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LATINA UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES WITH RESOURCES AND STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS AT A PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTION

A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Jonathan Montgomery
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
May 2016
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This qualitative case study aims to provide a nuanced insight into the reported racial, ethnic, linguistic, and gendered experiences of five Latina undergraduate students attending a predominately White institution in western Pennsylvania. Additionally, by exploring the ways in which these students encounter on-campus resources and student organizations created for Latino/a students at the university, their perspectives regarding the importance of these resources for successfully navigating a PWI are revealed.

Data was collected through five semi-structured interviews and subsequently transcribed and analyzed for themes using content analysis. Emergent themes included stereotyping related to academic potential, social connections and race; language; spaces/geographies; email and personal networks; recommendations for outreach; importance of involvement/informal support systems; and rationale for not accessing resources. The implications of this study call for increased outreach to incoming Latino/a students to raise awareness of resources available to them, a need for multicultural training of faculty to reduce instances of differential treatment and microaggressions in the classroom, and participants’ establishment of alternative or informal support systems when encountering challenges at the university.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

“And what have we here?” my teacher said as she inspected my contribution to our class’s food show and tell. I had brought some pasta de guayaba (guava paste) I used to spread on crackers, homemade flan, and a pack of Maltes my abuela had brought from New York. It wasn’t much, but it was what my mother had given me. My teacher politely perused my offerings, mostly hiding her aversion to the unfamiliar snacks that lay before her. Her gaze lingered on the six glass bottles of Malta. “And these?” she said with a hint of disapproval. “It’s a Malta,” I said proudly, defending my favorite sugary beverage. “It looks like beer, are these alcoholic?” she said incredulously. “No, they’re like soda,” I responded. I was in third grade after all. “Well let’s just let you take these home, and the students can try some of your other things if they want,” she said handing me the pack of Maltes to put away. Confused and embarrassed, I put the Maltes in my backpack and watched silently as my teacher walked around the room smiling and “adventuously” trying my classmates’ dishes, all of which could be found in every grocery store in town.

This excerpt is a personal memory from my third grade classroom in Griswold, Connecticut. It is one of my earliest memories of perceived difference between my classmates and myself. At the time, I could not quite figure out why the whole situation had bothered me so much; my teacher hadn’t said anything one could consider overtly rude or offensive, nor had she even chastised me in any way. However, whatever it was, she had made me feel out of place, devalued, awkward, and as a result I withdrew and chose not to participate. Looking back, I realize the foods I had brought were important to me. They were my attempt to make myself, my culture, and my family present and valued within a classroom space dominated by
Whiteness. Yet I will never forget the look on that teacher’s face. As if what I had to offer was not welcome, or didn’t belong. And consequently, whether it was her intention or not, she had made me feel the same. While these types of experiences and feelings would not remain isolated incidents, as I spent most of my schooling in majority White institutions, they would inspire me to pursue research focused on ensuring that the voices and experiences of other underrepresented minority students would be heard and valued within predominantly White contexts.

“White” Context

Predominately White institutions while commonly perceived as monolithic entities are in fact comprised of a multitude of individual departments, faculty members, and differing ideologies. As such, the policies enacted by these institutions should be acknowledged as complex ideations derived from the variety of individuals which comprise them. That being said, in a context such as the one being explored by this study it is imperative to consider the ideologies and historical background which inevitably influence the individual actors, and by extension the institution itself. As this particular study is situated within a PWI, the concept of whiteness necessitates definition and further exploration. According to Matias and Mackey (2016), “the hegemony of Whiteness” often goes unnoticed and unaddressed due to a naturalization within the United States education system, despite obvious implications for the educational equality of students of color (p.34). Thus, in order to address the prevalence of this naturalized hegemony of Whiteness, which Matias and Mackey (2016) discuss, critical Whiteness studies offer a useful perspective. Critical Whiteness studies utilize a transdisciplinary approach which explores the “phenomenon of Whiteness, how it is manifested, exerted, defined, recycled, transmitted, and maintained, and how it ultimately impacts the state of race relations” (p.34). In conjunction with CRT, which posits the idea that race and racism are embedded in the practices, policies, and ideologies of institutions of higher learning, especially PWIs, critical Whiteness studies help to
contextualize the current study which is situated within a predominately White context. Additionally, by examining the phenomenon of Whiteness institutions can begin to gain a better understanding of the non-neutrality of Whiteness and the implications of the fact that race affects us all. Whiteness in this sense must be acknowledged as having “material, physical, emotional, and political power,” which inevitably affects students of color who must navigate its overwhelming presence (Matias & Mackey, 2016, p.35).

**Statement of Problem**

Although the number of Latino/a students attending universities across the country has increased in the past two decades, a significant gap still exists in terms of academic retention and achievement. Statistically, Latinos are less than half as likely as White college students to obtain a bachelor’s degree in four years, and the dropout rates are the highest among all other minority groups (Kim, Rennick, & Franco 2014). In fact, according to Cerezo and McWhirter (2012), only 11% of self-identified Latinos hold a bachelor’s degree in comparison to 34% of Whites, indicating a significant educational disparity. While a myriad of differing factors has been proposed as possible causes for the growing disparity, from limited access to financial resources to institutionalized obstacles that hinder Latino/a student integration and inclusion in the campus community, the importance of on-campus support tends to be overlooked.

According to Cerezo, Lyda, Beristianos, Enriquez, and Connor (2013), faculty, peer, and familial support all have notable beneficial effects on academic success and retention among college students. In fact, Baker (2013) found that for minority students in particular, support from peers and faculty significantly influences the success students have in the classroom, with both Latino/a and Black students benefitting from receiving support from their teachers, especially teachers of the same race. More generally, multiple studies have demonstrated the advantages of substantive student-faculty interaction for college students of any background, in
terms of students’ positive perception of academic self, motivation to succeed, probability of persisting academically, and improved learning outcomes (DeFreitas & Bravo, 2012; Kim, Rennick, & Franco, 2014; Kim & Sax, 2009, 2011; Komarraj, Musulkin, & Bhattacharya, 2010; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Tinto, 1975). However, despite a dearth of research demonstrating the importance of positive interactions, many Latino/a students attending Predominately White Institutions\(^1\) tend to experience interactions with their peers and professors quite differently than their White peers do. Rivas-Drake and Mooney (2008) found that on PWI campuses, Latino/a students often report encountering deficit perceptions related to their academic potential, racism, discrimination, and isolation. These perceptions, coupled with the complex emotional, social, and academic challenges associated with the transition to college, can be especially trying for Latino/a students transitioning into a PWI. In fact, research conducted by Worthington, Navarro, Loewy, and Hart in 2008, and echoed by Smith, Allen, and Danley in 2007, reported that “the experience of PWIs as unwelcoming and unsupportive for students of color has been associated with adverse outcomes: poor academic performance, greater stress, and poor mental health problems” (As cited in Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012, pp. 159-160). The situation worsens when you consider the lack of adequate services available to underrepresented minority students on PWI campuses, which address these students’ unique needs. According to Harwood, Huntt, Mendenhall, and Lewis (2012), although student diversity has increased at PWIs, “teaching practices, student support services, and overall campus environments” have not changed alongside student diversity (p. 159).

Thus seemingly, many support services stand ill-equipped to adequately meet the varied needs of the changing student population. Equally vital to ensuring Latino/a students utilize

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\(^{1}\) Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) refer to institutions with majority White demographics. See Chapter 3.
these services is effective outreach and advertisement to ensure Latino/a students are made aware and are well-informed regarding services available to them. According to Cerezo and McWhirter (2012), since Latino/a students in particular are less likely than their White peers to seek out professional services for emotional support when they experience challenges in college at PWIs, identifying the ways in which Latino/a students encounter these services is crucial for more effectively informing students of the services available to them and assessing the degree to which those services meet their needs. However, as has been previously stated, many Latino/a students are faced with few available campus support systems which provide adequate services for underrepresented minority student populations on campus. This is especially troubling when you consider the majority of Latino/a students attend predominantly White institutions (Robertson, Bravo, and Chaney, 2014). Thus it’s crucial that predominantly White institutions of higher learning continuously strive to create a more inclusive environment for all students and adapt their teaching practices and student support services to ensure Latino/a students are sufficiently supported and included within predominately White contexts.

**Theoretical Framework**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino/a Critical theory (LatCrit) dually comprise the lens through which this study is viewed and the theoretical body of work in which the study is grounded. While these two theoretical frameworks differ in terms of their focus and emphasis, they are in no means conflicting epistemologies. In regards to educational research, Delgado Bernal (2002) noted that both CRT and LatCrit aim to “challenge the dominant discourse on race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (p. 109). This positions CRT and LatCrit as particularly useful frameworks for interpreting and analyzing the oftentimes racialized
experiences of the participants in this study, while at the same time taking into account aspects of
gender and class. Additionally, CRT and LatCrit function under the acknowledgement that
educational structures, processes, and discourses are oftentimes contradictory, in that they often
have both the potential to oppress and also empower as can be witnessed in the varying
experiences of the participants in this study.

CRT, according to Solorzano (1998), is commonly defined by five central elements: the
importance of transdisciplinary approaches, an emphasis on experiential knowledge, a challenge
to dominant ideologies, the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other
forms of subordination, and a commitment to social justice. These central elements of CRT,
however, are not exclusionary and instead overlap significantly with those posited by LatCrit.
LatCrit merely addresses additional concerns not necessarily focused on by CRT. In fact,
speaking to this point, Valdes (1996) explicated that in relation to CRT, LatCrit is both
“supplementary” and “complementary,” and that “at its best [LatCrit] should operate as a close
cousin— related to CRT in real and lasting ways, but not necessarily living under the same roof”
(Valdes, 1996, p. 26-27). Namely, what places LatCrit under a different roof is that it aims to
“theorize issues such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and
sexuality” (Bernal, 2002, p. 108), while also shedding light on the multidimensional identities of
Latinas/Latinos. Additionally, according to Valdes (1996), LatCrit also branches from CRT in
that it advocates a progressive sense of a coalitional Latino/a pan-ethnicity. Yet for all their
differences, both CRT and LatCrit are transdisciplinary and draw from a variety of different
fields of study in an attempt to understand and improve the educational experiences of students
of color (Bernal 2002; Parker, Deyhle, & Villenas, 1999). Thus for the purposes of this research,
I utilize the work of both LatCrit and CRT theorists in order to construct an adaptive and complementary theoretical framework on which to ground the study.

**Statement of Study Purpose**

The aim of this study is to provide a nuanced insight into the reported racial, ethnic, linguistic, and gendered experiences of five Latina undergraduate students attending a predominantly White institution in western Pennsylvania. Additionally, I explore the ways in which these students encounter on-campus resources and student organizations created for Latino/a students at the university in an effort to gauge their perspectives regarding the importance of these resources and organizations for successfully navigating a PWI. Thus, through an investigative qualitative interview design, my study seeks to add to the literature surrounding the role of resources and student organizations in supporting underrepresented minority students at predominantly White institutions and to shed light on informal and often invisible forms of support established by the participants at the university.

**Statement of Research Questions**

The central inquiries which drive this study are dual pronged and split between investigating the five participants’ reported racial, ethnic, linguistic, and gendered experiences and exploring their various encounters and interactions with resources and student organizations designed for Latino/a students on campus. In order to adequately investigate these areas of inquiry, the research questions in this study are presented as follows:

1. What kinds of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and gendered experiences do the five Latina undergraduate students report at the university?
   
   a) What role does self-identifying as Latina/Hispanic play in interactions with peers, faculty, and members of the community?
2. How do the five Latina undergraduate students encounter resources designed for Latino/a or Hispanic students on campus?

   a) In their perspectives, what is the importance of these resources for successfully navigating a PWI?

   b) How do these resources align with the needs of the five Latina undergraduate students?

Significance of the Study

For too long, the experiential knowledge of students of color has been viewed as a deficit in formal learning environments. Critical raced-gendered epistemologies allow this experiential knowledge to be viewed as a strength and acknowledge that the life experiences of students of color are “uniquely individual while at the same time both collective and connected” (Dillard, 2000, p. 676; Bernal, 2002, p. 109). As Dillard and Bernal discussed in the excerpt above, the experiential knowledge of students of color has historically been viewed as having little importance in terms of their effect on the functions and policies of the institutions in which they are educated. Thus, the significance of this study lies in the centrality of experiential knowledge as the primary means through which we gain insight into the lives of these five Latina undergraduate students attending a PWI and examine the systems they access for support. While these five women’s experiences cannot possibly be generalized to Latinos attending PWIs in the United States as a whole, as Dillard states, their experiences are both collective and connected while at the same time also uniquely individual. So by examining their interactions, encounters, and reported experiences, this study aims to reveal the potential of various resources and student organizations for supporting other Latino students in their navigation and retention at PWIs.

Currently, Latinos constitute the youngest and fastest-growing ethnic minority group in the country, yet their rates of four-year degree completion and retention continue to fall below that
of White peers, signaling a need for institutions of higher learning to assume more responsibility to ensure these students are fully included and supported within the campus community. A step in the right direction towards achieving this goal lies in the quality and availability of the resources provided for Latino/a students on campus, which is the very area of focus my study seeks to address. Hence, the firsthand experiential knowledge revealed in this study is significant for elucidating a portion of the reported needs and opinions of Latino students, which can assist and encourage PWIs to more effectively design their resources for these students, and support student organizations offered to them. Additionally, this study reveals the creation and utilization of informal networks and support systems established by the participants themselves.

**Overview of the Chapters**

This thesis is divided into five chapters including an introduction, literature review, methodology chapter, results chapter, and discussion and conclusion chapter. The upcoming literature review chapter, will be divided into two parts. The first part will address a number of emergent themes discovered through a review of the literature focusing on Latino/a student experience at a PWI, while the second will focus on demonstrating the role of various programs and resources designed for Latino/a undergraduate students at a PWI. In the methodology chapter, I discuss the design used in the study, along with my rationale for choosing a qualitative interview based case study approach. Chapter Four will be the results chapter in which the data that was collected from my five participants will be presented. Lastly, in Chapter Five, I will discuss the conclusions drawn from the study in relation to the available literature, along with the study’s implications and limitations, and provide recommendations for future studies.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section includes a review of the literature pertaining to the experiences of Latino/a students at predominantly White institutions across the United States, and presents an overview of a number of programs and organizations that reflect educational policy grounded in CRT and LatCrit. Specifically, these programs are shown to support Latino/a and other underrepresented minority students as they navigate various PWIs within the United States, and clearly demonstrate the potential benefits of implementing educational policies substantiated by a critical race epistemology. The review is divided into themes derived from the literature regarding Latino/a student experiences at PWIs, which I was able to classify into three general areas of focus: (1) racial/linguistic discrimination, (2) difficulties integrating into campus, and (3) resources and programs with theoretical bases in CRT and LatCrit that seek to foster Latino/a inclusion and success within institutions which have historically marginalized and excluded them. By exploring these areas of research, I intend to illuminate the experiences of the five Latina participants, and to demonstrate the validity of CRT and LatCrit as appropriate lenses for this particular qualitative case study.

