociocultural conditions, current experiences, career decisions and life planning). Contextual influences shaped the development of core identities (i.e., personal attributes, personal characteristics, personal identity) (Jones, 1997; Jones & McEwen, 2000; McEwen, 2003). Torres (2003) emphasized the importance of the environment in which students grow up, their family, and generational status in the United States on the ethnic identity development of Latino/a students. The core identities, in my study, represented the multiple and intersecting dimensions that were salient to Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students. The racial/ethnic identity and the gender identity of the Latina first-generation college students seemed to be influenced by their engagement in environments that were considered culturally as being either primarily Latino/a or "American." Participants' understanding of being a Latina was influenced in large part by their Latino/a family, the "American" culture of the University, and curricular and co-curricular experiences that had a Latino/a-focus. Participants expressed a desire to explore dimensions of their identity as Latinas whether

the students had a limited or extensive amount of interaction with Latinos/as prior to college. Attending a predominantly White university fueled the interest that many of the students had to become involved in experiences that would allow them to maintain a connection with or develop a deeper understanding of their racial/ethnic identity.

Core identities (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, role as college student, role within family) represented salient dimensions of the participants' identity as Latina first-generation college students. These dimensions of the participants' identity as Latina first-generation college students intersected and were experienced simultaneously. For example, the participants did not speak about individual dimensions of their identity (e.g., being a first-generation college student, a woman, or Latino/a) in isolation or separate from one another. As Latina first-generation college students, the participants' core identities were integrated. The findings support the need to explore multiple and intersecting dimensions of students' identity (Jones, 1997; Jones & McEwen, 2000; McEwen, 2003), which is necessary to understanding the "whole student" (Torres et al., 2009, p. 590).

The intersection of race/ethnicity and gender was evident in this study of Latina first-generation college students, which aligns with the findings of Jones (1997) and Jones and McEwen (2000) regarding the importance of considering multiple and intersecting dimensions on the identity development of women college students. Engaging in environments that were considered primarily Latino/a and those viewed as primarily "American" created dissonance for the participants as they tried to determine their "fit" within multiple worlds (e.g., Family Environment, University Environment). This finding aligns with the work of Torres (2003), who explained that a change often

occurred in the racial/ethnic identity development of Latino/a students due to encountering cultural dissonance. Torres (1999) explored the influence of engaging in Latino/a culture and Anglo culture on the development of a bicultural identity among Latino/a students. For Torres (1999), a student's level of acculturation and ethnic identity determined whether she or he had a Bicultural Orientation, Anglo Orientation, Hispanic Orientation, or Marginal Orientation. Participants in my study of Latina first-generation college students exhibited different levels of acculturation and ethnic identity, which was evident as students discussed their engagement in Latino/a culture and "American" culture. Some students seemed to question their "fit" within Latino/a culture and "American" culture. At least one student mentioned that she felt like she was a "mix" of both cultures because she felt similar to and different from her Salvadoran mother.

The Latina students negotiated the distinct gender role expectations associated with being a member of their family and a college student, which tended to be guided by Latino/a cultural values and "American" cultural values. Strict gender roles define appropriate behaviors and values for men and women in Latino/a culture (García et al., 2000). In Latino/a culture, the needs of the family are a higher priority than those of the individual (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2009). There is a particularly high expectation within Latino/a culture that Latinas prioritize the needs of the family over their own (Harris Canul, 2003), a dynamic described and demonstrated by the majority of the participants. The greater independence and freedom, considered "American" values, which were experienced by the participants as college students, conflicted at times with the central role that families play in Latino/a culture (Baca Zinn & Kelly, 2005).

Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) emphasized the importance of considering the heterogeneity of the Latino/a population when exploring the racial/ethnic identity development of Latinos/as, including similarities that might be shared regarding values, beliefs, and the use of Spanish, but also differences with regards to national origin, generational status in the United States, socioeconomic status, language, acculturation, appearance, color, gender, and geographic location. Several dimensions (e.g., race, ethnicity, generational status in the United States, language, parents' educational background) of the participants' identity made this sample unique, which likely influenced their experiences as Latina first-generation college students.

Pressure and Support

The challenges that the participants encountered balancing college responsibilities (e.g., studying, curricular and co-curricular experiences) and family responsibilities (e.g., spending time with family, assisting with household chores, caring for siblings) could be attributed, in part, to negotiating culturally different values and expectations regarding the roles of Latinas, which they also needed to reconcile with their parents' lack of understanding of higher education. For example, almost all of the participants shared that it was difficult to study at home due to distractions, but also as a result of a familial expectation and a personal desire to engage with family members. Similar to the findings in my study, family obligations and expectations have been a source of stress for Latina students (Rodriguez et al., 2000). Orbe (2008) described a similar clash or tension experienced by first-generation college students due to negotiating "established and emerging identities" (p. 88). First-generation college students negotiate an individualist

identity, associated with being a college student, with a more collectivist identity (Orbe, 2008).

Cultural dissonance (Torres, 2003) was experienced by the Latina first-generation college students in my study as they determined their “fit” within the Latino/a culture of their family and the “American” culture of the University. All of the students referenced wanting to explore or develop a deeper understanding of their racial/ethnic identity. Students who did not feel as connected to the Latino/a community on campus also expressed a desire to explore and develop a deeper understanding of their Latina identity. Peer interaction, particularly through student organizations, has been found to play a critical role in the ethnic identity development of Latino/a college students (Torres, 2003). The racial/ethnic identity and the gender identity of the students were particularly influenced by the participants’ engagement with Latino/a peers, including through Latino/a student organizations. Students also sought out opportunities to engage in service opportunities in the Latino/a community and explore topics related to their race/ethnicity and gender through curricular experiences (e.g., U.S. Latino/a Studies, Spanish department, Women’s Studies, study abroad). Becoming involved in Latino/a student organizations and enrolling in college courses (e.g., Latino/a leadership course, Spanish courses) provided participants with opportunities to explore questions that they had regarding their racial/ethnic identity as well as maintain or establish a connection with the Latino/a community.