Racial/Linguistic Discrimination

“We’re viewed as not making it because of our race.” (Hungerford-Kresser, 2010, p. 12).

These words, spoken by a Latino student in regards to his experiences at a predominantly White institution, unfortunately reflect the sentiments of many Latino students in US higher education. According to Harwood, Hunnt, Mendenhall, and Lewis (2012), universities have become numerically more diverse in recent decades, but minority students tend to view their experiences on campus rather differently than White students. So while diversity on campuses has increased, the necessary student support services and revised teaching practices for these growing minority
populations have not evolved with them. Grounded in Critical Race Theory, Villalpando and Oseguera (2005) remark that in American higher education, race and racism are embedded in the structures, practices, and discourses that guide the daily practices of universities. As a result, Latino students often reported feeling hostility and discrimination directed towards them not only in the classroom, but in the residence halls they live in and the public spaces on campus which they occupy daily.

The various forms of both subtle and explicit racism that these students face adversely affect the ways in which they construct their academic identities, as well as their perceived inclusion in the campus community. In fact, Harwood et al. (2012) found that feelings of inclusion and comfort within the university environment directly correlate with a students’ likelihood to persist, and their degree of academic success. Thus, to assess the degree to which minority students reported feeling included and integrated into a college campus, Harwood et al. (2012) conducted a qualitative study in which they examined minority students’ experiences living in university residence halls. A focus was placed on on-campus residence halls because they represent one of the most quintessential aspects of college life in which students become acclimated to the university environment, integrate into the campus community, and begin constructing their own academic and social identities. In fact, Harwood et al. (2012) cites a large variety of benefits to living on campus upon entering college. The researchers stated that students who live on campus earn higher grades, display greater participation in university events, graduate at higher rates, and tend to attain increased psychosocial development compared to students who do not live in on-campus residence halls (Harwood et al., 2012). Thus it is fairly well established that residence halls play a vital role in a student’s acclimation to university life.
However, for Latino and other minority students, this experience is often marred by experiences that create an unwelcoming and unsupportive environment.

The participants in the study reported experiencing a myriad of microaggressions in the residence halls, including racial slurs written in public spaces, unequal treatment by residence hall staff members, denial and minimization of racism by peers, segregated spaces, and an overall unwelcoming atmosphere. Microaggressions are defined by Harwood et al (2012) as being subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges, which are “put downs” of Blacks or other minority groups by offenders (pp. 161-162). Due to consistent microaggressions directed towards the minority students participating in the study, the students understandably reported feeling marginalized and excluded from the greater campus community, which, according to Harwood et al (2012), can adversely affect their likelihood of persisting or succeeding academically. An unwelcoming, unsupportive campus environment has been known to be a contributing factor in decreased academic performance, greater stress, and mental health problems among students of color at predominantly White universities (Harwood et al 2012).

In addition to racial discrimination, Latino students tended to also experience linguistic discrimination. Dovidio, Gluszek, John, Ditlmann, and Lagunes (2010) conducted a series of quantitative studies aimed at revealing general discrimination against Latinos, which included surveys for two of the studies of students with nonnative accents and their perceptions of belonging, White college student’s perceptions of minority groups’ “Americanness” or relatability, as well as an observation study of how Latino and White shoppers were treated by White cashiers in over 100 grocery stores. They found that in addition to racial discrimination, Latinos were also frequently profiled as foreign or un-American, often due to their accent or use of the Spanish language. Although many of the Latino participants had been American citizens
their entire lives, they were perceived as not belonging, which, according to Dovidio et al (2010), affects the manner in which Latino students are treated by White peers socially and interpersonally on campus. Dovidio et al (2010) state that “…people may instead choose to isolate and ostracize members of other groups who are perceived to deviate from the civic standards of prototypical Americans” (p. 67). Dovidio et al (2010) further remark that such ostracization or isolation poses significant negative consequences for the psychological health of Latino students, while also hindering their integration into the campus environment.

Cerezo, Lyda, Beristianos, Enriquez, and Connor (2013) add to the literature with a study which explores the experiences of 12 college Mexican-American men and the various factors that influenced their abilities to persist in college and succeed academically. In exploring the experiences of these men it was found that in general among the sample of students, role models and encouragement from family and peers were the most positive factors driving Latino academic retention and success. The majority of the sample discussed discouragement based on their ethnic and gender statuses which hindered them academically, beginning pre-college in the form of racial microaggressions and the promotion of alternatives to higher education. Once in college most students cited financial difficulties as their most prominent barrier to academic achievement and retention, closely followed by discrimination by White peers and faculty. So due to their race or perceived linguistic or nationalistic identities, Latino/a students are consistently forced to contend with disadvantages out of their control beginning as early as high school. Cerezo et al (2012) discuss the increasingly common practice of promoting alternatives to higher education for Latino students by guidance counselors, teachers, and even peers. Citing
Martinez’s (2003) study as an example Cerezo et al (2012) describes the attitudes of educators in relation to their Latino students:

Participants in Martinez’s study described how dynamics related to race, ethnicity, and income in their high school setting resulted in low academic expectations expressed to them by high school teachers and support staff. Such messages signaled to students that they did not belong in college. (Cerezo, 2012, p. 354)

This early discouragement from pursuing higher education is a theme that repeats itself in the work of Solórzano, Villalpando, and Oseguera (2005). Grounded in Critical Race Theory, Solórzano et al (2005) analyze the educational inequities and racialized barriers faced by Latino/a students when navigating the educational system leading to completion of a college degree. Solórzano et al. (2005) explicate a multitude of different barriers facing Latino/a college students which are integrated parts of the greater educational system. For example, inadequate schooling, guidance, and support before college sabotages Latino/a students’ chances of achieving success to such an extent that out of 100 Latino/a elementary students, only 52 will graduate from high school, 10 from college, and four from graduate programs (Solórzano et al, 2005). Since Critical Race Theory is founded upon the basic principle that race and racism are defining characteristics of American society, Latino/a students’ race and linguistic identities play an important role in the ways in which they receive the necessary guidance and support, before and during college, to succeed and persist academically. Without such guidance and support from faculty and staff, Latino/a students are subsequently placed at a definitive disadvantage in comparison with their White peers.

Thus from the literature we can surmise that many Latino/a students are often subjected to racial and linguistic discrimination in higher education and during the years leading up to it.
These various forms of discrimination are not only psychologically harmful, but serve to effectively marginalize and ostracize Latino/a students within the campus community. As a result, Latino/a students from various studies reported experiencing difficulties acclimating and integrating to a predominantly White university setting. As integration into the campus community is associated with greater rates of retention and academic success among students, it is understandable that without it, Latino students may feel marginalized, unsupported and unwelcome, and thus more likely to discontinue a pursuit of higher education.

Clark, Ponjuan, Orrock, Wilson, and Flores (2013) describe the educational experiences of Latino men to be one of struggle and discouragement. Facing institutional, familial, and social barriers, these Latino students are often placed at a disadvantage upon entering institutions of higher learning. However, obstacles that hinder Latino student’s academic and social success begin long before they step foot on campus. According to Clark et al. (2013), Latino students often cited negative experiences with their high school guidance counselors prior to attending college. For most students who are considering attending college, no greater resource exists than the advice and guidance of a high school counselor. High school guidance counselors have a uniquely vital role in assisting in the transition from secondary to postsecondary education, and are responsible for providing resources, materials, and advice on how to navigate the educational pipeline both financially and academically. However, according to Vela-Gude et al. (2009), Latino students taking part in a recent study reported that during their high school years their counselors provided inappropriate or inadequate advisement, were not readily available, provided minimal individual counseling and attention, gave preferential treatment to White students, and had low expectations toward their college aspirations. Thus in the face of
differential treatment, many Latino students are placed at an early disadvantage even before they start their postsecondary education.

Once in college, Latino college students reported experiencing feelings of social hardship and marginalization when entering the college environment (Storlie, Moreno & Portman, 2013). The alienation experienced by many Latino college students can be attributed to a variety of differing factors, ranging from racial/linguistic discrimination to sexism and microaggressions experienced on campus. Yet these occurrences and feelings are not uncommon among underrepresented minority groups attending US institutions of higher learning. In fact, grounded in CRT, Solórzano, Villalpando, and Oseguera (2005) remark that in American higher education, race and racism are embedded in the structures, practices, and discourses that guide the daily practices of universities (p. 274). Thus as a result, underrepresented minority students often report feeling hostility and discrimination directed towards them not only in the classroom but in the public spaces on campus as well. Consequently, Latino students express increased difficulties acclimating and integrating into the greater campus community. These difficulties, according to research, have often been attributed to hindrances of Latino’s academic achievement and influences on overall opinions of higher education.

**Difficulties Integrating into Campus**

Integration and inclusion into the campus community, as has been discussed, is important not only for the psychological development and overall health of a student, but it also has the potential to negatively or positively affect a student’s academic retention and success. Within the literature, many Latino students have reported experiencing difficulties with becoming socially, culturally, and academically acclimated to predominately White university settings due to a variety of factors.

Socially, Latino students attending PWIs tend to strengthen ties among other Latinos or
other students of color instead of expanding their social circles to include White peers. A qualitative study conducted by Hungerford-Kresser (2010) explicates this well. Interviews were conducted with students in an informal coffee shop setting, in which they were asked to share their experiences of learning the ins and outs of the university culture and the ways in which they found themselves placed in connection with or in opposition to said culture. The participants reported coming from high schools in which they were the majority, so many expressed surprise that their university had relatively few Latino or Black students, although university recruitment boasted a highly diverse student body. While the Latino student’s feelings about this were mixed, with some feeling lucky to be there and others disagreeing with such low admittance of minorities, they all expressed feeling greater solidarity with Black and other Latino students. So contrary to what many believed would be the case attending a PWI, their peer groups did not expand to include many White students but rather further solidified friendships with minority peers. Latino students tended to socially restrict themselves due to shared life experiences and struggles with other minority students, marginalization from their White peers, and familiarity and comfort with minority groups which had comprised a large majority of their respective high school populations.

In terms of cultural integration of Latinos within predominantly White university settings, Pyne and Means (2013) conducted a case study drawing on Critical Race Theory that highlighted the experiences of a Latina student’s first year studying at a predominately White, private, and highly selective university. The student, Ana, completed three semi-structured interviews in which she discussed with the researchers her life history, experiences related to college aspirations, expectations of the first year of college, perceived barriers and opportunities for
academic and social success, changes in expectations and aspirations after the first and second semesters, and the perceived impact of precollege access experiences on readiness and decision making.

From Ana’s experiences a number of common themes emerged, from a lack of faculty support to financial hardships involved in funding her college education. However, among the various barriers Ana described, feeling culturally isolated was not only an important aspect of her experience in higher education but also rather indicative of the sentiments shared by many Latino college students attending PWIs. Much like Ana, who felt her cultural experiences differed significantly from her White peers, Latino college students often come from backgrounds that culturally do not align with the majority of their White classmates. As a result, many Latinos instead choose to develop themselves socially within familiar groups that provide similar backgrounds, interests, and, above all, acceptance.

In terms of academic acclimation, which includes knowledge of how to navigate the educational pipeline of US higher education, deal with teachers, manage academic studies, and maneuver financial aid, Latino students tended to express lack of support and unfamiliarity with regard to affording college and learning how to manage their studies. According to Cerezo et al (2013), 50% of students attending a public university on the west coast required some form of need-based financial aid to finance their education. While this is true for many college students due to steadily rising tuition prices in recent years, Latino students are especially dependent on financial aid as many come from low income areas. Additionally, since many Latino students are the first of their generation to attend college, they often lack familial resources to help guide them through financing their education. In fact, Cerezo et al (2013) find in their study that financial hardship was the primary challenge experienced by Latinos in completing college.
Additionally, many students also indicated they had little knowledge about the financial aid process when they began college, citing constant worries that were shared between themselves and family members regarding taking on debt, specifically student loans, to complete college. Thus Latinos tended to receive little guidance to acclimating to the financial procedures of the university.

Baker (2013) adds to the literature with a study conducted at a highly selective predominately White university setting in which the participants were underrepresented students who self-identified as either Black or Latino. Baker (2013) conducted a combination of interviews and surveys concerning the importance of peer and faculty support for Black and Latino students in order to gauge the effectiveness of support on the GPA of these students. Baker (2013) found that support from peers and faculty significantly influenced the success a student had in the classroom, with both Latino and Black students benefitting from receiving support from their teachers, especially teachers of the same race. Thus Baker (2013) contends that academic performance is positively influenced more by contact with faculty than with peers, in particular with faculty of the same race. The difficulties expressed by Latino students in acclimating academically may be attributed to lack of such support. This further provides evidence of the benefits of having programs and resources available with adequate faculty support, which can provide advice and guidance for underrepresented students navigating PWIs. Thus, as I have discussed previously, the perception of inclusion and satisfaction with their overall educational experience is vitally important for Latino student retention and success within PWIs.

Citing a study comparing the outcomes of various ethnic groups attending highly selective institutions, Kim, Rennick, and Franco (2014) found that a sense of belonging and
satisfaction within the campus environment directly correlated to increased academic success and that Latinos perceived their college experience as being relevant and important for their lives more than any other minority group in the study. So the importance of integrating and including underrepresented minority students into PWI campuses is seemingly directly beneficial for success in higher education. However, many universities, especially PWIs, do not have programs in place that address this issue; those that do, however, have clearly demonstrated the benefits of having such resources available on campus for Latino students and other underrepresented minority students (Case & Hernandez, 2013; Cerezo & McWhirter, 2012; Ovink & Veazey, 2010).

Because Latino students are faced with a myriad of obstacles and barriers to their academic and social success in higher education beginning as early as high school and continuing into their postsecondary years, resources and programs that help alleviate these barriers should be available and implemented accordingly. Thus, a central aspect of this study is to seek to further illuminate Latino/a student interactions with programs set in place to support them, by valuing and hearing the experiential knowledge the students themselves have to offer. By exploring how the five participants encounter these resources, view their importance for navigating a PWI, and perceive the extent to which the resources align with their needs, a more nuanced understanding can be reached regarding the management and implementation of these programs and resources at PWIs.

The following section will offer a review of programs found in the literature which utilize and reflect critical race epistemologies that seek to foster Latino/a student inclusion and success within PWIs that have historically marginalized and excluded underrepresented minority students. These programs demonstrate the benefits of educational policy that values the
knowledge students of color bring with them to higher education, by creating spaces in which that knowledge is considered an asset rather than a deficiency.

**Latino Educational Equity Project (LEEP)**

Racial and ethnic diversity largely shape institutional climate and strongly influence the social adjustment and retention of racial-ethnic minority students. Extensive research has demonstrated that although campuses continue to grow more diverse, students of color continually report university environments as more hostile and unfriendly than their White classmates do (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Hurtado et al., 1996; Nuñez, 2009; Yosso et al., 2009; Cerezo and McWhirter, 2012). Considering a hostile campus climate has been associated with lower academic achievement and persistence, poorer self-esteem, and a diminished sense of belonging for students of color, its role in the retention of Latino/a students is well established (Nuñez, 2009; Hurtado et al., 1996). Therefore, in an effort to address the educational disparity associated with Latino/a student retention and to meet the reported needs of the Latino/a students at PWIs in the authors’ home state of Oregon, the Latino Educational Equity Project (LEEP) was born.

Slated as a brief intervention pilot program designed to facilitate critical consciousness of race in higher education for Latino/a students, the pilot program was firmly rooted in CRT, and used this theoretical framework to guide the creation and delivery of the program. LEEP was designed with four essential elements in mind, which the authors aligned with the central tenets of CRT. These included: (a) building a supportive community, (b) increasing consciousness regarding race and (c) cultural congruity in higher education, and (d) developing skills to identify supportive, effective resources on the college campus to handle potentially challenging situations. The components of the program were carefully selected in response to needs
identified by university personnel and student leaders at various university sites in the state of Oregon (Cerezo, McWhirter, Peña, Valdez, & Bustos, 2013).

Essentially, Latino/a students participating in the LEEP program were encouraged to construct a community of mutual support to ensure academic responsibility, become aware of political and racial aspects of higher education and their implications for the Latino community as a whole, as well as to become aware of the university culture, and how to balance home and academic responsibilities. Through one intervention session which lasted eight hours, students were provided with the resources mentioned earlier, facilitated by LEEP group facilitators who also self-identified as Latino/a. Consistent with CRT and the literature surrounding successful intervention programs for Latino/a college students, this choice was made in order to centralize experiential knowledge of the group facilitators as people of color, foster a sense of community, and provide positive role models for the students. By the end of the study, researchers found that the students who had participated in the LEEP program experienced the greatest improvement in the area of social adjustment to college. While cultural congruency and critical consciousness provided mixed results with only one single session, the marked improvement in Latino/a students’ ideas of social adjustment proved promising.

As a result of this program, Latino/a students reported greater social acclimation and inclusion. The authors remark that the students began to connect with one another as the day progressed, while they shared stories of discrimination, racism, and oppression on campus, spoke about feelings of isolation and voiced experiences of xenophobia or “being tolerated,” which demonstrated an understanding of the sociopolitical issues affecting them (Cerezo et al., 2013). Written responses by both the participants and the facilitators were equally encouraging as they reflected the development of critical consciousness and provided insight into the students’
perceived needs. True to the tenets of CRT and LatCrit, the LEEP program placed the experiential knowledge and input of the Latino/a participants and facilitators at the forefront of the pilot program, valuing historically undervalued input. The benefits from the LEEP program extended beyond the vital development of the Latino/a students’ critical consciousness to the placement of retention efforts for Latino/a students at the forefront of campus support efforts. Additionally, university staff were included in the program space and informed of collaborations between different campus services, such as residential life and multicultural services. All things considered, the LEEP program represents an exciting new direction in retention efforts for Latino/a students at PWIs. The collaboration between CRT and programs such as LEEP, which are designed to provide support to students of color attending PWIs, is essential to changing and improving campus environments, and continuing to work towards enhancing the success of Latino/a and other underrepresented minority college students.

**Biology Undergraduate Scholars Program (BUSP)**

Citing significant “racial disparities in the attainment of post-secondary degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields,” governmental agencies such as the National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering have warned of a major decline in the strength of the U.S. economy in the face of a rapidly diversifying population (Chang, Sharkness, Hurtado, & Newman, 2014). In fact, the National Research Council states that the job fields with the most projected growth will require science and technology skills, an area currently severely underrepresented by the fastest growing population in the country (NRC, 2011). In fact, they found that the numbers of underrepresented minorities in science and engineering would need to triple to equal the percentage they currently comprise in the population. However, the dissimilitude displayed between the numbers of students of
color in these fields and their White counterparts is not fundamentally a matter of disinterest, but rather the result of lower rates of degree completion (Chang et al., 2014). According to The Center for Institutional Data Exchange Analysis (2000), nearly half of underrepresented minority students initially interested in science degrees change their plan within the first two years, and non-science students rarely switch to science related degrees. Thus, seeking to address these concerns, the University of California, Davis implemented The Biology Undergraduate Scholars Program (BUSP) in 1998 as an undergraduate intervention program designed to increase underrepresented minority student retention and achievement in the life sciences, as well as to help such students acquire the knowledge, skills and competencies necessary for success in scientific and biomedical careers (Ovink & Veazey, 2010). Over time, the goal of the program gradually expanded to include, “creating a supportive, academically focused community of minority students in the sciences and helping them to broaden and attain their professional aspirations by providing a wide range of information about their educational and occupational options” (Ovink and Veazey, 2010, p. 375-376).

The program is based on three main elements: (1) supplemental instruction in core courses of chemistry, math, and biology, (2) Quarterly academic and personal advising, and (3) paid undergraduate research experiences (UREs). As a multiyear “bridge” program, BUSP admits between 45 and 65 entering students each year who begin classes in the summer prior to their freshman year and continue through to the end of their sophomore year. After successfully completing their first 2 years, students may apply to take part in the BUSP Honors Program, which concentrates on conducting original research, writing and presentation skills, and preparing students to apply to graduate programs (Ovink and Veazey, 2010). However, BUSP
also provides underrepresented minority students (URMs) with a community within which they can form study groups, room together, and socialize with one another in a comfortable space.

As I have mentioned earlier, peer support and feelings of acceptance or inclusion have been associated with increased academic success, resistance to academic attrition, and greater satisfaction with college experience. So Latino/a students able to participate in the BUSP program or programs like it can highly benefit from the support they provide. While this particular program focuses on the sciences, the positive results are convincing for any field of study. In fact, by interviewing and studying alumni of the BUSP program Ovink and Veazey (2010) found that BUSP students outperformed both non-BUSP URM students and White/Asian majority students in basic science courses, chemistry and calculus (Ovink & Veazey, 2010). Moreover, BUSP students’ retention to degree in biology majors exceeds the campus average. Hence, the BUSP program is a step in the right direction for educational policies which aim to further the advancement and success of Latinos and other underrepresented minorities in higher education.

**College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP)**

Originating from a community college in rural Colorado, the college assistance migrant program is a program which provides students with human resources and networks of instructors, counselors, administrators, mentors, and other students who offer academic and personal wisdom, knowledge, and information. True to the tenants of CRT and LatCrit, the CAMP program offered students the opportunity and space to establish a sense of community with other students and advisors who valued the experiential knowledge they had to offer. In seeking to gauge its effectiveness in assisting the Latino/a students the program set out to serve, Reyes III (2007) added to the literature by conducting a longitudinal study, in which he followed five
Latino/a students who participated in the CAMP program and gauged what they had learned through surveys and interviews. What he discovered was that among the students who participated, all reported learning about college and what it takes to persist to graduation. In addition to this, many reported that they learned how to manage the personal, family, cultural, and educational worlds in which they functioned, struggled, and succeeded. Essentially, he found that the students seemed to develop successful student identities as a result of community practice, mentoring, and peer support (Reyes III, 2007). As a result, students expressed a feeling academically, socially, and emotionally more successful at the college. Encouragingly, the five Latino/a students in his study felt more able to take part in the community of practice which had been denied them due to their marginalized statuses before taking part in the CAMP (Reyes III, 2007). Since according to Cerezo and Chang (2013) social integration, or membership in groups and interactions with faculty, positively relates to GPA among Mexican American, Black, Native American, and White students by reinforcing academic commitment and reduced feelings of alienation, it appears to be a common understanding that those students that are encouraged and supported to participate fully both socially and academically, fare better than those who do not. It is for this reason programs like CAMP are so important, especially for Latino students, to instill a sense of acceptance and validation in environments which often deprive them of both.

**Center for Intercultural Teaching and Learning (CITL)**

“Since I’ve talked to everybody I feel like I’m Latino, yeah, but feel like I can be open to everybody else, I can fit in with whoever I’m with. But still, I’m Latino and I’m proud” (Case & Hernandez 2013). These words spoken by a participant of the Center for Intercultural Teaching and Learning reflect the positive and empowering effects of ethnic identity exploration programs for underrepresented Latino/a students attending a PWI. The Center for Intercultural Teaching
and Learning (CITL) is a cohort program grounded in CRT, in which student scholars participate in a four-year, ethnically-rooted leadership program designed to promote academic and social integration. The program model blends leadership development alongside ethnic identity exploration to facilitate student development in areas that are linked to retention, student success, and degree completion among Latino/a students.

In preparation for the first semester, students earn three academic credits through Summer Academic Leadership Training (SALT). This residential bridge program helps to foster the development of both social and academic skills, and offers an initial exposure to ethnic identity. Program leaders are assigned as well to assist students in reaching intended outcomes (Case & Hernandez, 2013). After researching the effects of this program among a cohort of students followed through their four years of college, Case and Hernandez (2013) found that Latino/a student’s experiences and perceptions of their own ethnic identity within a PWI setting changed as their education progressed. Freshman Latino/a students reported feelings of awakening, pride, and affirmation in relation to their Latino/a heritage. While sophomore Latino/a students stated that they experienced greater feelings of elevated ethnic consciousness, increased value attributed to other’s ethnicities, and a willingness to give back to the larger campus community by offering their own unique bicultural abilities for a more inclusive campus environment. Junior Latino/a students progressed even further by accepting their bicultural orientation, which afforded them comfort within both Latino/a and Anglo cultures. Within this particular framework Latino/a students discussed the overall acceptance of their cultural identities and began to move from learning about ethnic identity to experientially engaging with it in their daily lives. Lastly the Senior Latino/a students having completed the CITL program assumed the role
of bicultural leaders on campus, integrating ethnic identity and leadership development for intercultural contexts outside of the university.

Thus having completed the program Latino/a students were able to persist at a much higher rate in spite of the barriers and obstacles placed before them. In fact in the spring of 2012, all students who participated in the CITL program study had since graduated or were still part of campus and moving towards degree completion. Adding to the appeal of programs like CITL and SALT, is the opportunity for Latino/a students to explore their cultural backgrounds, and face racialized experiences critically among supportive peers and faculty. Considering a critical raced-gendered epistemology, rooted in CRT and LatCrit, supports methodological and pedagogical approaches such as those employed by CITL and SALT, which affirm and validate experiences related to varying forms of oppression, programs such as these are crucial for repositioning the manner in which Latino/a students view the value of their experiential knowledge (Bernal, 2002). Thus, empowering these students by valuing the experiences they bring to college, while also helping them to integrate into the college’s social and academic systems, helping to effectively maximize their chances of persisting throughout all 4 years of undergraduate study. Additionally, since according to Baker (2013) “connections with other minority students reinforce excellence in academics, provide social support and information for students to navigate the college environment, and increase ethnic solidarity and pride” (p. 633), ethnic identity programs like CITL which places students into cohorts can be essential for establishing necessary peer connections.

Ethnic identity exploration programs are but one of the ways in which PWIs with underrepresented Latino/a student populations can address the difficulties and barriers their students face. However, ethnic cohort programs are labor intensive and require time and
resources to build and sustain. Students require mentors which share their ethnic heritage and can understand their lived experiences, improved instruction on how to discuss sensitive ethnic topics among peers, and significant scaffolding throughout their four years of exploration, however the potential outcomes of such programs are motivation in themselves. Students taking part in the programs like CITL tend to demonstrate growth academically, socially, and in leadership development. They demonstrate marks of thriving that continue beyond graduation through contributions as bicultural leaders and ethnic role models both in the workplace, and within their communities (Baker, 2013). Thus while ethnic identity exploration programs and resources are not necessarily the answer to solving the various obstacles Latino/a students face in PWI settings, and in US higher education in general, they can still be promising interventions for underrepresented, often marginalized Latino/a students within PWIs.

**Final Remarks**

In conclusion, the articles I have included in this literature review contribute significantly to the understanding and knowledge of my selected topic of study. The issues facing Latino/a university students within PWIs and in higher education in general, across the nation are at the forefront of educational policy, and it is my sincerest hope as a researcher that through constructing this analysis of the available literature attention can be brought to the issue and solutions proposed. This review of literature provides insight into the experiences of Latino/a students in higher education and the various barriers and obstacles to degree completion they must overcome in order to graduate, as well as suggestions for ways to assist these students in dealing with racism, microaggressions, and discrimination.

Furthermore, as Lopez (2005) mentions, “future research into how people perceive, encounter, and respond to race-related stress in contexts such as public spaces and the workplace” could inform policies which dictate how race is addressed within certain
circumstances, and “could be utilized in [faculty] training programs that address multiculturalism”, thereby helping to minimize negative experiences between Latino/a students and faculty (p.363). As Rodríguez (2012) states rather well, we must first address the pervasive deficit thinking among teachers in both secondary and post-secondary education, by changing teacher’s attitudes we can begin to make positive steps toward education reform, and consequently increased academic achievement among Latino/a and underrepresented students (Rodríguez, 2012). Programs like LEEP, BUSP, and CAMP grounded in critical-raced gendered epistemologies like CRT and LatCrit have been shown to provide significant benefits to Latino/a students in terms of social integration and inclusion, academic success and retention, empowerment, and overall increased satisfaction with the experience of college.

In line with these findings, counselors and college affairs professionals can assist students in developing a sense of community by encouraging them to join ethnic-based and other student organizations, which foster peer support. This is especially important for students who are traditionally underrepresented on college campuses, in order to avoid creating an environment in which students feel alienated, marginalized, or ignored. Thus in keeping with the ideals of transformative pedagogy, in addition to framing the study, this literature review has offered a variety of viable methods of alleviating the challenges Latino/a students face, with the end goal of ultimately equalizing the rate of their retention and success within US higher education institutions. By better understanding all of the factors which influence academic success and retention, and taking steps to address these factors, educators can more effectively address the issues prevalent in US higher education, better serve their underrepresented student populations, and help to generate incentive for the creation of programs and resources which support them academically, socially and culturally.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

The aim of this chapter will be to present the methods I used to address the research questions. First, I will discuss my perspective and positionality as a researcher, after which I will justify the choice of qualitative research in general and case study specifically. Finally, I will discuss the procedure I employed to collect data, along with the methods and techniques used to analyze that data.