Peer interaction plays an influential role in achieving a variety of student outcomes (Astin, 1993; Newcomb, 1962; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Peers, particularly other Latina students, played an important role in the academic adjustment of

the participants. Researchers indicated that Students of Color (Padilla et al., 1997) and Latino/a first-generation college students (Torres et al., 2006) tend to receive academic information from peers rather than from formal campus resources (e.g., advisors, faculty). Students of Color also tend to receive practical knowledge about a campus from peers (Padilla et al., 1997). Consistent with the findings of Torres et al. (2006) and Padilla et al. (1997), participants in this study rarely sought assistance from faculty and staff, instead relying on peers. Students who did engage with faculty and staff members tended to describe negative encounters. However, students who had positive experiences with faculty and staff primarily highlighted relationships with individuals who identified as Latino/a. Participants also received advice from Latina peers with regards to negotiating the often distinct values and responsibilities associated with being a college student and a member of their family. For example, one participant shared that she received advice from another Latina student about the best way to approach having a conversation with her parents about wanting to study abroad. Another student noted that she enjoyed sharing her “problems” as a commuter student with a Latina first-generation college student peer who provided her with advice about the campus as well as guidance on how to speak to her mother about college experiences that her mother did not understand. The assistance received from peers was integral because higher education experiences were new to the Latina students and their families.

According to Torres (2009), Latino/a college students recognize racism as a result of experiencing dissonance about thoughts and beliefs, considering alternative messages that allow students to make meaning of racist beliefs, reflecting on alternative messages that are presented, and being able to try new behaviors. The participants in my study of

Latina first-generation college students were exposed to new thoughts and beliefs about Latinos/as as a result of attending college. Many of the students indicated that they were defying commonly held stereotypes about Latinos/as, including the belief that it is “not the norm” for Latinos/as to enroll in college, through their enrollment at the University. Going to college and seeing other students enrolled helped some of the participants to develop a positive perception of Latinos/as. At least one of the students expressed surprise in seeing other Latinos/as in college, including individuals from her ethnic group (e.g., Salvadorans), because Latina peers from her high school did not go to college. Participants were proud that they were defying societal stereotypes, but research has articulated the negative influence that stereotypes can have on students (Steele, 1999; Torres, 1999, 2003, 2009). Steele (1999) noted that the desire to dispel stereotypes can involve a weight as a result of wanting to disprove beliefs that cannot be disproved.

Participants’ awareness of stereotypes regarding Latinos/as as well as the desire the students had to combat these misconceptions likely contributed to the pressure and pride experienced by the Latina first-generation college students in this study. All of the students had an awareness of stereotypes regarding Latinos/as, but also expressed a desire to combat these stereotypes. Commonly referenced stereotypes shared by the participants included the belief that Latinas will become pregnant at a young age and that Latino/a students are not attending college. One of the participants noted that she wanted to show others that “we’re not just their cleaning people.” An awareness of stereotypes has been found to influence the ethnic identity development of Latino/a students (Torres, 1999, 2003) and negatively affect the academic performance of students, even if the stereotypes are not considered to be true by the individual (Steele, 1999). Latino/a college students

are believed to experience internalized racism as a result of stereotypes (Torres, 2009). The extent to which the Latina first-generation college students in my study internalized the negative beliefs associated with stereotypes is unknown. However, the students' desire to explore Latino/a culture through curricular and co-curricular experiences seems to be counter to internalized racism. A sense of agency to combat negative beliefs about Latinos/as was associated with the participants' awareness of stereotypes, which suggests perhaps an alternative outcome to the negative effect that stereotypes can have on Latinas.

Familial Support

Participants indicated that being a first-generation college student was challenging because their parents were unable to provide guidance about college processes, but family members were still viewed as a strength. The examples of familial support experienced by the Latina first-generation college students are not forms of capital that tend to be recognized within social capital and cultural capital literature (McDonough, 1997; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005; Yosso, 2005). The findings align more with a cultural integrity framework, which views family members as assets to the educational experiences of students (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005).

Family members were an integral source of support, which aligns with other studies that recognized the families of first-generation college students (Billson & Terry, 1982; Orbe, 2008) and Latino/a college students (Hernandez, 2000, 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; López, 2007; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002) as assets. The findings of this study counter much of the research that has described first-generation college students (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998) and Latino/a college students

(Brown et al., 2003) as having family and background characteristics associated with attrition. The Latina first-generation college students referenced receiving foundational forms of support from their parents for attending college. The Latina students were aware of and appreciated their parents' decision to immigrate to the United States and for instilling within them the importance of education at a young age. The support and encouragement received from family members were also acknowledged. Participants appreciated that their parents always assisted in whatever way they could, which included providing financial assistance, aiding with their learning during early educational experiences (e.g., teaching Spanish, assisting with homework), and supporting the students' involvement in pre-college programs and other opportunities. Other researchers have also acknowledged the importance of family support and encouragement to the college experiences and adjustment of Latino/a students (Hernandez, 2000, 2002; López, 2007) and the maintenance of a family connection to the educational success of Latinas (Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002) and Latino/a college students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). The central role that mothers have historically played in Latino/a families (Repak, 1995) can assist in explaining the significant role that mothers played in the lives of the Latina first-generation college students.

Strengths of Being a Latina First-Generation College Student

I wanted to explore the factors that contribute to the success of Latina students who are the first in their family to attend an institution of higher education, countering the deficit perspective that is often used by researchers when examining the experiences of Students of Color (Tinto, 1993) and first-generation college students (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). The enrollment, retention, and experiences of Latina first-generation

college students can be enhanced through the development of initiatives that take into account the strengths of students.

The following six strengths were associated with being Latina first-generation college students: Family, Latino/a Culture, Spanish Language/Being Bilingual, Determination, Support Network – Prior to College and During College, and Sense of Responsibility to Help Others. Similarities exist between the findings and the six forms of capital that Communities of Color are believed to possess (Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) indicated that Communities of Color have the following forms of capital: aspirational capital (i.e., sense of resiliency), linguistic capital (i.e., knowledge of multiple languages and communication styles), familial capital (i.e., support from immediate and extended family and community), social capital (i.e., peer networks, community resources), navigational capital (i.e., ability to maneuver through social institutions), and resistant capital (i.e., challenging inequalities).