Restatement of Research Purpose and Questions

The aim of this study is to provide a nuanced insight into the reported racial, ethnic, linguistic, and gendered experiences of five Latina undergraduate students attending a predominately White institution in western Pennsylvania. Additionally, I explore the ways in which these students encounter on-campus resources and student organizations created for Latino/a students at the university in an effort to gauge their perspectives regarding the importance of these resources and organizations for successfully navigating a PWI. Thus, to address these inquiries, I chose to construct my study as a qualitative case study, examining the unique experiences of five undergraduate Latina students currently enrolled at a predominately White institution. Through semi-structured interviews, I sought to address the following research questions:

1. What kinds of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and gendered experiences do the five Latina undergraduate students report at the university?

   a) What role does self-identifying as Latina/Hispanic play in interactions with peers, faculty, and members of the community?
2. How do the five Latina undergraduate students encounter resources designed for Latino/a or Hispanic students on campus?

   a) In their perspectives, what is the importance of these resources for successfully navigating a PWI?

   b) How do these resources align with the needs of the five Latina undergraduate students?

**Research Design**

In order to adequately capture the complexities and uniqueness of the five participants, I chose semi-structured interviews as the primary mode of data collection. However, in order to provide as rich data as possible, the interview data was analyzed alongside written archives regarding student organizations and resources for Latino/a students on campus.

Interviews were chosen in lieu of other data collection methods due to their open-ended format. Creswell (2012) remarks that this is an advantage to interviews over other forms of data collection, as they allow “participants to describe detailed personal information” “unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings” (p. 218). Additionally, by conducting semi-structured interviews particularly, my participants were permitted more freedom to decide the direction of the interview, and as such their responses were less likely to be constrained by the interview questions themselves.

As was previously stated above in the introduction to this chapter, the research conducted for this case study was qualitative in nature. My reasoning for choosing a qualitative approach over a quantitative approach lies in the nature of qualitative research. From the beginning, it was very apparent that the type of data I would be receiving would necessitate a deeper analysis of the thought processes, emotions, and feelings of my participants and would not allow for any sort of generalization. As a result, I found a qualitative approach to research to be well suited to the
task of addressing my central inquiries. In fact, speaking to this point, Rosaline Barbour (1999) states, “qualitative research sets out to describe, understand and explain a particular phenomenon”, and is “ideally suited for providing in-depth contextualized accounts” (p. 156). Adding to Barbour’s assertion, John Creswell (2012) also describes qualitative research as being more uniquely suited for “exploring a problem” and developing a deeper understanding of a central phenomenon (p. 26). With that being said, a qualitative approach to this research was deliberate and strategic in adequately addressing the research questions raised, and for achieving the overall goals of this study. Considering the accounts of the five Latina university students are central to this study, a qualitative research design best aligns with the intended goal. Additionally, interviews in particular assume a crucial role in my study by allowing participants to describe detailed personal information, which cannot always be observed (Creswell, 2012). Thus, my study aims to address the aforementioned research questions through one on one interviews with five Latina college students utilizing a qualitative approach.

**Informal and Formal Support Systems**

Throughout this study, formal support systems and informal support systems were discussed by participants, and identified by the researcher. Formal support systems are defined by the researcher as student organizations advertised by the university as multicultural, diversity based, or Latino/a centered (See Appendix F). Conversely, informal support systems refer to forms of support utilized by the five participants that are necessarily recognized officially by the university, such as family or peer support.

**Participants**

All of the participants who participated in this study are currently enrolled students at the university and self-identify as Latina; however, this identification was not clear cut and will be
explained in detail shortly. In order to recruit participants, I chose email as the central medium of communication. Working with the assistant director of admissions for Latino recruitment, I was able to gain access to the 364 email addresses of students included in the university’s Latino/a student listserv. I first composed a brief invitation letter, which provided a summary of the research purpose along with criteria for inclusion in the study. Attached to the invitation email, I included an informed consent form, which essentially explained the study in more detail, and made the participant aware of her rights to privacy and ability to withdraw at any time. Interested participants were instructed to sign the informed consent form, choose a place and time for the interview which best fit their schedules, and to either bring the informed consent form with them to the interview, or scan and email it to me.

Of those invited to participate in this study, none responded to the first email. Discouraged but undeterred, I then resent the invitation email to all of the students on the listserv. Again responses were extremely low. However, through word of mouth and referrals by colleagues to potential participants, the five participants were finally recruited. The five participants were all Latina women currently enrolled at the university in pursuit of an undergraduate degree. The majority of these five women happened to be seniors, graduating within the next year, except for one junior. This was a strategic choice on my part, as I hypothesized that these students would have more experiences at the university and more interaction with faculty as they prepared to enter the workforce. While all of the participants met the criteria for self-identifying as Latino/a as an undergraduate student, this identity often differed from the umbrella term or Latino/a.

According to Alcoff (2005), the process of ethnic and cultural naming is bound up with struggles of power and equality, both responding to and shaping the social reality of the named
(p. 4). As such, designations such as Latino and Hispanic carry a historical and political load
d Laden with historical events that have inevitably influenced their acceptance by different groups
of people. As Jorge Klor de Alva (1998) has argued, these ethnic names can often unite
heterogeneous communities across race, class, ethnicity, and political orientation. However, one
must tread carefully in this regard so as to not erase individual experiences and histories of the
diverse groups which comprise these groups. In regards to this particular study, the term Latina
has been selected by the researcher as a pan-ethnic identifier coinciding with LatCrit’s advocacy
for a coalitional pan-ethnicity and the researcher’s own position. As Alcoff explains, “there is no
mutual exclusivity between the use of a pan-ethnic term, like Hispanic, and the use of a more
specific term, like Puerto Rican, and most use both but in different contexts” (Alcoff, 2005, p.
11). This is a phenomenon demonstrated by the participants in this study, as they continually
switch between terms throughout the course of the interview. However, the acknowledgement
must be made that pan-ethnic terms like Latino and Hispanic cannot entirely replace more
specific terms, which can often reflect more accurate and complex interpretations of the cultural
realities of the named.

Equally important to note is the concept of self-identification itself, which is often
inextricably linked to perceptions and imposed identifications of others. While the participants in
the study maintained individual agency in regards to their self-identifications, it cannot be
ignored that the ways in which others perceived them most likely had influences on how they
self-identified themselves. That is to say, that self-identification is often a co-constructed
process, which juxtaposes the identifications imposed on the participants with their own
understandings of the ethnic or racial group with which they affiliate. Thus, it is in light of this acknowledgement that the concept of self-identification can be contextualized and understood.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Year:</th>
<th>Major:</th>
<th>Self-Identification:</th>
<th>Birthplace:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catalina</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Management of information systems</td>
<td>Latina, Spanish, Hispanic, Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marisol</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Hispanic, Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alejandra</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Dietetics</td>
<td>Puerto Rican, Hispanic</td>
<td>Maryland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galena</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Human resource management</td>
<td>Dominican, Spanish</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senalda</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Latina, Hispanic, Puerto Rican</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, the five participants considered themselves under the umbrella of the term Latina, yet chose to identify themselves differently individually throughout the interview process (see Table 1). Whether that identification was based on familial national origin or used interchangeably with Latina, none of the five participants limited themselves solely to the self-identification of Latina.

**Context**

The context for this study was a predominantly White institution located in western
Pennsylvania. This particular university, according to fall 2014 enrollment, has 477 self-identified Latinos comprising 3.32% of the total student population. Kofi Lomotey (2010) defines predominately White institutions as being institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment. Thus, in line with this definition, the target university fits the criteria for a predominately White institution with a White student enrollment of 74.65%. The university itself is located in a small town with a population of about 13,975 as of 2010. The demographics of that population reported about 91.51% of the population identify as White, while in comparison about 1.21% identify as Latino/a or Hispanic.

**Data Collection**

The process of data collection revolved around the conducting of interviews and the subsequent transcription and analysis of that data. Participants took part in one 30-45 minute face-to-face interview conducted at the university library. Interviews were digitally recorded, and transcribed following each interview. Secondary follow-up interviews were also offered for participants wanting to share their experiences beyond the allotted 45 minutes; however all participants found the time frame to be sufficient. Digital recording files were safely stored on my personal password-protected laptop computer to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

The aim of the interviews was to explore the five Latina students’ experiences related to resources provided for Latino/a students, and reported accounts regarding their experiences at a predominately White institution. Resources included both those provided by the university in the
form of student organizations and events organized by these groups as well as other commonly
“invisible” support systems, such as peer and familial support. After a short icebreaker to
establish comfort and repertoire with the participant, the interview process began. The interview
assumed a semi-structured format, aimed at answering my aforementioned research questions
along with emergent questions asked during the interview in reaction to participants’ responses.
The first set of questions were constructed to address the first research question: *What kinds of
experiences do the five Latina undergraduate students report at the university?*

In asking questions like, “What kinds of challenges do you or have you experienced in
this community or on campus as a result of your race or self-identification?” I sought to
investigate the intersection between self-identification and the identities others presume for us, as
well as elicit the recall of experiences related to being a Latina on a predominately White
university campus. By investigating this connection, I hoped to be able to gauge how self-
identity was interconnected and influenced by the perceptions of others. Additionally, this
provided my participants with an opportunity to reflect on and discuss the ways in which they
believed their identification affected their life on campus.

To address my second research question, participants were asked a set of questions
regarding their interactions and experiences with resources designed to serve Latino/a students:
*How do the five Latina undergraduate students engage with resources designed for Latino/a or
Hispanic students on campus?* This particular question attempted to gauge what the participants
considered resources, the level of interaction the participants had with these resources, and their
views on the effectiveness and usefulness of those resources in navigating a PWI. However, if
the student had not encountered or utilized any resources while attending the university, follow-up questions were asked in order to determine the factors which might account for that fact.

Other questions pertained to the university’s role in the creation and quality of resources provided for these students. This set of questions was central to the study, as university support systems and resources played a major role in the experiences of my five participants. Thus, by asking this set of questions, I aimed to gauge the university’s attempts to cater to the needs of the Latino/a student population, as well as the strategies implemented to appeal or attract them (See Appendix D)

These questions were intended to elicit information regarding the efforts by the university to serve this particular student population, and the five students’ views of those efforts. This is significant in that student responses can potentially assist predominately White institutions in more effectively serving their growing Latino/a student populations, and help to reveal informal support systems utilized by the participants.

**Data Analysis**

As the main source of data collected for this study was interviews, content analysis was utilized in the process of data analysis. Defined by Bryman (2004) as “an approach to documents that [both] emphasizes the role of the investigator in the construction of the meaning of and in texts” and “allows categories to emerge out of the data,” content analysis was chosen due to its theory-guided procedure, and connection to the subjects of analysis (p. 542). Consistent with this particular form of data analysis, the meaning of the context in which the interviews were conducted was also taken into account when analyzing the data. Thus, interview data were transcribed, and subsequently coded for themes and categories. All data were analyzed through the lens of CRT and LatCrit, to arrive at selected themes. In addition to
interview data, written archives in the form of information pertaining to resources and student
organizations for Latino/a students were also used as references against which to reflect on the
stated goals of the particular resource and its reported evaluation by my participants (See
Appendix F). It is also useful to mention that the researcher attended many of the events hosted
by these organizations and that personal experience factored into the analysis of the data as well.
With that being said, the process of data analysis can be divided into four general stages:

**Stage 1: Data Preparation**

In this stage, all interviews and follow-up interviews were transcribed into written texts.
This process took a considerable amount of time, as transcribing participants’ speech with
minimal inaccuracy required a high degree of meticulousness. Student names were also replaced
by pseudonyms chosen by the researcher. To ensure anonymity, in addition to the chosen
pseudonyms, no names or identifying personal information accompanied the excerpts used.
Next, a survey of the available student organizations was conducted, in which information about
each organization was gleaned from the university's website; once again, names of organizations
were changed to ensure anonymity. Lastly, the researcher attended a number of events hosted by
the Latino student organizations on campus to cross-reference personal experiences at these
events with the reported experiences of the five participants.

**Stage 2: Developing Coding Categories**

The process of coding began by first printing out all interview transcriptions. Next, I
read each interview transcription twice to get a sense of the data. Afterwards, the data were
reread and possible codes, thoughts, and general notes were written directly on the transcription
printouts as I read through them. By the end of this process, over 100 coding categories, created
according to themes derived from the interview data, were established and ranged from racism and stereotyping to representation and familial support.

These themes reflected recurring ideas, statements, or types of experiences. For example, stereotyping was a fairly common type of experience mentioned by the participants. As such, it met the qualifications for a coding category. Throughout the process of reading and interpreting the written transcriptions, reported experiences that pertained to stereotyping were coded as such and assigned to the stereotyping coding category. The process was then repeated with each of the five interviews. Then, moving forward, I began to condense similar codes into singular categories which had been delineated from the data in order to further narrow down the number of codes.

**Stage 3: Coding the Data**

Once my coding categories had been established, the process of narrowing down the number of coding categories commenced. I surveyed all available collected data, reviewed notes taken during transcription, and systematically began eliminating coding categories that did not pertain to the central inquires of the study. Once the coding categories had been narrowed down to a manageable number, which reflected frequent mentions by participants and displayed relevance to the research questions raised, I began the process of interpretation, and the drawing of conclusions from the codes.

**Stage 4: Interpretation of Coded Data**

The final stage of data analysis involved making meaning of all coded data. Themes or patterns in the data were finalized, and the process of interpretation of these themes began. From the data, the primary emergent themes arose as significant areas of overlap of participant experiences and significance to the study:
Table 2

Emergent Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1</th>
<th>RQ2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Stereotyping</td>
<td>1. Email and personal networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Academic Potential</td>
<td>2. Recommendations for Outreach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Social Connections</td>
<td>3. Importance of Involvement/ Informal support systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Race</td>
<td>4. Rationale for not Accessing Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Spaces/Geographies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data regarding these particular emergent themes will be presented in chapter four. In chapter five, interpretation of these themes in relation to both the available literature and research questions raised will be discussed.

Researcher Perspective and Positionality

My desire to hear the stories of undergraduate Latino/a students is rooted firmly in my own experiences attending a predominately White institution as a Latino undergraduate student. So as these bright young women shared their experiences with me, it quickly became apparent that what was reported by my participants was much more than simple responses to interview questions: it was a brief insight into the complex lives of these five Latina students. As a Latino male, the researcher was positioned uniquely as both a kind of insider in terms of having experience navigating a PWI as a minority student and an outsider regarding a lack of experience with issues and experiences related to being a woman. The unique perspective provided by my identification with the participant group positively affected both the interview data collection process and the subsequent analysis of the data. In fact, Greene (2014) argues that because insider researchers are more familiar with the group or social setting they are studying, they are more adept at approaching individuals; thus, their colleagues are normally more willing to talk to someone who understands (pp. 3-4). Merriam et al. (2001) also advocate for the benefits
involved with engaging in insider research: “with regards to participants, insider researchers have the ability to ask meaningful questions and read non-verbal cues, as well as the ability to project a more truthful, authentic understanding of the culture under study” (p. 411). Thus, I believe my unique positioning to my participant group positively affected my interactions with my participants and my perspective while analyzing the interview data by helping me to adequately elucidate and express the feelings and opinions of the participants in the most truthful and authentic manner possible.