Four strengths identified by the participants were similar to several of the forms of capital identified by Yosso (2005) and other researchers. The students' conception of family as a strength aligns with Yosso's notion of familial capital. Family members played an important role in the experiences of the participants, particularly in terms of providing support prior to and during college as well as serving as a source of motivation for the Latina first-generation college students. Family has also been identified as a strength that influences the educational experiences of Latinos/as (Delgado Bernal, 2006; Hernandez, 2000, 2002; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; López, 2007) and first-generation college students (Orbe, 2008). Spanish Language/Being Bilingual, strengths associated with being a Latina first-generation college student, was similar to linguistic capital

(Yosso, 2005) and bilingualism (Delgado Bernal, 2006). All of the participants indicated that they were bilingual, speaking English and Spanish. Many of the students enrolled in Spanish courses in order to improve their level of competency of the language.

Aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005) was similar to the determination that Latina first-generation college students exhibited and recognized as a strength. The determination demonstrated by the participants was evident as the students navigated college experiences as the first in their family to attend an institution of higher education in the United States. Yosso's conception of social capital was similar to the support network described by the Latina participants. The support network of the participants primarily included family members and peers, but several students mentioned receiving support from Latino/a faculty and staff and other individuals (e.g., family friends, high school guidance counselor).

Latina first-generation college students identified two additional strengths that were not cited in Yosso's study: Latino/a Culture and Sense of Responsibility to Help Others. Each of the participants demonstrated a desire to explore or maintain a connection with Latino/a culture, and did so by becoming involved in Latino/a-focused organizations, enrolling in Latino/a courses, or exploring Latino/a-related topics in course assignments. Each of the students felt a sense of responsibility to help others as a result of being the first in their family to attend college and in recognition of the sacrifice and support of their parents. Participants were committed to giving back to their family, peers, and the Latino/a community. In addition, most of the students selected a major and career path that would allow them to assist the Latino/a community in some capacity. The Latina students' desire to help others was similar to Delgado Bernal's (2006)

conception of Commitment to Communities, which represented the participants' interest in assisting family members and the Mexican community.

Limitations

Transparency regarding the limitations of this study will assist researchers and practitioners in determining the transferability of the findings. This grounded theory is not generalizable to all Latina first-generation college students, but the findings can provide a useful framework when working with Latina first-generation college students. Individuals should consider possible limitations related to data collection.

Jones et al. (2006) noted that most researchers contend with time restrictions, which may require making compromises. I was concerned that holding interviews at the end of the academic year may result in low student interest, but this did not prove to be a problem. I provided each student with the option of scheduling the second interview after final exams were completed, which was likely more convenient for the participants and probably enhanced students' participation in my study. Two interviews occurred with each student, one during each of the months of April and May in 2008, with the exception of one participant. For that student, due to her academic demands during the month of April, one interview was conducted at the beginning of May, and a second interview toward the end of May. All of the participants seemed to be open and honest about their experiences.

A longitudinal study was not conducted so assertions cannot be made regarding development over time. However, using grounded theory allowed for an in-depth exploration of Latina students' identity as a Latina first-generation college student. Grounded theory does not provide a "snapshot" (Brown et al., 2002, p. 179) of students'

experience, but rather allowed for the exploration of a dynamic and complex phenomenon, Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students. This study relied primarily on reflections shared by participants as Latina first-generation college students during two interviews. Students' reflections about past experiences were retrospective. Due to the passage of time, participants may not have been able to accurately recall details regarding earlier experiences that may have provided me with additional insight about the students' experiences as Latina first-generation college students.

The grounded theory will not be reflective of the experiences of all Latina first-generation college students; however, the findings can be transferable to particular students or groups of students. A detailed explanation of the research setting, sample, methodology, and grounded theory were provided so that readers can determine the transferability of the study (Mertens, 2005). Understanding the sample, including demographic information about students who were not represented in the sample, will also assist individuals in determining the transferability of the study. Participants were considered a first-generation college student if their parents' educational background did not exceed high school in the U.S. or some postsecondary education in another country, and if a sibling had not preceded them in attending college. Information regarding participant recruitment was primarily disseminated via Latino/a listservs as well as faculty and staff who worked closely with Latino/a students. As a result, students who expressed interest in participating in the study may have identified more closely with being Latina and been more engaged in the University. All of the students self-identified as Latina, attended a four-year public university in the mid-Atlantic as full-time students,

had parents who were born outside of the United States (with the exception of the father of one participant), and had immediate family members who lived within 10-45 minutes from the University. The sample included individuals from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds, with the majority of participants identifying as Central American. Individuals from some Latino/a ethnic backgrounds, including Puerto Rican and Cuban students, were not represented in the study. With the exception of three participants who were in the second semester of their first year of college, all other participants were continuing students who were persisting at the University. Thus, this study did not include students who stopped out of the University. Additionally, the sample did not include part-time students, individuals enrolled in a two-year college, and Latino men.

Implications

I will present implications for theory, research, and practice based on the findings. Researchers and practitioners should explore and understand Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students in order to better support these students as they negotiate distinct roles and environments. Future research should explore heterogeneous Latino/a populations, particularly due to the anticipated increase in the percentage of Latino/a first-generation college students entering institutions of higher education (Saenz et al., 2007). The findings support the creation of curricular and co-curricular experiences for Latina first-generation college students and parent outreach programs for their family. Research and programming that operate from a strengths-based perspective are particularly appropriate.

Implications for Theory and Research

Theory can assist researchers and practitioners to better understand students' experiences and development. Theory can simplify complex processes, including the development of college students as well as the role that the environment plays on student development (McEwen, 2003). The exploration of the "whole student and understanding what identities constitute that whole" (Torres et al., 2009, p. 590) has been deemed an important area of future research. The grounded theory of Latina students' identity as a Latina first-generation college student highlights the complexity associated with students' identity as Latina first-generation college students. During a particularly important developmental time in the lives of students, Latina first-generation college students are navigating multiple roles and environments as the first in their family to attend an institution of higher education. Practitioners can better support Latina first-generation college students through an enhanced awareness of students' experiences as they engage in culturally and educationally distinct environments, and how this engagement influences multiple and intersecting dimensions of Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students. The grounded theory also sheds light on a diverse population, Latina first-generation college students, who were not considered in earlier theories and models (Torres et al., 2009), many of which were developed in the 1950s and 1960s on male students who attended private and elite institutions of higher education (McEwen, 2003). Grounded theory assists in developing "the building blocks for generalizable empirical research" (Brown et al., 2002, p. 174).

Additional research that focuses on understanding Latina, as well as Latino, first-generation college students from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds can build upon the

findings of this study. The heterogeneity of the Latino/a population calls for the continued exploration of diverse Latino/a populations, including students who identify as Central and South American, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and other specific Latino/a ethnic groups. The majority of the sample identified as Central or South American, which is consistent with the Latino/a population residing in the state of Maryland (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c), where the research site is located. Researchers should explore whether the experiences of Latina first-generation college students may differ for a sample with demographic characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, U.S. generational status) that vary from the participants in this study. For example, all of the students expressed an awareness of the immigration experiences of their parents, but researchers may find different results if the experiences of students who are considered the 3rd generation or higher in the United States are explored. Future research should also explore the role that the socioeconomic status of Latina first-generation college students might play on the experiences of students.

Participants were considered a first-generation college student if their parents' educational background did not exceed high school in the U.S. or some postsecondary education in another country, and if a sibling had not preceded them in attending college. Future research should explore the role that students who are the first in their family to attend an institution of higher education have on the experiences of younger and older siblings who enter college after them. In addition, a review of literature did not reveal any studies that explored the experiences of Latino/a first-generation college students whose parents attended college in another country. Participants indicated that their parents completed their educational experiences in a Latin American country, with the

exception of the mother of one student who graduated from high school in the United States after emigrating to the U.S. at the age of 16. The educational experiences of participants' parents varied. For example, participants had parents who had no formal educational experiences, completed the 2nd grade, and attended the equivalent of a vocational school in a Latin American country; some students did not know the highest level of education completed by their parents. The understanding that the participants had of being Latina first-generation college students was similar, including among students with a parent who attended some postsecondary education outside of the United States. Future studies should explore differences in how Latina students understand being Latina first-generation college students, depending on where the educational experiences of the participants' parents occurred, in the United States or in another country.

Longitudinal studies, beginning with the first year in college through graduation, may add to a more complex understanding of Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students. An increased understanding of the experiences of Latina first-generation college students may also emerge through the study of Latina first-generation college students who pursue graduate school opportunities. Latina graduate students could provide valuable data based on reflections of their undergraduate experiences as well as current experiences in graduate school. The perspective of graduate students may reveal whether Latina first-generation graduate students continue to experience aspects of an identity as Latina first-generation college students.

All of the participants expressed an awareness of stereotypes regarding Latinos/as as well as a strong desire to combat misconceptions. Researchers have reported that

Latinas experience societal stereotypes based on gender and ethnicity (Harris Canul, 2003; National Women's Law Center & Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 2009), and that these stereotypes are barriers to the participation of Latinas in higher education (Rodriguez et al., 2000). A specific focus on the influence of societal stereotypes was not included in the study, but this is an area needing further exploration, particularly due to the stress that can be experienced by Latinas as a result of stereotypes (Rodriguez et al., 2000). Other outcomes associated with an awareness of stereotypes should be considered. The findings indicated that an awareness of stereotypes was also a source of motivation for the Latina participants who wanted to dispel misconceptions about Latinos/as through their college attendance.

The extent to which the campus climate may have influenced participants' sense of agency around combating stereotypes about Latinos/as should be considered. Student activism within the Latino/a community occurred around two key issues between Spring 2005 and Spring 2008. In Spring 2005, students advocated for the creation of a full-time Latino/a coordinator position to support students (Butler, 2005). During the Spring 2008 semester, when data collection occurred, the passage of a U.S. Latina/o Studies minor focused on the experiences of U.S. Latinas/os (American Studies, n.d.; Butler, 2005; Hernandez, 2009) marked the end of student activism. The majority of students seemed to have an awareness of advocacy efforts aimed at creating a Latina/o Studies minor, but only a few participants indicated playing an active role. Advocacy efforts within the Latino/a community may have influenced the development of an increased sense of awareness and activism among the students about issues within the Latino/a community,

particularly among the junior and senior participants in the study who were enrolled when protests occurred around these two key issues.

Qualitative and quantitative studies that operate from an asset-based or strengths-based perspective make valuable contributions to research and practice. Using a strengths-based perspective can provide practitioners with recommendations that are grounded in research, which can aid in increasing the enrollment and retention of Latina first-generation college students. In addition, framing interview or survey questions using a strengths-based perspective may indirectly empower students as they reflect on the valuable contributions and strengths that they possess.

Implications for Practice

Implications for practice are provided based on the findings. Understanding Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students will allow practitioners to better support students as they negotiate distinct roles and environments. The development of curricular and co-curricular experiences should include the participation of Latino/a students, faculty, and staff who are sensitive to the unique needs and experiences of Latina first-generation college students enrolled at a particular campus. Curricular and co-curricular experiences that connect Latina first-generation college students with peers, faculty, staff, and alumni who have an understanding of Latino/a cultural values and the experiences of Latina first-generation college students can aid in the personal, academic, and social transition of Latina first-generation college students enrolled at institutions of higher education. Programming developed from an asset-based versus a deficit perspective (Padilla et al., 1997; Rendón, 1994; Tierney &

Auerbach, 2005; Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005) could prove to be empowering for students and their families.

Peer interaction was important in Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students. The students reported receiving academic support and motivation from peers as well as assistance in understanding college processes and experiences. Peer interaction, particularly with other Latino/a students, assisted many of the participants in dealing with the culture shock of attending a predominantly White institution. The Latina students asked other Latino/a first-generation college students for advice about negotiating the often distinct values, expectations, and responsibilities of their family and the University. These findings underscore the importance of recruiting and admitting racially/ethnically diverse Latino/a first-generation college students. A critical mass of ethnically diverse Latino/a students may provide additional opportunities for students to connect with individuals who have similar backgrounds as their own.