**Final Remarks**

In this chapter, I have discussed and justified my use of qualitative research to address the central research questions raised, as well as the use of semi-structured interviews to elicit data from my participants. Data collection methods, rationale for interview questions, and the process of data analysis used were also discussed at length. In the next chapter, I will present the results of the study in added detail.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Derived from five face-to-face interviews, the data discussed in this chapter will be presented thematically according to emergent and recurring themes discovered through analysis of the transcribed data. The chapter is organized most generally in two parts, each addressing a research question raised previously. The first portion of the chapter will deal with emergent themes revealed through questions asked to the participants regarding their various experiences at the university, while the second portion will continue on to address the recurring themes discovered through questioning aimed at gauging the ways in which students encountered and experienced resources created for Latino/a students at the university.

RQ 1

What kinds of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and gendered experiences do the five Latina undergraduate students report at the university?

a) What role does self-identifying as Latina/Hispanic play in interactions with peers, faculty, and members of the community?

Seeking to address the first central inquiry of my study, I first set out to read through and analyze the participants’ responses to questions specifically investigating their various types of experiences attending a PWI. The established emerging themes from this set of participant responses included stereotyping, language, and spaces/geographies.

Stereotyping

A commonly recurring code throughout the majority of the participants’ responses was that of stereotyping. This code was then further divided into a set of subcategories related to the various manners in which the participants reported being stereotyped. These subcategories included stereotyping related to their academic potential, social connections and race. While
these categories and subcategories are organized separately for ease of reading, the stereotyping reported by my participants was often multilayered and overlapping.

**Academic Potential**

Over the course of the five interviews, many of my participants reported having lower expectations placed on them by their professors and receiving differential treatment based on their self-identification as Latina. For example, while discussing the interactions between Senalda and her professors, she mentioned a tendency for some of her professors to often make negative assumptions about the academic potential of her and other minority students in the classroom:

> I think sometimes my professors are shocked at how on top of things I am sometimes. I think they think minorities especially try to skate by in college. (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

When asked to elaborate, Senalda mentioned an incident in her science class in which her professor expressed surprise at the fact that she was demonstrating so much effort to understand a particular assignment. While Senalda believed she was being no more inquisitive than any other dedicated student, she began to question whether the professor would have had the same reaction had a White peer displayed the same desire to adequately understand an assignment:

> So I’m thinking are you saying that because I’m Hispanic, because I think any student who wouldn’t understand would call you over and ask questions. I think they think I’m not gonna be on top of things as much, that’s why I never have an excuse for a professor. I’d rather turn something in late and not say anything at all, than get you a bogus excuse, cuz you’re just gonna amount it to probably, “oh okay her last name says it all.”

(Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)
Thus Senalda expressed that there appeared to be a deficit-oriented perception of Latino/a and other minority students within her classes in regards to their motivation, investment, academic potential, and willingness to be engaged in the classroom. In referring to her last name as being indicative of her work ethic and likelihood of providing excuses, it can be understood that Senalda felt a Latina-sounding last name was sufficient for eliciting deficit perceptions from her instructors even before she stepped foot in the classroom. Nothing made this fact clearer than when she stated:

    So you kind of already get that bias automatically, right off the first day. They're like, okay well there’s the group of minorities there, let’s see what they try to get over on me this week, this semester (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

This statement indicates that Senalda perceives a clear bias within the classroom against not just Latino/a students, but other students of color as well.

    As can be expected, Senalda’s experiences with stereotypes related to her academic potential and that of her minority classmates were shared among other participants in my study. When asked how her self-identification as a Latina had influenced her interactions with her professors and with members of the university community, Catalina discussed multilayered experiences of stereotyping related to her socioeconomic status, race, and hometown, which translated into lower academic expectations from her professor. Citing negative perceptions associated with her means of funding her education and the fact that she hails from inner city Philadelphia, Catalina stated:

    If you tell the people here that you are a minority ethnicity and you are here on a scholarship, and you tell them what city you are from, if you’re not from Pittsburgh, you’re kind of a piece of shit, for lack of better words, that’s kind of just how people
perceive you, no one really expects a lot out of you (Catalina, personal communication, September 1, 2015)

Her statement in this case reflects similar sentiments displayed by Senalda in regards to the academic potential of minority students. Although Catalina is a high-achieving student attending the university on a highly competitive merit-based scholarship, her potential to succeed academically is underestimated as a result of her race and gender within her particular field of study and within a university where she is considered a minority.

Likewise, Galena also mentions receiving differential treatment from professors in classrooms where she is often the only Latina in the class. When asked if she had experienced any challenges as a result of her Latina or Dominican identification on campus, she reported being singled out by professors when topics pertaining to Latino people arose in class:

In class like my professors, if something comes up related to Hispanic or anything, they’ll ask me my opinion or like they’ll ask me, say, actually last week my professor was showing a YouTube clip and the ad was in Spanish and he was like ‘Oh can you translate this for us?’ (Galena, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

While Galena stated that experiences like these were not taken personally and did not cause her to feel discriminated against, her professors’ statements run the risk of marginalizing or marking her as different in a class where she is already the single minority. Also, by relegating Galena to the position of expert in this instance without her consent, her professor places pressure on her to essentially perform or assume a role which she does not acknowledge herself. Speaking along the same lines, Marisol also mentions being the focus of jokes related to her difference in the classroom. Like Galena, Marisol clearly states that such experiences are normally taken in jest and cause no offense or harm:
Yeah okay in the music department I get called out on being Hispanic, but mostly as a joke like they're just being funny...like my chorus teacher he is always saying jokes like, ‘Oh y’all have to feel weird if your different, like [Marisol] cuz she's not from here,’ and I’m like shut up. (Marisol, personal communication, September 21, 2015)

From her inflection during the interview, Marisol very clearly seems to interpret being singled out as merely a joke, though such comments run the risk of being interpreted differently by other students and demonstrate differential treatment on the professor’s part. However, despite being treated differently than her White classmates, Marisol describes her own experiences with her professors in the music department as generally positive, although she does acknowledge that not all Hispanic students’ experiences are so positive on campus:

So yeah no I haven't had a bad professor, cuz I know they do exist, cuz I’ve heard stories from people. But no luckily I haven't had to bump into any of them, and if I did I really didn't even notice (Marisol, personal communication, September 21, 2015)

Thus, accounts of experiences related to academic deficit perceptions, and differential treatment from professors demonstrates both similarities and differences among the participants. While some participants tended to interpret differential treatment as jokes, others viewed such treatment as offensive and highly inappropriate for a comfortable classroom environment. However, despite their differing reactions to stereotyping related to their academic potential, the majority of participants reported such experiences as being a result of their self-identification as Latina. So in this regard, self-identification appears to play a role in the ways in which the participants have internalized attributes of being a Latina, which often entails being on the margin, or facing various forms of disparity within a PWI.
Social Connections

Further analysis of my participants’ interviews revealed stereotyping related to the establishment of peer groups as another emergent theme. Often complex in their constructions, I found my participants’ statements to be telling of just how multifaceted and individual the formation of peers in college can be for some underrepresented minority students. In speaking with Catalina, she mentioned coming to college unsure of where exactly she would fit in socially, as many first-time college students do. While the fact that the university is a PWI did not appear to be a shock to Catalina as she graduated from a predominantly White Catholic high school prior to enrolling, the community in which it resides was admittedly a new experience. For example, what she discovered coming to college was that there was an expectation to associate primarily with other Latino/a or “Spanish” students placed on her by other students at the university, which she did not experience at home in Philadelphia:

It’s funny, my boyfriend will tell me that he has friends on the rugby team or like in different areas of the university community that they’ll see me and they’re like, “Oh that’s that really pretty Spanish girl that doesn’t hang out with Spanish people,” and it’s like wow is that really what I’m known as on campus, does it really matter who I hang out with? (Catalina, personal communication, September 1, 2015)

While this expectation was mentioned by more than one participant, the ways in which it factored into their respective peer group formations differed. For example, Catalina appeared to acknowledge that having a primarily Latino/a peer group was an indication of a person’s cultural pride, yet she viewed stereotypes regarding the friends she made as not being representative of her being “Latina” or “Spanish” enough and as such placed little importance on establishing these connections exclusively with other Latino/a peers, as demonstrated in the following excerpt:
So I guess I like taking pride in being Spanish, though I don’t readily like hang out with a lot of the other Spanish people that may be on campus, I know who I am inside and how I feel Spanish needs to be, just anyone can be Spanish if they’re Spanish. There is no set in stone way to be Spanish or Latina. So call me a coconut, I’m okay with that. (Catalina, personal communication, September 1, 2015)

From Catalina’s statements, it can be gathered that she perceived a common assumption regarding the peer groups Latino/a students establish at PWIs. The connection made between taking pride in being Spanish, but not hanging out with Spanish students on campus indicates a belief that one requires the other. Thus, within her statement, there is an implication that she associates having a Latino/a peer group as being indicative of belonging to that group. Further evidence is provided when Catalina exhibits acceptance of the term “coconut,” commonly used as a pejorative term referencing a Latino/a or Hispanic person who “acts White”. So by stating, “So call me a coconut, I’m okay with that,” she demonstrates not only an acknowledgment that others may question her degree of identification with her proclaimed self-identification based on the friends she keeps, but also an immunity on her part to the term’s offensive intent, and a declaration of refusal to adhere to the stereotypes placed on the social connections she establishes. Catalina mentions that as her time at the university passed, she was able to gain a higher degree of self confidence in terms of her self-identity as a Latina woman, in relation to the difference she was immersed in at a PWI, which eventually allowed her to reach a point where she could comfortably reject stereotypes surrounding her social connections and create friendships among many different groups of people.

Senalda on the other hand, differs from Catalina in that she came to college from a high school that was predominately Black and Latino/a, and her peer group reflected this diversity.
Additionally, since she came to college with her best friend, who is also Latina, she reported being less interested in seeking out other Latino/a students on campus. In other words, she expressed already being culturally validated and supported by her current group of friends, which caused her to stick mainly to the same group throughout college:

Maybe if I didn’t have [my best friend] I would’ve probably followed through with going, because she’s like my little piece of home, with me and my friends even. Even though they’re Black, they grew up in Lancaster, mini Puerto Rico, so my friends they all know how to throw down, make rice and beans just like I do. Some of their Spanish is just as good as ours so like I don’t feel pressure, I feel comfortable with them. They’re used to my culture. (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Thus, Senalda’s pre-established supportive peer group differentiated her experience socializing at a PWI from that of Catalina. That is to say, Senalda did not seem to experience the same pressure to establish connections with other Latino/a peers at the university as Catalina did initially. However, despite the comfort her close group of friends provided, Senalda still reported being identified in the same manner as Catalina, in terms of her ethnicity and those of her peer group:

So the people know us by being Spanish. I think that’s weird how people, I guess, identify, other people identify us by that, […] Oh you’re that Hispanic girl hanging out with that other Hispanic girl, so people know us (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

While this identification appeared to be racial in nature, as Senalda discussed her long black hair and darker complexion as characteristics commonly used to identify her as a Latina, there remains an underlying association between the friends she keeps and her identification as a
Latina woman. However, this stereotype may affect Senalda differently than it did Catalina due to the racial composition of her friends. Since her friend group more closely reflects the expectations placed on both participants by other peers, it is possible that the pressure she experienced to establish friendships with other Latino/a students on campus was lessened. Additionally, the cultural support and understanding Senalda’s friends offered may have contributed to a greater sense of security within an environment she described as “90 percent White.”

Marisol reports not having much, if any, interaction with other Latino/a students on campus until being invited to participate in a Latino student organization event on campus. Recruited by a professor in the Spanish department, she explains her excitement at the prospect of being able to meet other Latino/a students on campus and enjoy familiar food:

I was like sweet, cool, Hispanic night, why not? I wanna go to that. Food, okay. So I emailed her and she was like, “Oh yes come in, you have to audition.” (Marisol, personal communication, September 21, 2015)

Once at the event, Marisol mentions being surprised at the number of Latino/a students on campus, as she did not encounter many outside of the event:

It was really weird because before that I didn’t think there was a lot of Hispanics or Latinos in the school, and then I went to that and there was a bunch. Like oh wow where was I? (Marisol, personal communication, September 21, 2015)

With her last question, Marisol appears to express a degree of surprise at the number of Latino/a students on campus, indicating a perceived invisibility of these students on her part. Moreover, the event’s environment exposed Marisol to Latino/a students from a variety of different backgrounds, yet interestingly, unlike Senalda and Catalina Marisol did not experience the same
pressure to associate with other Latino/a students. She mentioned that people often tended to mistake her for White, and as a result this affected the ways in which she created connections within the Latino/a student community.

Race

Perhaps the most commonly recurring emergent theme throughout participants’ interviews, racial stereotyping represented a common experience shared by a majority of the participants. All but one participant reported differential treatment as a result of their self-identification as Latina. However, since Latinos are a racially and culturally heterogeneous group, the degree to which the participants reported being racially stereotyped ranged in severity and perception. For example, Marisol described herself as looking racially White, and as a result her experiences with racial stereotyping appeared to be less negative and frequent. When asked if she had faced any challenges on campus as a result of her being Hispanic, Marisol responded, “Um, no not personally because I don’t look like your typical, so a lot of people don’t know unless I say it. Right, so I haven’t really experienced like racism [...]” (Marisol, personal communication, September 21, 2015).

Not only is the participant's association between looking Latino/a and facing racism on campus evident in this excerpt, but she also mentions a so called “typical” Latino/a image. When asked about this stereotypical notion of what a Latino/a person should look like, Marisol explained:

They definitely expect you to be darker, which I’m not, I’m pretty White. They also expect you to have an accent, which I do, it depends on the words, you know, cuz like obviously my first language is Spanish and then English is like my second language, but I’m pretty fluent in both, and also like the attitude in a certain way. (Marisol, personal communication, September 21, 2015)
Marisol’s description of the racial stereotypes surrounding the appearance of Latino/a students didn’t stop there. Elaborating further she commented,

I don’t know, a lot of people tend to think that Hispanics or Latinos are, because how they see it in movies or like the interaction they have, they tend to have us like in a really ghetto-y trashy way, which is so wrong. They expect all of them to be like that, so I always get the, oh but you don’t look Puerto Rican, you don’t act like one. And I was like how does a Puerto Rican act according to you? (Marisol, personal communication, September 21, 2015)

This excerpt helps to reveal a perceived racial stereotype attributed to Latino/a students attending the university, based on characteristics related most centrally to prominent racial features, such as skin color, but also founded in language, behavior, and socioeconomic stature. So by exhibiting qualities and characteristics that do not adhere to the stereotypical model set forth, Marisol reports being treated with curiosity or interest rather than animosity.

However, participants who appeared more stereotypically Latina perceived more animosity and microaggressions both on campus and within the community. When asked about whether she thought of the university as a welcoming environment for Latino/a students, Galena described the campus as being a sort of bubble in which she felt safe from the racial microaggressions and stereotyping she experienced in the surrounding community. Referring to the university campus as being “welcoming” and “comfortable,” she remarks:

I believe it is, yeah. Except for when you go out, the university yeah, the town not so much. As far as like, on campus I feel totally welcome, you know comfortable everything. But say if I go to like [restaurant] sometimes I feel very out of place, very
uncomfortable. So it’s mostly like the town, and the people here in the town, not so much the university (Galena, personal communication, September 17, 2015).