The important role that parents play in the enrollment and persistence of students should be acknowledged. Inviting family members to participate in orientation programs for Latina and Latino students can reflect an understanding of Latino/a cultural values, including the centrality of family in the lives of Latino/a first-generation college students. Programming offered prior to college and after students enroll can assist in demystifying college experiences for parents and can alleviate some of the weight that students carry as a result of navigating multiple worlds as the first to attend college. Programming aimed at the parents of Latina first-generation college students can assist students and their families in adjusting to college, particularly because higher education experiences are often new. The mothers of the participants played a particularly influential role in terms

of supporting the educational experiences of the participants, which may lend support for inviting Latina first-generation college students to bring a family member to an overnight recruitment event or a pre-college program. Sharing information regarding curricular and co-curricular experiences may provide parents with a better understanding of college experiences in which their daughters may become involved. Examples of additional initiatives include creating parent newsletters written in Spanish and English, sponsoring community and campus events staffed by Latino/a alumni and university representatives, hosting family days on campus, and offering a Latino/a graduation ceremony. Programming for students and family members can assist students as they navigate the multiple worlds in which they engage.

All of the students described exploring aspects of their racial/ethnic identity and gender identity through participating in Latino/a student organizations, college courses, and campus events. Student affairs professionals should support the presence of diverse Latino/a-focused student organizations on college campuses; one organization did not fit the needs of all of the participants. For example, four of the participants felt a stronger connection to their respective Latina sorority than to the other Latina sorority on campus or Latino/a student organizations. The five women who were members of a Latina sorority were attracted to the relationships that they could build with women based on sharing similar cultures, goals, and gender. Peer mentor programs can assist students in connecting with other Latina students, which can be helpful for individuals who might not naturally or easily develop these connections on their own. The Latina students indicated that they developed a deeper understanding of their cultural background and strengthened their level of Spanish competency as a result of enrolling in specific classes

offered by U.S. Latino/a Studies, African American Studies, and the Spanish Department. Some of the women also participated in study abroad experiences or explored Latino/a-related topics in class. Offering a comprehensive menu of curricular and co-curricular experiences can meet the multiple and diverse needs of Latina first-generation college students. Providing students with opportunities to explore their racial/ethnic identity and gender identity is as vital as providing academic support services and other campus resources.

Participants rarely sought out key student support areas, faculty, and staff for assistance. Although students generally described less than positive experiences engaging with faculty and staff, many of the students had positive interactions with a few of the Latino/a faculty and staff members on campus. Campus administrators should explore the development of innovative student outreach efforts, particularly considering Students of Color reportedly rarely use formal campus resources for support (Padilla et al., 1997). Academic units and campus offices should employ and charge staff, perhaps through the development of formal positions, with supporting Latina first-generation college students. Joint positions in academic and student affairs units with a cultural center could be beneficial, particularly if internal efforts within those units to support Latina first-generation college students have not been effective. Establishing liaison roles or joint positions between key student support areas within the University (e.g., academic advising, financial aid, counseling center, career services) and cultural centers can also provide Latina first-generation college students with assistance navigating college systems in perhaps a more familiar environment. Creating formal connections with faculty and staff who are interested in supporting Latino/a first-generation college

students should include individuals from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds, and not just Latinos/as.

The interviews seemed to provide the participants with an outlet to consider topics that they rarely reflected on or discussed as Latina first-generation college students. The women shared reflections about being a first-generation college student, negotiating the Latino/a expectations of their family with the “American” values and expectations encountered within the University, and their racial/ethnic identity. Creating opportunities for Latina students, faculty, and staff to engage in honest conversations regarding their experiences via one-on-one or small group conversations can be powerful. As the first in their family to attend college in the United States, the students can learn from or gain encouragement from individuals who may have had similar experiences.

The grounded theory of Latina students’ identity as Latina first-generation college students presents a framework that can be helpful to practitioners when working with Latina first-generation college students. Due to the heterogeneous nature of the Latino/a community, higher education administrators should get to know the unique experiences and needs of individual students in order to effectively support Latina first-generation college students on their campus.

Conclusion

In this chapter, findings of this study were discussed in relationship to theory and research. I described limitations associated with the study, and ended with a discussion of implications for theory, research, and practice. The grounded theory provides researchers and practitioners with a framework that can be used in their work with Latina first-generation college students.

The Latina first-generation college students in this study lived at the intersection of multiple worlds, which included being “the first” to attend an institution of higher education and engaging both in Latino/a culture and in “American” culture. Participants simultaneously experienced multiple and intersecting dimensions (i.e., Race/Ethnicity, Gender, Role as College Student, and Role within Family) of their identity as Latina first-generation college students. Latina students’ identity as a Latina first-generation college student was established in relationship to and interdependent of the distinct environments in which the participants engaged. Engaging in educationally and culturally distinct environments, particularly with family members and in the University, required participants to negotiate the distinct values, expectations, and responsibilities associated with straddling multiple roles and worlds. Challenges that participants encountered as a result of “being the first” from their family to attend college in the United States contributed to the pressure that the Latina first-generation college students experienced. Participants also encountered challenges trying to balance college responsibilities (e.g., studying, curricular and co-curricular experiences) and family responsibilities (e.g., spending time with family, assisting with household chores, caring for siblings), which included negotiating culturally different values and expectations regarding the roles of Latinas and needing to reconcile that higher education was new to the students and their family. Participants received support from these distinct worlds of the college environment and their family, both of which helped them to explore and develop a deeper understanding of their identity as Latina first-generation college students. The participants also associated *orgullo* or pride with being a Latina first-generation college student. The Latina participants identified six strengths with being a Latina first-

generation college student: Family, Latino/a Culture, Spanish Language/Being Bilingual, Determination, Support Network – Prior to College and During College, and Sense of Responsibility to Help Others. To best support Latina first-generation college students, administrators must be cognizant of the challenges that these students experience as well as the sources of strength and pride that sustain Latina students who are the first in their family to attend an institution of higher education.

This study moves beyond the reporting of demographic characteristics to understanding Latina students' identity as Latina first-generation college students. Several strengths are associated with this study, including the exploration of an area that has been rarely studied, the diversity of the sample (e.g., generational status in the United States, race/ethnicity, parents' educational experiences), and producing a grounded theory of identity as a Latina first-generation college student. In addition, exploring the strengths that the participants associated with being a Latina first-generation college student contributes research that moves away from the deficit perspective that is often used to study Students of Color (Padilla et al., 1997; Rendón, 1994).

APPENDIX A: Email Invitation To Prospective Student Participants

Dear Latino/a Student,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study focusing on Latino/a first-generation college students. This study seeks to better understand the experiences of Latino/a undergraduate students who are the first in their families to attend college. If you are a full-time undergraduate student and your parent or parents' educational background does not exceed a high school education, then you are eligible to participate in this study! Please note that students whose parent/s have attended some college may also be eligible to participate in this study.

In order to participate in this study, you will need to agree to two interviews lasting between 60 – 90 minutes. These interviews will occur during the months of April and May. You will also have an opportunity to participate in an optional third individual or group interview after the spring semester has ended. I will ask questions during the interviews which will allow me to learn about your experiences as a Latino/a first-generation college student at the University of Maryland and what it means to you to be the first in your family to go to college. All interviews will occur on campus at a time and location that will prove convenient for you. If meeting off campus proves more convenient, a location will be identified. In appreciation for your participation, \$25 will be given to you after the first interview. An additional \$25 will be given after the second interview has been completed.

All interviews will be digitally recorded, but the data will remain confidential and used only for research purposes. In addition, participants will be asked to select a pseudonym that will be used when reporting the findings.

If you are interested in participating in this study please contact Patty Alvarez at palvarez@umd.edu by [enter date]. I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Education at the University of Maryland.

Your participation is appreciated and important to the success of this research study. If you have any questions about this study, please contact me (palvarez@umd.edu or xxx-xxx-xxxx) or my advisor Dr. Marylu McEwen (mmcewen@umd.edu). If you would like to participate in this study, please complete the web version of the interest form at <http://cgi.umd.edu/survey/display?Latino-a/First-gen2008> or the attached copy; if you complete the attached copy, please return it to me electronically or via campus mail to 1134 Cumberland Hall.

Sincerely,

Patty Alvarez
Doctoral Candidate
University of Maryland

1134 Cumberland Hall

palvarez@umd.edu

xxx-xxx-xxxx (office phone with private voice mail)

xxx-xxx-xxxx (cell phone)

APPENDIX B: Participant Interest Form

Experiences of Latino/a First-generation College Students

I am interested in participating in the research study focused on the experiences of Latino/a first-generation college students conducted by Patty Alvarez.

Name: _____

Local Address: _____

E-Mail: _____

Home Telephone: _____ **Cell phone:** _____

Please circle, highlight, or put an X by the appropriate responses below:

How would you prefer I contact you?

- a. Email
- b. Phone
- c. Cell phone

If you prefer to be called via telephone, may I leave a message for you regarding this study?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Do you anticipate being available to complete a total of two interviews during the months of April and May?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Please help me understand a little bit about your background. Circle, highlight, or put an X by the category that best describes you. Please type or write out your responses for questions 3, 5, 8, and 9. Feel free to add a category if a more appropriate description has not been included on this form.

1. What is your current class standing? a. First-year b. Sophomore c. Junior d. Senior	2. What is your gender? a. Female b. Male c. Transgendered
3. Please indicate your age:	4. Are you enrolled as a full time student? a. Yes b. No
5. What is your current or intended major?	
6. Did you transfer to the University of Maryland? a. Yes, from a two-year college b. Yes, from a four-year college c. No	7. Where do you live? a. On-campus residence hall b. Off-campus housing c. Off-campus with family

8. Please indicate your race (e.g., American Indian, Asian Pacific Islander, Black, Latino/a, Multi-racial, White, etc.):	9. Please indicate your ethnicity (e.g., Cuban, Dominican, Mexican-American/Chicano/a, Puerto Rican, Salvadoran, etc.). <i>Include multiple ethnicities if applicable:</i>	
10. Please indicate the highest level of education completed by your parent/s or guardian/s. Check one level for each column.		
	<u>Mother or Female Guardian</u>	<u>Father or Male Guardian</u>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
High school or less	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some college	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Associate's degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bachelor's degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Master's degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doctorate or professional degree (JD, MD, PhD)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>11. Do you have a sibling or siblings who have attended or graduated from college? Please indicate the highest level of education completed by your sibling/s.</p> <p>a. Yes, I have a sibling/s who attended a two-year college</p> <p>b. Yes, I have a sibling/s who graduated from a two-year college</p> <p>c. Yes, I have a sibling/s who attended a four-year college</p> <p>d. Yes, I have a sibling/s who graduated from a four-year college</p> <p>e. No, my sibling/s have not attended or graduated from college</p> <p>f. Not applicable (I do not have a sibling/s)</p>		

Thank you for your time and interest!

Please complete and return this form to Patty Alvarez via email (palvarez@umd.edu) or campus mail (1134 Cumberland Hall). I will contact you soon to let you know whether you have been selected to participate in this study.

APPENDIX C: Interview Protocol

Experiences of Latina First-Generation College Students

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. You have been selected to participate in this study because your point of view and experiences are very important. I know that your schedule must be very busy so I really appreciate your involvement in this research study.

Purpose

This study is the focus of my doctoral dissertation research. The purpose of these interviews will be to learn about your understanding of being a Latina first-generation college student at the University of Maryland. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions that I will ask so please feel free to share your thoughts and feelings as they emerge.

Guidelines

Before we begin the interview, I want to remind you that this interview will be digitally recorded. All of the information shared will be kept confidential. Information may be used for research purposes, but no specific identifying information will be used. I will ask that you think about a pseudonym that you would like me to associate with the interview data and when reporting the findings. What pseudonym would you like to use? If you are unsure at this point, I can ask you again at the end of the interview. Do you have any questions? Let's begin the interview. Please let me know if you need to take a break for any reason.

Prior to beginning first interview:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each participant should complete the consent form and demographic questionnaire prior to beginning the interview. • Clarify any information received from the interest form.

General Focus of First Interview

Research Question 1: For Latina students who are the first in their family to go to college, what is their understanding of being a first-generation college student?

- Tell me a little bit about yourself (e.g., name, major, hometown).
- In order to participate in this study, you had to identify as Latina and be a first-generation college student. Tell me a little bit about your ethnic background. Tell me a little bit about your family (e.g., size, composition), including their educational background (probe: siblings, parents, other family members (aunts/uncles, cousins, and so forth)).
- Please share with me why you wanted to participate in this study?
- Describe the path that you took into higher education, more specifically, the University of Maryland (probe: when did you decide that you wanted to go to college, why did you choose the University of Maryland)?
- What does it mean to you to be the first in your family to go to college?