Galena describes herself as differing both physically and culturally from the majority of the people in the town and on the campus, yet not feeling out of place at school.

Outside of the university environment, however, she reports that her race and those of her friends elicit stereotyping and differential treatment from White citizens in public spaces within the community. She illustrates a particularly troubling experience with her ex-boyfriend who is Black, in which they were not served at a local restaurant. After waiting at a table for over ten minutes, she realized no servers were approaching them: “Yep, so we got up and left. And you know, I don’t wanna assume, but that’s the only thing I could assume is that they just didn’t wanna wait on us” (Galena, personal communication, September 17, 2015). According to Galena, this kind of experience was common whenever she would venture out into the community with her friends, a majority of whom were Black and Latino/a:

When I go to [restaurants] I always have people stare at me all the time. Cuz I go with my roommate which is Hispanic and another friend of mine which is African American, and every single time we go there, it does not matter what time of day or when, we always get stared at by the people that are eating there, like the older people. It’s just not a very comfortable feeling (Galena, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Thus, although Galena perceives the campus to be an environment in which she feels comfortable and safe, the outside community remains seemingly hostile.

Nonetheless, despite Galena’s encouraging accounts regarding positive on-campus interactions with peers, Catalina and Senalda experienced social interactions with peers on campus quite differently. Unlike Galena, both Catalina and Senalda mentioned race and racism
as playing a role in their social interactions with peers on campus. When asked to discuss whether she had experienced any challenges on campus as a result of being a Latina woman, Senalda responded:

> Just relating with people, sometimes I feel like I’m either too White for some people or too Black for other people. Like when I interact with White people I feel like I’m too Black, like I’m too urban, but then when I’m with Black people I feel like I’m too White, but that goes back to, I guess just, you know, being a minority in college (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Thus, Senalda explains feeling like she doesn't quite fit with a number of different groups due to the fact that she's an underrepresented minority at the university. Likewise, Catalina also reports challenges interacting with peers due to her race. When asked about the effect her self-identification had on interacting with peers, Catalina mentioned her race as a factor excluding her from a number of different sororities on campus:

> Sorority recruitment. I definitely felt like I wasn’t meeting up to the standards of a lot of these sororities because I was Spanish. Because I didn’t look like the blonde, blue eyed, Aryan race that was infesting the rest of these alpha sororities. It's like all the alpha sororities I didn't even get a single thing back from. And I was so sad, I was devastated because a lot of those were a lot of girls I was like ‘aw I would love to be a sister’ (Catalina, personal communication, September 1, 2015)

In addition to perceiving discrimination against herself by these alpha sororities, Catalina also remarked on the ways other more multicultural or diverse sororities were viewed by these organizations:
It's like a lot of the other sororities, the people kind of looked down on, for various reasons like ‘oh they're not as pretty, they have like too many mixes in there, like there's too much diversity’. (Catalina, personal communication, September 1, 2015)

This idea of having too much diversity, unfortunately, effectively alienated Catalina from sororities that she felt she was genuinely connecting with. Rejection based on her race was understandably both confusing and hurtful. Commenting on this experience, Catalina stated:

The entire sorority thing, like the entire recruitment week was supposed to be based around can you click with these girls. And the girls that you clicked with, those are the ones you call back. And I felt like I was clicking with them, and then for me to get no feedback from any of the ones I really liked really hurt me. I was like, is my hair too brown? Are my eyes not blue? My skin isn't White enough? (Catalina, personal communication, September 1, 2015)

Thus, as can be seen in this excerpt and in experiences shared by Seralda, Galena and Marisol, racial stereotyping affects every person differently. Yet for all their differences, a commonality persists in that race remains an important influential element of experiencing life at a PWI.

Language

An additional emergent theme revealed through analysis of participant interviews was experiences related to language. While the majority of the participants spoke English as their first language, Marisol was raised in Puerto Rico where she learned English as her second language. When asked if being Hispanic and speaking Spanish as a first language affected the way she was perceived or treated by peers on campus, she mentioned garnering the interest and curiosity of her peers when they discovered English was not her first language:

I probably get that question like once a week. Do you think in Spanish or in English? and I usually give the answer, well if I'm speaking in English I’ll think in English, and if
I’m speaking in Spanish I’ll think in Spanish (Marisol, personal communication, September 21, 2015)

Marisol comments that the questions she receives are never asked negatively, and instead she attributes them to a lack of exposure to people from other countries. However, in discussing and reflecting on her bilingualism with others, she reports coming to a troubling realization:

But a couple of days ago I was thinking about that and I was like well that's wrong, because since I've been speaking English for a very long time, I often now find myself, when I'm by myself, thinking in English, and I go what are you doing? I try to think in Spanish as much as possible cuz I feel like sometimes I’m losing the language. (Marisol, personal communication, September 21, 2015)

Thus, after further reflection on her language use within the United States and at a PWI, Marisol expressed feeling a sense of language loss, which may explain why when she encountered another Spanish speaking student in the music department she quickly developed a relationship with her: “There was another girl, a pianist, from Colombia...she would play for my lessons so we would just like talk in Spanish” (Marisol, personal communication, September 21, 2015).

Marisol remarked that although the Colombian pianist was much older than her, they still became quite close due to the fact that she could openly speak Spanish with her. Unfortunately, she only attended one semester at the university. So naturally when Marisol was recruited to take part in the Latino student organization’s Noche Latina event, she was excited to be able to speak Spanish with other Latino/a students. However, she discovered many of the students she met were more comfortable speaking English or a mixture of Spanish and English, with which she was unfamiliar: “Yeah they don’t, they were all speaking English to each other, or like
Spanglish. And I’m like, what are you doing?” (Marisol, personal communication, September 21, 2015).

As a result, Marisol expressed that she simply didn't find much in common with the students in the organization. Although she discussed forming associations with other peers who shared common interests, a desire to speak Spanish with someone in order to help avoid further language loss was evident:

Here’s the thing also that I struggle with. A lot of people are like first generation or second generation, so yeah they identify but then they don't speak the language and I’m like, ‘oh well okay.’ So maybe sometimes I do feel like I should have more Hispanic or Latino friends because I can speak Spanish to them, but then again not all of them do, so it’s like what’s the point? (Marisol, personal communication, September 21, 2015)

Contrarily, Galena speaks English as her first language, and expresses regret at the fact that she cannot speak Spanish fluently. When asked if she wanted to share any experiences outside of the interview questions I had asked her, she mentioned a tendency for people to assume she spoke Spanish. To her dismay she explained how being a monolingual English speaker caused her to feel ostracized from the Latino/a community:

It sucks being asked that question, like do you speak Spanish because I have to say no. I wish I did, but I do not. I wish I did just so I could feel, cuz honestly I feel like I’m part of the Spanish community but I don't feel like I’m part of the Spanish community, if that makes sense. (Galena, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Thus, apparent in Galena’s explanation is the association made between speaking Spanish and being a part of the Latino/a community. Speaking to this point a bit further, Galena mentions
that her insecurities with not being able to speak Spanish kept her from seeking out Latino organizations on campus, out of fear that she would be perceived as fake:

        A lot of those Spanish organizations on campus, like all the students in there speak Spanish, you know what I mean? And I don't, so I feel like they're probably like, “Why are you even here? First of all you're half Spanish, second of all you don't even speak Spanish, so you might as well be White.” (Galena, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

This excerpt displays Galena’s insecurities related to both having a White mother, and not knowing Spanish. Galena remarks that as a result of her monolingualism and bicultural identity, she often feels like an outsider among other Latino/a students on campus, specifically those in student organizations. Interestingly, in individual encounters with bilingual Latinos, she reports feeling a greater degree of comfort. Still, despite feeling discouraged about not speaking Spanish, Galena displays a determination to learn in order to feel more connected to her community and her culture:

        I want to yes, I have an app on my phone that I use when I can and it helps me learn little words, but I really do wanna learn Spanish really bad. Like I hate that I don’t know Spanish. It sucks. (Galena, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Thus, the linguistic experiences shared by both participants played an important role in the ways in which they established social connections with their Latino/a peers on campus, and to a certain extent seemed to define their own Latina identities. Hence, while Marisol and Galena encountered and perceived Latino student events differently due to their own individual reasons, both appeared to view language, and the Spanish language specifically, as a central part of their identities.
Spaces/Geographies

The final emergent theme for the first set of interview questions addressing the first research question was spaces/geographies. Through discussion of differing experiences reported by my participants, it became clear that certain spaces on campus and geographies in general were interpreted and identified in different ways based on factors such as race and socioeconomic status. In terms of geographies, urban, rural and suburban locations were mentioned by the participants in a number of ways. Senalda reported experiencing racism at a more frequent rate in suburban areas outside of her home town of Lancaster, which caused her to consider remaining in more urban areas.

I had a guy actually tell me to go back to my own country once...like he did it in front of my niece and nephew, which was like totally, I was like I can't believe he just did that. So I’ve dealt with it back home in Lancaster, which I never thought I would have to deal with. That was in the suburbs, so I probably should've stuck my butt back in the city. (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

That being said, Senalda was not alone in her perception of suburban and rural areas as places where she was more likely to experience racism. She continued on to explain that her mother would often fear for the safety of her and her friends, who were Black Hispanic, when they would venture outside of the city dubbed “Little Puerto Rico”.

My mom always told me, she was like listen when you’re driving from Lancaster to university town make sure you have enough gas because if you get stuck out there that would freak me out...a bunch of minorities in, who like if you got stuck out in that part of PA I would be very, you know, afraid for yous [sic]. (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)
Thus, even before coming to college Senalda experienced urban and suburban geographies quite differently. Additionally, she expressed that her mother and her friends tended to see suburban and rural areas as being areas populated mostly by White people, while her White professors often associated Latinas and other minority students as coming from urban areas. She highlighted an experience in one of her classes, in which a professor singled her out as coming from the city, although he hadn't even spoken to her.

My professor singled me out and was like, ‘so you’re…’, he assumed that I was from the city, he was like, ‘So you’re from the city and I know you’re probably…’ and I was like how did that conversation come up that made you just make that assumption that okay she's a Latina, so she must be from the city. (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

While Senalda is in fact from an urban area, stereotyping by her professors regarding where she is from had the potential to influence the way she was viewed by both her peers and the professor himself. Senalda mentions that these type of assumptions often are accompanied by damaging stereotypes, which intermingle issues of race, socioeconomic status, and education.

Yeah it was just like, what did being Latina or being Latino, you have a couple more things that come, that follow. Okay you’re probably from the city, you’re probably, grew up in a neighborhood that probably isn't as good, in high schools and schools that probably weren't as good. So with that comes, they categorize you in with the other minorities. (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Thus, while seemingly simply a matter of geography, the terms urban and suburban were often laden with underlying negative associations and stereotypes. Catalina on the other hand, discussed how attending a PWI for her had normalized spaces on campus as being devoid of
minority students, and as a result she found it abnormal to see groups of minority students all in one place.

When you're in any particular space, you can always pick out when there are no White people around as opposed to when there are no Black or Spanish people around. But it’s really hard that that's ever a thing, it's like if there are no Black people or Spanish people, you don't even think about it, but you’ll notice if there are no White people because there's always White people, everywhere. (Catalina, personal communication, September 1, 2015)

From Catalina’s response it becomes clear that she perceives an expectation that many spaces on campus are to be majority White, while minority students are generally expected to remain in the minority. For her this is what seems to define a PWI, not just the absence of minority students, but the indifference as to whether they are there at all. For this reason, Galena and Senalda mention the common practice of acknowledging the presence of other Latino/a students within the same space, whether they know each other or not.

And I see the guys sometimes, it's like one of those things like they know I’m Hispanic and they are Hispanic so it's like ‘Hey’. You don’t really know them, but you acknowledge their presence. (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Like I see, honestly like I could probably recognize by face every single Hispanic student on this campus. Like it I saw them I could be like oh I’ve seen you before. Like I know who you are by face, it's so crazy. (Galena, personal communication, September 17, 2015)
Thus, whether due to the low numbers of Latino/a students on campus or simply to make their presence known, both participants expressed an inclination to recognize other Latino/a students in public spaces on campus as a kind of validation or acknowledgement of their presence.

In sum, different spaces and geographies influence not only the ways in which many of the participants feel in particular spaces at a PWI and the surrounding community, but also how they are perceived by others as Latina women, and as underrepresented minority students.

**RQ 2**

How do the five Latina undergraduate students encounter resources designed for Latino/a or Hispanic students on campus?

- In their perspectives, what is the importance of these resources for successfully navigating a PWI?

- How do these resources align with the needs of the five Latina undergraduate students?

Investigating the ways in which participants encountered and utilized resources designed for Latino/a students on campus was central to this research. That being said, the second half of the interview questions focused on investigating reported experiences with these resources, in seeking their perceived importance and alignment with participant needs. Derived from participant responses, interview data was then divided into emergent themes addressing the research questions driving the study. These included email and personal networks, recommendations for outreach, the importance of involvement/ informal support systems, and rationale for not accessing resources.

**Email and Personal Networks**

Seeking to bring light to the ways in which the participants encountered university resources for Latino/a students on campus, the five participants were asked about their
familiarity with support systems and resources available to them. Of the five, two participants highlighted email along with personal connections as the primary modes through which they received information regarding events and activities organized by Latino student organizations.

Well first, if I did get anything I’d get it via email. Anything, but if I was really looking to get involved with it, I’d probably go on the university website I’m guessing. I know they have organizations, like you can search organizations. (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

The Scoop. and like my friends in my BOG scholarship, like the people that I did keep in contact with a lot of them are on the board for a lot of those Latino student organization and [diverse student recruitment team] (Catalina, personal communication, September 1, 2015)

Demonstrated by their responses, in addition to receiving email outreaches through the university wide newsletter, The Scoop, both participants commented on how their social networks often included members of these organizations who would often inform them of upcoming events. Their responses coincided with Marisol’s reported method of encountering resources through her Spanish professor. Since the Spanish department at the university contains a large number of the Latino/a faculty on campus, Marisol reports finding out about Latino student organization events and other Latino student clubs through her Spanish professor. When asked if she was aware of any Latino/a or Hispanic organizations on campus, Marisol stated,

Yeah, I’m not involved with any though. It’s like the dancing one, then there's like another one and Spanish club. I don’t know cuz I would like do, I met my freshman year, one of the Spanish professors. She’s the one that does Noche Latina. (Marisol, personal communication, September 21, 2015)
Referring to Latino Student Organization, Grupo de Baile, and Spanish club Marisol expressed that although she was aware of the existence of these organizations, she only became aware of them because her professor had happened to know her Latina background. Otherwise, she remarked it was on the student to find the organizations. Galena on the other hand mentioned receiving emails as her primary contact with Latino/a organizations on campus, but noted that the university website contained valuable information about the available resources.

I get some emails sometimes, but I usually delete my email, so yeah that’s probably why the exposure. [...] I would go to university.edu and I would search all the organizations on campus and find one that headlines Hispanic. (Galena, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Thus, while emails and information available through the university website helped to inform students of organizations and events, personal networks tended to also recur as means by which the participants heard about organizations. Senalda demonstrated how her social networks established through work and friendships made her aware of the Latino/a sorority on campus.

I actually know Jasmine, I worked with her and then like I already knew some of the people that were in that sorority. Like I knew a girl named Benancia, I knew a girl named Darnette, so I knew people. I knew Hispanic people so like I knew that they had a sorority. (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Her explanation of encountering organizations through connections within the Latino/a community on campus, was fortunate as many participants tended to remark at the limited amount of advertisement for these organizations and events. Despite outreach by email, many participants stated that the university could do more to assume a more central role in disseminating information regarding these resources to students, and making them more of a priority on campus.
Recommendations for Outreach

Information regarding available student organizations, events, and resources for Latino/a students was something all participants agreed should be readily available. However, over the course of their interviews three of the five participants reported that they were unaware of student organizations or resources available to them. When asked if she was familiar with the kinds of support systems or resources for Hispanic students on campus, Marisol stated,

No. They don’t inform everyone. So I guess you would just have to look for it then. You don’t know where to look, you know? So I guess if you’re not in one of those groups you won’t know. So unless like a teacher knows your background then they’ll tell you, but I would have no clue. (Marisol, personal communication, September 21, 2015)

These sentiments appeared to be echoed by Galena when she remarked,

I honestly am not aware of too many organizations on campus related to the Spanish or Hispanic community so I don’t know who I could reach out to on campus. (Galena, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

When asked what she thought could account for her not hearing about these organizations, Galena mentioned a lack of exposure to student organizations and clubs.

Probably exposure, I wasn’t really exposed to any of them really. The only organizations that I am aware of are like the frats. Like the Hispanic frats and stuff, I know there’s a sorority and a fraternity that are like predominately Hispanic, but as far as clubs and organizations I don’t really know. (Galena, personal communication, September 17, 2015)
Moreover, Alejandra seemed to once again reflect an unawareness of existing organizations. When asked if entering the university as a freshman she had been aware of Latino/a organizations she stated,

No, I didn't really hear about them, I'm trying to remember how I found out about them. But they weren't I guess you'd say advertised enough. I would’ve, I didn't know how to join it, even though I’d heard about it. (Alejandra, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Thus, the majority of participants commented on a perceived lack of exposure to available organizations and resources when initially coming to the university, mostly attributed to limited outreach. Many commented on little advertisement of these resources on the university’s part, and lacking information regarding how to become involved in these groups. While information pertaining to available organizations was displayed on the university website, the responsibility of finding and contacting them fell to the students. The participants did however demonstrate in their responses that over time they became aware of frats, student organizations, and various events, but only through time spent at the university. If this indeed is the case, it would appear that incoming freshman Latino/a students are at a disadvantage when it comes to becoming involved early. In fact, as a result of this perceived gap in outreach to newly arrived Latino/a students, many of whom are just finding their place within a new community, when asked how the university could improve awareness, some participants suggested the university organize an event during orientation, in which students could be exposed to a variety of different clubs and resources on campus available to them from the start. Galena remarks,

Yeah definitely, especially during orientation. They could explain like everyone’s different freshman year. You know everyone comes in, everyone’s different. They could
have like a display of all the clubs and everything they offer. I don’t know if they do something like that but that’d be cool because my freshman year that’d really be something I would have definitely been into. (Galena, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Similar to Galena, when asked for recommendations for outreach, Senalda highlighted outreach during freshman orientation as a way to make students more aware of the resources available to them.

Well first, the welcome back ceremonies or whatever. I feel like that should be where they target freshman and you know there should be the frats, the sororities, the clubs, different types of, they need to bring out people who are this color. You know what I mean? (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Additionally, Senalda mentioned the idea of reaching out to high schools in order to increase Latino/a student enrollment by showing Hispanic and Latino/a students what the university has to offer them, as well as, pushing to get students involved.

I feel like the university gives the opportunity for that with emails and stuff, but if you want kids involved in organizations you have to push more, and if you want diversity you have to push more for that and you have to see what your target audience is, and it's not. It's going into those high schools like mine and targeting Hispanic students because a lot of them stay at home, they wanna be near family. (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Elaborating further she mentions the newness of resources and organizations for Latino/a students, and the need to invest in them more to attract more of these students.
Club-wise I think there should probably be more clubs just because I don’t really know really one, so, and then there's one sorority and one frat. It’s just new. You can’t tell me that you can go in a classroom and feel comfortable saying, ‘Oh yeah we have a lot of resources available to them’, when you don’t, and it's just now coming up. (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Thus, a number of participants critiqued the priority given to Latino/a organizations and events by the university, and desired larger investment in these resources. On the other hand, Catalina admits the advertisements conducted by the Latino student organization for events and activities are effective at disseminating information and making the organization known on campus, but would like to see more collaboration with other minority groups on campus. Elaborating she states,

Like I feel like they don’t branch out enough. Because I feel like we need more minorities to come together because is not just Black, Whites, or Spanish. It's not just any individual one. Like diversity groups kinda just focus around one victimized subculture of people. (Catalina, personal communication, September 1, 2015)

In other words, Catalina reports viewing individual student organizations as counterproductive in regards to the helping minority students’ voices be heard on campus, as they tend to restrict themselves to specific groups of people. She explains that minority student groups should focus their efforts on supporting each other and coming together in light of similar issues faced at PWIs. By doing so, she hopes to erase the image of victimized subcultures of people, and to provide a united front.

In conclusion, participants suggested outreach to the Latino/a student population by means of either orientation once they arrived on campus, or pre-college visits before they choose
what university they want to attend. In addition to gauging the effectiveness of organizations’ outreach, participants explained the importance of becoming involved for persisting at a PWI, and shed light on their own individual systems of support they themselves utilized while attending the university.

**The Importance of Involvement/Informal Support Systems**

While a number of the participants reported taking part in some of the events hosted by most prominently the Latino student organization, none mentioned these organizations as personal sources of support on campus when facing challenges. In fact, most cited informal support systems such as family or Latino/a peers as being their primary means of advice and support in situations in which they encountered challenges on campus as a result of their race, gender, language, and ethnicity. The following cross section of participant responses demonstrates this point quite clearly:

Probably my parents. Because I feel like my parents, I usually go to them because they can understand coming from another country, you know? After that I might just talk to a professor if it’s getting out of hand. (Marisol, personal communication, September 21, 2015)

I would probably vent to my mom, family. My roommate, who is also Hispanic. Probably my friends that could understand where I’m coming from and how I feel. (Galena, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

My mom because my mom has had, she’s in Lancaster she’s really well known because she helps people start their own businesses, she’s been on school boards, all that type stuff. She's dealt with a lot of different, she’s dealt with a lot of race issues. (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)
My boyfriend. Really. Yeah, just because he has a lot more life experience, and he's like anything that you have to tell me I can counteract because I’m Black. (Catalina, personal communication, September 1, 2015)

I guess I’d call my family, cuz they would understand the most for like cultural reasons, and I wouldn’t really know who to go to around here who could relate if something were to happen (Alejandra, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

As demonstrated by their responses, nearly every single participant viewed their family or other minority peers as sources of support and advice. Family members and minority peers were often cited as being uniquely capable of truly understanding the challenges faced by the participants, due to similarities in culture, race, and familiarity with the participants’ home communities. Additionally, one participant highlighted her boyfriend’s role in providing a sympathetic ear when listening any issues related to race she might encounter at the university. However, while reportedly not important for the participants own navigation of a PWI, the importance of becoming involved on campus was mentioned by a number of participants. Whether that involvement be through Latino/a student organizations or organizations associated with specific fields of study, getting involved was recommended by three of the participants. When asked what advice she would give to incoming Latino/a students regarding how to live at a PWI more comfortably, Senalda stated,

Get involved. If I didn’t have [her best friend] I don’t know how I would’ve done. It also looks good on resumes. But yeah definitely get involved and check out those events because that’s the university’s attempt at trying to bring unity or awareness that we are here on campus and maybe through that they’ll be able to meet other Hispanics or just other cool people in general. (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)
These sentiments are then echoed by Catalina who emphasizes involvement not only in organizations and events at the university, but in the educational process as well.

Don't be afraid to get involved. Don’t be afraid to make your voice heard. If you need to email a bunch of your professors and just tell them like hey I exist, like just give them the low down of who you are and what you hope to achieve. They’re looking for people to be involved, like they want to hear from you. (Catalina, personal communication, September 1, 2015)

Elaborating further she remarks,

Don’t be another tan face in the crowd, like if you want college to matter you have to make it matter, you have to get involved with anything. It doesn't matter what you're getting involved in, if there's a chess club on campus and you like chess and you're the only Spanish person, you're gonna be the best Spanish playing chess person on that team. It doesn't have to be a multiculturally diverse organization, it could be anything.

(Catalina, personal communication, September 1, 2015)

Thus, Catalina reports any form of involvement is advantageous for Latino/a students coming to a PWI for the first time, especially when it comes to their own education. This opinion is shared by Alejandra as she states,

Get involved when you can, as soon as possible. Even if you hear about it and don’t know how to look it up, try to get involved with their programs. (Alejandra, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

In sum, student organizations and resources for Latino/a students at the university were not reported as directly substantive to the participants’ individual success at navigating a PWI, as the majority of the participants reported utilizing other forms of support. However, access to
these resources and the importance of becoming involved for other incoming Latino/a students were mentioned by the majority of participants. For example, although Catalina herself was not involved specifically with Latino/a organizations or events, she did mention involvement with her sorority and consistent communication with her professors as forms of involvement. Thus, in light of the circumvention of support systems at the university in preference of self-established, informal resources, the participants’ explanations of the factors which influenced not accessing these resources were explored next.

**Rationale for nonparticipation**

Seeking to address the final auxiliary research question regarding the alignment of resources designed for Latino/a students with the needs of the five participants, each participant was asked if they had participated in any events hosted by Latino/a organizations on campus. Following this question, they were then asked to explain why or why had they not decided to take part in particular events or activities, in order to gauge what role these organizations played in terms of support. As has been previously mentioned, although some of the participants had attended events and participated in organized activities, the majority of the participants reported they had either not attended any events or if they had, many expressed a low level of interest. Furthermore, none of the participants mentioned these organizations as contributing to their adjustment and success within a PWI. Still, each participant reported a number of varying factors which inevitably influenced their decisions to either become involved with these organizations or forgo them entirely. Senalda reported that although she received a number of invitations to events hosted by Latino student organization, she never really attended any. When I inquired as to why, she responded,
Mostly, just, I’m really antisocial. Not really, I stay within my group of friends. Me and [her best friend] are good, so we stay within our group of friends. I don’t really venture off and even when people extend invites I’ll be like yeah okay I’ll think about it and I never really follow through with it. (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

Thus, Senalda reports comfort and familiarity with her current peer group, which results in her lack of desire to reach out to other Latino/a students she might encounter. Elaborating on this point further she states,

Well I always had [her best friend] so I really felt like oh okay that's my Hispanic counterpart so I don’t have to, I never really had to go searching for it. Maybe if I didn’t have [her best friend] I would've probably follow through with going, because she's like my little piece of home. (Senalda, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

On the contrary, Marisol had attended Latino student organization’s Noche Latina events and mentioned that she enjoyed being different among her friends and simply did not mesh with the members of the organization.

I feel like I don’t need those clubs. I have my own friends, yeah they're not my same culture but I like that, because then it's different and I can show them my culture and they’ll be like wow, you know? And I don’t know, also it's different because of like how we were raised. (Marisol, personal communication, September 21, 2015)

Thus, unlike Senalda, Marisol had attended events hosted by Latino/a student organizations, however she still reported that she did not desire to establish connections within these groups. Galena on the other hand, mentioned that she was reluctant to seek out Latino/a organizations
due mostly to insecurities related to not speaking Spanish. When asked if not being able to speak Spanish caused her to not be involved with Latino/a organizations on campus she stated,

Yes, exactly. Exactly. Cuz a lot of those Spanish organizations on campus like all the students in there speak Spanish, you know what I mean? And I don't, so I feel like they're probably like why are you even here? (Galena, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

When asked if this had influenced her in any way into avoiding events or organization meetings she very simply responded,

Yes, yes, very much actually. (Galena, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

As a result, she reports feeling alienated to a certain degree. Something which is remedied in a way through her Hispanic friends who also do not speak Spanish. On the other hand, Catalina describes Latino/a organizations as groups designed for those without a voice, which she believes is unnecessary for her.

I don’t know it's not something that I really had an interest in. I don’t feel like I don’t have a voice on this campus, like I can make my voice heard if I want it to be. So I guess that's why I never really got into a lot of those organizations because everything was about like self-empowering, like being heard, and I’m like my voice is heard. (Catalina, personal communication, September 1, 2015)

As a result, Catalina reports awareness of available organizations and events, but a lack of interest in attending or involving herself in them. Lastly, Alejandra attributes her non-involvement in Latino/a organizations and events to a lack of exposure and knowledge of how to become involved, coupled with other obligations related to her involvement in the nutrition department.
I’m involved within my nutrition department mainly, and I think like I haven’t branched out and really seen like all the other organizations really. (Alejandra, personal communication, September 17, 2015)

However, Alejandra also mentions regretting not having investigated Latino/a organizations earlier in her college career, as she is about to graduate.

Thus, in summation all five participants varied in their own individual factors influencing their involvement and participation in events hosted by Latino/a student organizations. From pre-established Latino peer groups, to language insecurities participant responses were as unique and individual as the participants themselves.

**Conclusion**

The findings displayed within this chapter reflect the diversity, resilience, and profound insight of the participants in this study. The participants represent the broad array of Latino/a students entering into institutions of higher learning, and the complexities involved with being an underrepresented minority student within a PWI. As the data illustrates, these five Latina students’ reported experiences are often multilayered and at times overlapping, often shuttling between positive and negative experiences. Yet, they remain invaluable for the exploration of the research questions which drive this study. Chapter 5 will thus attempt to establish connections between the findings and the literature, and provide recommendations for how to better serve and support Latino/a college student attending PWIs.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this chapter is to offer interpretation and analysis of themes encountered in relation to the research questions. As the study’s purpose is to investigate the reported racial, ethnic, linguistic, and gendered experiences of the five Latina undergraduate students, in addition to their individual encounters with resources and student organizations designed for Latino/a students at the university, the research questions were as follows:

1. What kinds of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and gendered experiences do the five Latina undergraduate students report at the university?
   a) What role does self-identifying as Latina/Hispanic play in interactions with peers, faculty, and members of the community?