- What has your experience been like as a Latina first-generation college student at this University (probe: academic experiences, social experiences, interactions with family)?
- In what ways does being a Latina first-generation college student influence your academic experiences (e.g., approach to academics, interactions with faculty, coursework, etc.) at the University?
- In what ways does being a Latina first-generation college student influence your social experiences (e.g., involvement in student organizations, interactions with peers outside of the classroom, use of campus services, interactions with family) at the University?

At the end of first interview:

- Thank each individual for participating.
- Ask each participant to identify a pseudonym that will be used throughout the study.
- Remind participants that their comments will remain anonymous. Explain that they will receive an electronic copy of the interview transcript via email within a week of the interview so that they can offer any corrections or clarifications.
- Ask each participant to bring in an artifact during the second interview that has meaning for the person as a Latina first-generation college student.
- If possible, schedule a tentative time for the second interview. The interview may be scheduled via email if the students or I are unprepared to schedule the next interview.
- Give each participant \$25.
- Ask participants if they have any questions or additional thoughts that they would like to share.

Second Interview

Prior to second interview:

- Ask participants if they have any corrections or comments regarding the previous transcript/interview.
- Ask participants if they have any questions that remain from the first interview or additional thoughts they would like to share.
- Provide a summary of some of the key points raised during the first interview, particularly with regards to setting a context for the second interview.

General Focus of Second Interview

Research Question 2: What strengths do Latina first-generation college students associate with being a first-generation college student?

- When did you first become aware that you were a first-generation college student? Please explain.

- Please describe a situation (possible probes: experiences in the classroom, interactions with peers, interactions with family) that typically causes you to think about being the first in your family to go to college. What thoughts and feelings do you have in this situation? Do you have other situations that also have caused you to think about being the first in your family to go to college? Please describe them. (Probe: thoughts and feelings).
- Ask participants to share their artifact and explain the meaning that it has for them. How does the artifact relate to your being a first-generation college student? What does the artifact represent for you? What does it mean to you?
- What does being a Latina first-generation college student represent for you?
- When I say the words “Latino or Latina first-generation college student,” what comes to mind *for you*? (probe: words, metaphors, feelings, experiences)
- What strengths or assets do you associate with being a Latina first-generation college student? Has being a first-generation college student helped you in any way? Please explain.
- Who or what has helped you through any tough moments (possible probes: family, community, campus resources)? Please provide some examples.
- Who or what has contributed to your success (possible probes: family, community, campus resources, self)? Please provide some examples.
- What advice would you give to other Latino/a first-generation college students?
- Is there anything else that you would like to share based on your experiences that we have not discussed thus far or you did not get an opportunity to share?

At the end of second interview:

- Thank each individual for participating.
- Ask participants to review and provide feedback on their respective paragraph profile.
- Ask each participant to identify a pseudonym if she or he has not already done so.
- Remind participants that their comments will remain anonymous. Explain that they will receive an electronic copy of the interview transcript via email within a week of the interview so that they can offer any corrections or clarifications. Provide participants who would prefer to return their edits of the second interview transcript via US mail a stamped, addressed envelope.
- Note that an optional focus group or individual interview will be held during the summer. Ask students to share their availability for the focus group or possible third interview.
- Give participant \$25 at the end of the interview.
- Ask if there are any questions.

APPENDIX D: Consent Form

Page 1 of 4
 Initials _____ Date _____

Project Title	Latino/a Students Who are the First in Their Families to Go to College: A Grounded Theory Study of Their Understanding of Being a First-Generation College Student
Why is this research being done?	This is a research project being conducted by Dr. Marylu K. McEwen and Patty Alvarez at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are at least 18 years old and are a Latino/a first-generation college student. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of Latino/a first-generation college students at the University of Maryland.
What will I be asked to do?	The procedures involve participating in two interviews during the spring 2008 semester. Each interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Prior to the first interview, you will be asked to complete a short demographic survey. During the interview, you will be asked about your experiences as a Latino or Latina first-generation college student at the University of Maryland and how you see yourself as a first-generation college student. In addition, you will be asked to describe some of your academic experiences, interactions with your peers, and what it means to you to be the first in your family to go to college. During the second interview, you will also be asked to share and discuss an artifact (e.g., a poem, song, picture, journal entry, or other item) that has special significance for you as a Latino/a first-generation college student. All interviews will be held at a time and in a private location convenient for you. Interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis. You will have an opportunity to review your interview transcripts and offer any clarifications. Each transcript will be sent to you electronically within a week of each interview. You will also be invited to participate in an optional focus group interview with other students or an individual interview this summer in order to comment on the findings that emerge from this study. As an incentive for your participation, you will be given \$25 after the first interview and another \$25 after the second interview.

Project Title	Latino/a Students Who are the First in Their Families to Go to College: A Grounded Theory Study of Their Understanding of Being a First-Generation College Student
What about confidentiality?	<p>We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. This research project will involve making digital recordings of the interviews to provide a complete record of our conversations. To help protect confidentiality, your interview tapes, transcripts, and documents will be coded with a pseudonym. These documents will be kept separate from the information provided on the interest form and demographic survey. Only the researchers will be able to link the research materials to a specific person. All transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet at the home of the student researcher. Only the researchers will have access to the digital recordings and they will be destroyed in December 2009. None of the computer files related to the study will include any identifiable personal information. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</p> <p><u>Digital Recordings</u></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.</p>
What are the risks of this research?	There are no known risks of participating in this research project.
What are the benefits of this research?	This research is not designed to help you personally, but you will have the chance to reflect on your experiences as a Latino/a first-generation college student. This process may affect your perceptions of yourself and inform your future educational choices. The results of this study may help the researchers learn more about the experiences of Latino/a first-generation college students. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through an improved understanding of the experiences of Latino/a first-generation college students.

Project Title	Latino/a Students Who are the First in Their Families to Go to College: A Grounded Theory Study of Their Understanding of Being a First-Generation College Student		
Do I have to participate? Can I stop participating at any time?	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits for which you would otherwise qualify.		
What if I have questions?	<p>Dr. Marylu McEwen and Patty Alvarez from the Counseling and Personnel Services department at the University of Maryland, College Park, are conducting this research. If you have any questions about the study, please contact one of the researchers:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td> <p>Marylu K. McEwen Associate Professor Counseling & Personnel Services Department 3214 Benjamin Building University of Maryland College Park, MD 20742 xxx-xxx-xxxx mmcewen@umd.edu</p> </td> <td> <p>Patty Alvarez Doctoral Candidate Counseling & Personnel Services Department 1134 Cumberland Hall University of Maryland College Park, MD 20742 xxx-xxx-xxxx palvarez@umd.edu</p> </td> </tr> </table> <p>If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study or would like to report a research-related injury, please contact the following office:</p> <p>Institutional Review Board Office University of Maryland College Park, MD 20742 301-405-0678 irb@deans.umd.edu</p> <p>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures governing your participation in this research.</p>	<p>Marylu K. McEwen Associate Professor Counseling & Personnel Services Department 3214 Benjamin Building University of Maryland College Park, MD 20742 xxx-xxx-xxxx mmcewen@umd.edu</p>	<p>Patty Alvarez Doctoral Candidate Counseling & Personnel Services Department 1134 Cumberland Hall University of Maryland College Park, MD 20742 xxx-xxx-xxxx palvarez@umd.edu</p>
<p>Marylu K. McEwen Associate Professor Counseling & Personnel Services Department 3214 Benjamin Building University of Maryland College Park, MD 20742 xxx-xxx-xxxx mmcewen@umd.edu</p>	<p>Patty Alvarez Doctoral Candidate Counseling & Personnel Services Department 1134 Cumberland Hall University of Maryland College Park, MD 20742 xxx-xxx-xxxx palvarez@umd.edu</p>		

Page 4 of 4
 Initials _____ Date _____

Project Title	Latino/a Students Who are the First in Their Families to Go to College: A Grounded Theory Study of Their Understanding of Being a First-Generation College Student
Statement of Age and Consent	Your signature indicates that: you are at least 18 years of age, the research has been explained to you, your questions have been fully answered, and you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.
Signature and Date	Name of Participant (please print)
	Signature of Participant
	DATE

APPENDIX E: Demographic Survey

<p>1. What is your current cumulative GPA? _____</p>	<p>2. What is your expected graduation date? _____</p>								
<p>3. If you currently work, where do you work? a. Currently don't work (skip to #5) b. Work on campus c. Work off campus d. Both on and off campus</p>	<p>4. If you currently work, how many hours a week do you work? _____</p>								
<p>5. Have you ever stopped attending the University of Maryland for one or more semesters? a. No (Skip to #7) b. Yes</p>	<p>6. If you have stopped attending, what were the circumstances? (Circle <i>all</i> that apply) a. Financial reasons b. Health concerns c. Family obligation d. Academic reasons e. Personal f. Other: _____</p>								
<p>7. Did you receive financial aid this past year in the form of: (Circle <i>all</i> that apply)</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">a. Did not receive financial aid</td> <td style="width: 50%;">e. Work-study</td> </tr> <tr> <td>b. Loans</td> <td>f. Athletic scholarship</td> </tr> <tr> <td>c. Need-based scholarship or grant</td> <td>g. Other: _____</td> </tr> <tr> <td>d. Non-need based scholarship or grant</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		a. Did not receive financial aid	e. Work-study	b. Loans	f. Athletic scholarship	c. Need-based scholarship or grant	g. Other: _____	d. Non-need based scholarship or grant	
a. Did not receive financial aid	e. Work-study								
b. Loans	f. Athletic scholarship								
c. Need-based scholarship or grant	g. Other: _____								
d. Non-need based scholarship or grant									
<p>8. Indicate your citizenship and/or generational status. (Circle <i>one</i>)</p> <p>a. My grandparents, parents and I were born in the U.S. b. My parents and I were born in the U.S., but one or more of my grandparents was not c. I was born in the U.S., but my parents were not d. One of my parents and I were born in the U.S., but one of my parents was not e. I am a foreign born, naturalized citizen f. I am a foreign born, resident alien/permanent resident g. I am on a student visa h. None of these apply to me i. Other: _____</p>									
<p>9. If you were not born in the U.S., at what age did you move to the U.S. _____</p>	<p>10. What is the primary language spoken in your home? _____</p>								

<p>11. What is your relationship status?</p> <p>a. Single d. Divorced b. Married e. Other: _____ c. Partnered</p>	<p>12. Do you have a child/children?</p> <p>a. No b. If yes, how many _____</p>					
<p>13. Indicate the highest level of education completed by your sibling/s and their age (leave this question blank if you do not have a sibling/s). Check one level for each column. If you have more than six siblings, please check this box <input type="checkbox"/>. You will have an opportunity to provide information regarding any additional siblings during the interview.</p>						
	Sibling 1	Sibling 2	Sibling 3	Sibling 4	Sibling 5	Sibling 6
Don't Know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
High school or less	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some college	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Associate's degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Master's Degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doctorate or professional Degree (JD, MD, PhD)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>Indicate the age of each sibling/s below each column:</p>						
<p>14. Please list any organizations with which you are involved as an active member – both on- and off-campus.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>						
<p>15. Which of the following courses have you taken? (Circle <i>all</i> that apply)</p> <p>a. Spanish Department b. Latin American Studies Center c. U.S. Latina/o Studies Program d. Other Latino/a-focused course/s _____</p>						

Questions asked on this survey were borrowed liberally from the Latino/a Access and Success 2005 demographic survey.

APPENDIX F: Memorandum from Inquiry Auditor**Memo**

To: Patricia Alvarez
From: Kenya Mewborn Ph.D, Inquiry Auditor
Date: 4/25/2011
Re: Dissertation Research

It was my pleasure to serve as your inquiry auditor. As auditor I was charged with examining the process and product of your dissertation research. I reviewed interview transcripts, coded material, preliminary and final conceptual themes, the final theory, and drafts of each chapter. You successfully coded the vast amount of information provided by participants and I verify that the emergent theory was grounded in the data shared during interviews. Congratulations on presenting an insightful theory of Latina first-generation college student identity development!

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