2. How do the five Latina undergraduate students encounter resources designed for Latino/a or Hispanic students on campus?
   a) In their perspectives, what is the importance of these resources for successfully navigating a PWI?
   b) How do these resources align with the needs of the five Latina undergraduate students?

The findings discussed in chapter four are meant to be brief insights into the lives of five Latina undergraduate students attending a particular PWI. As such, their responses and reported experiences are not reflective of all Latino/a students attending PWIs across the United States. However, as Dillard (2000) mentions, the experiences of Latino/a students at PWIs, while uniquely individual, are also connected and collective. Thus, the implications of this study maintain relevancy for other Latino/a students attending PWIs.
Significance of the Study

The significance of this particular study lies in its focus on experiential knowledge as the means through which the unique experiences of students of color were heard and explored. According to Bernal (2002), an emphasis on experiential knowledge and a challenge to dominant ideologies are integral aspects of the epistemologies set forth by both CRT and LatCrit, and as such the experiences reported by the five participants were valued as important evaluations of the institution to which they belong. Viewed through the lens of CRT and LatCrit, the interview process, which elicited data regarding their experiences, beliefs, and recommendations, positioned the five Latina women as holders and creators of knowledge with the potential to transform their university into a place where individuals’ experiences are adequately acknowledged and appreciated. Furthermore, in addition to helping shed light on the experiences of Latina undergraduate students attending PWIs, a number of informal support systems or resources were also revealed through questioning designed to examine the participants’ perceptions of the support systems set in place to assist them. This is significant, as the identification of these commonly “invisible” forms of support created by these five Latina students adds vital insights to the literature and encourages areas of future study.

University Efforts

As Senalda briefly mentions in Chapter Four, university efforts to support Latino/a students, and to increase enrollment of these students is a relatively new development at the university. However, promising developments are being made in this regard. In 2012, the university admissions office hired the first Latino recruiter as part of an effort to increase Latino/a student enrollment at the university. The following year, an organization responsible for the retention of Latino/a and other minority students organized a Latino student reception in which various members from Latino student organizations on campus introduced themselves and
explained what each organization aimed to accomplish. Unfortunately, this particular event has not been repeated since 2013, despite participants in this study mentioning the need for such an event.

More encouragingly, however, has been the development of the university office responsible for social equity. Initially instituted as a means of ensuring affirmative action at the university, the office has gone through a period of closure and changes regarding its mission and responsibilities. Today, the office strives to ensure the hiring of diverse faculty at the university, conduct campus climate surveys designed to explore perceptions of the institutional climate, assist in resolving reports of discrimination, harassment and retaliation, ensure the university abides by regulatory standards mandated by federal and state governments, and aid in the creation of the Affirmative Action Plan for minorities and women.

Among its many endeavors, the campus climate survey should be highlighted as a significant step in the right direction towards assessing and improving the institutional climates of PWIs for underrepresented minority students. According to Solorzano et al. (2000), when a collegiate racial climate is positive, it includes four elements: (a) the inclusion of students, faculty, and administrators of color; (b) a curriculum that reflects the historical and contemporary experiences of people of color; (c) programs to support recruitment, retention and graduation of students of color; and (d) a college/university mission that reinforces the institution’s commitment to pluralism (p. 62). With that being said, ascertaining the current campus climate in order to gauge the extent to which these elements are present on campus is vital to ensuring a positive institutional climate. Furthermore, the findings presented in this study reaffirm the need for surveys of this kind. Thus, in line with tenets of CRT and LatCrit, surveys like the campus climate survey represent the university’s attempt to receive valuable student feedback regarding
their perceptions of the current climate within which they live. However, gauging the current campus climate is merely the first step; these surveys should be followed by action by the university to address the results revealed in order to ensure a positive collegiate racial climate for all students.

**Call for Multicultural Training of Faculty**

As is evident in participant responses, the participants’ self-identification as Latina inevitably influenced interactions with both peers and professors at the university. In particular, negative experiences with White professors in the classroom were reported at a troubling rate. These experiences were often related to the participants’ status as a minority student in the classroom, and most frequently assumed the form of stereotyping and microaggressions. This is rather troubling considering the extensive body of research suggesting this type of prejudice or negative racial experience is often negatively associated with the quality of minority students’ academic and social experiences in college, as well as their commitment to degree completion (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Museus, Nichols, & Lambert, 2008; Chang, Eagan, Lin, & Hurtado, 2011).

Moreover, the stereotypes placed on the participants taking part in this study can also negatively impact the success these students experience in the classroom, due to their race and gender. According to Claude Steele’s (1992, 1997) theory of “stereotype threat or vulnerability,” under certain conditions, negative racial stereotypes associated with the intellectual ability of disadvantaged groups, which include both racial minorities and women in male-dominated fields, can impair the academic performance of these students. Steele’s theory attributes this impairment to the anxiety minority students may face as a result of the fear that others’ judgements or their own actions may result in a confirmation of the negative stereotypes placed
on their group’s intellectual capacity. For instance, Senalda presents an excellent example of the anxiety discussed by Steele, when she refuses to give any justification for incomplete or late work out of fear that she will confirm the negative stereotypes ascribed to the intellectual capacity of Latina students. Furthermore, Steele’s theory may also apply doubly to Catalina as she is both a woman in the male-dominated field of computer science and a self-identified Latina. Thus, stereotype threats like those demonstrated in the previous examples appear to present a potential undercutting of minority students’ confidence and an undermining of their academic performance within PWIs, demonstrating clearly that it is crucial that this form of stereotyping be more effectively identified and combatted. Acknowledged and highlighted by both CRT and LatCrit, this form of racism within education calls for recognition, discussion, and elimination in order to ensure the success and well-being of not only Latino/a students but other minority students within PWIs as well.

With that being said, professors and faculty who interact with diverse student populations on these campuses should undergo continuous multicultural training in which they are made aware of damaging stereotypes and the effects such stereotyping has on the students in their classrooms. Castellanos and Jones (2003) echo this call for training and propose diversity dialogues, in which students are granted the opportunity to discuss issues of ethnic identity, privilege, stereotypes, campus climate, and racial consciousness (p. 288). Additionally, it is suggested that faculty attend yearly sessions, and be asked to incorporate what they have gained from these sessions in their syllabi and curricula. This form of faculty orientation or training represents but one method for combatting differential treatment and stereotyping of Latino/a students in the classroom, but its potential benefits are encouraging.
Informal Support Systems and the Need for Increased Outreach

Although this study set out to discover the ways in which formal support systems such as student organizations and resources designed for Latino/a students by the university assisted Latino/a students in their navigation of a PWI, informal or “invisible” systems of support arose from participant responses. In particular, the participants mentioned family and ethnic peers as being primary sources of support or advice in the face of challenges encountered. These findings coincide with the literature regarding factors influencing college access and retention of Latino/a students, which have found peer support to have a critical function (Coleman, 1988; Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Morris, & Cardoza, 2003; Wells, Seifert, Padgett, Park, & Umbach, 2011; Cerezo et al, 2012). Additionally, the participants’ highlighting of other Latino/a peers as sources of support, and as providing a greater sense of cultural understanding and validation was also substantiated by current scholarship (Museus, 2008; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Villapando, 2003) and reflect the findings from Hungerford-Kresser’s (2010) study previously discussed in Chapter Two. As such, the establishment of connections with Latino/a peers offers a valuable resource for Latino/a students attending a PWI, and demonstrates the potential benefits of student organizations and events which offer opportunities to create these important networks.

Furthermore, family was reported as the primary support system for the participants in this study. The majority of the five participants indicated that when encountering challenges, or requiring advice, their families were the first people they relied on for support. While the benefits of familial support in terms of student self-efficacy and adjustment is fairly common in literature regarding Latino/a students in higher education (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Torres & Solberg, 2001), the choice to establish their own individual systems of support in lieu of those provided at the university appeared indicative of a perceived difference between the participants’ communities and the university community, as well as insufficient outreach to the
Latino/a student population on campus. As Senalda explained in her interview, the events she did happen to attend on campus felt “inorganic” to her compared to home cultural celebrations and events that felt more “organic.” It is possible that she perceived her community to be separate and distinct from the one in which she resides at the university, influencing not only her willingness to become involved, but her close attachment to the peer group she reported coming with to college. However, unlike Senalda, a number of the participants reported that they were simply unaware of the resources available to them, and as such were unsure of how to become involved. To this end, email notifications were highlighted as an effective means of student outreach, but participants stated this was limited and should be supplemented by an event or orientation in which all organizations and resources are presented. As previously mentioned, this event was a reality in 2013 with the Latino student reception hosted at the university. However, since that time there has not been an event like it, signaling a need for its reinstatement. Thus, in sum, as the university examines its methods of student outreach, informal support systems established by Latino/a students are an area that requires further examination if PWIs and other institutions of higher learning plan to further support, and incorporate these valuable resources into the university community.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Limitations of this research included time constraints, and gender diversity of participants. As the time frame to complete this study had to remain within two years, the possibility of conducting a longitudinal study, in which participants’ various experiences could be tracked over time, was highly improbable. Additionally, the rather small time frame in which to complete this study narrowed the scope of the research considerably, in that triangulating the data with interviews conducted with faculty was not possible. Furthermore, considering the
complexity and depth of the experiences being explored, a one-time 45-minute interview merely scratched the surface of the experiential knowledge these students had to offer.

In addition to the time constraints placed on this study, the process of finding participants resulted in the inadvertent exclusion of male participants. While initially the intention was to find an even number of both male and female participants in order to account for differences in experience related to gender, low response rates to the invitation letter resulted in the pool of willing participants being populated exclusively by women. As this study was qualitative in nature, there was no goal of generalizability, so the number of participants, while one less than anticipated, was acceptable for optimal data collection.

In light of the study’s limitations and findings, future areas of research were revealed as areas in which this study could be expanded. As previously mentioned, future research could utilize a triangulation of data, in which both participants and faculty are interviewed. This would allow for additional insights into the accessibility of student support and experiences within the classroom. Additionally, informal support systems in the form of family and ethnic minority peers were revealed as established networks through which the participants sought support and guidance through attending a PWI. Therefore, future studies could further explore these often unnoticed or “invisible” support systems, in an attempt to illuminate their relevance to the participants and seek ways PWIs can further support these established systems.
Final Thoughts

Over the course of reviewing the dearth of literature regarding the current condition of Latino/a students in higher education, I must admit I found myself disheartened at times. Having to read article after article depicting the racism, obstacles, and barriers students of color faced in the pursuit of a better future saddened my heart and tested my resolve. Though I did not know them, I was them. Hearing their stories transported me back to vivid memories of guidance counselors nonchalantly informing me of my limitations, uncomfortable stares as I took my seat in certain restaurants, police shouting orders behind aimed weapons, and intense feelings of insecurity in places I knew I belonged. However, their triumphs and successes in the face of opposition emboldened and encouraged me. Sitting down with these five Latina women put the literature in perspective and reinforced the notion that we are here, and no amount of opposition will change that fact. It is my sincerest hope as a researcher and as a proud Latino that my research has done justice to the unique and complex experiences shared with me by my participants, and by doing so has helped to encourage and inspire.

Pa'lante, siempre Pa'lante mi gente.
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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

September 11, 2015

Jonathan Montgomery
364 R Maple Street
Indiana, PA 15701

Dear Mr. Montgomery:

Your proposed modifications to your previously approved research project, “Latino Student Experience at a Predominately White University,” (Log No. 15-170) have been reviewed by the IRB and are approved as an expedited review for the period of September 9, 2015 to July 14, 2016. This approval does not supersede or obviate compliance with any other University requirements, including, but not limited to, enrollment, degree completion deadlines, topic approval, and conduct of university-affiliated activities.

You should read all of this letter, as it contains important information about conducting your study.

Now that your project has been approved by the IRB, there are elements of the Federal Regulations to which you must attend. IUP adheres to these regulations strictly:

1. You must conduct your study exactly as it was approved by the IRB.

2. Any additions or changes in procedures must be approved by the IRB before they are implemented.

3. You must notify the IRB promptly of any events that affect the safety or well-being of subjects.

4. You must notify the IRB promptly of any modifications of your study or other responses that are necessitated by any events reported in items 2 or 3.

Should you need to continue your research beyond July 4, 2016 you will need to file additional information for continuing review. Please contact the IRB office at (724) 357-7730 or come to Room 113, Stright Hall for further information.

The IRB may review or audit your project at random or for cause. In accordance with IUP Policy and Federal Regulation (45CFR46.113), the Board may suspend or terminate your project if your project has not been conducted as approved or if other difficulties are detected.
While not under the purview of the IRB, researchers are responsible for adhering to US copyright law when using existing scales, survey items, or other works in the conduct of research. Information regarding copyright law and compliance at IUP, including links to sample permission request letters, can be found at http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=165526.

I wish you success as you pursue this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Jennifer Roberts, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Professor of Criminology

JLR:jeb

Cc: Dr. Usree Bhattacharya, Thesis Advisor
Appendix B

Interview Informed Consent Form

INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Investigator:
Jonathan Montgomery, Graduate Student in M.A. TESOL, JNQR@iup.edu

Faculty Sponsor
Dr. Usree Bhattacharya, Assistant Professor of English, usreeb@iup.edu

Overview:

I am inviting you to participate in a research study I am conducting with students who identify as Latino/a/Hispanic. The current study will explore the ways in which a particular group of undergraduate Latino/a/Hispanic college students experience higher education at a predominately white university in western Pennsylvania (IUP). It is my hope that by investigating how these students make meaning of their various experiences attending a university in which they are the minority, a better understanding of the many complexities of Latino/a/Hispanic students living and attending school in a predominately white community can be reached. Additionally, I intend on exploring these student’s interactions with resources directed at Latino/a/Hispanic undergraduate students, in an effort to gauge whether these interactions are reported as helpful or significant in terms of the student’s overall college experience. Again participation is totally voluntary. There will be no penalty if you refuse to participate, also all responses will remain confidential. If you agree to participate, I would ask this of you: Participate in the 30 to 45 minute interview, and the interview will be audio recorded. Those wanting to share their experiences longer than 45 minutes may request a follow-up interview.

Risks and Benefits:

Potential risks may be time spent talking, which may be emotional at times. To protect you from any possible stress, you are free to refuse to answer any particular question or stop the interview at any time. The potential benefits may be that participants will have the opportunity to share and reflect on their unique experiences, as well as provide their opinions regarding support systems offered to them. I also believe that this work can contribute to providing a more nuanced understanding of some of the barriers, challenges, triumphs, and successes experienced by
Latino/a/Hispanic students at a predominately white university.

**Confidentiality:**

The information I receive from you will remain confidential, as each person will have a pseudonym that only you and the investigator will know.

**For more information:**

Please contact Jonathan Montgomery ([JNQR@iup.edu](mailto:JNQR@iup.edu) or 570-447-1810) should you have any questions.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting anything. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw at any time by notifying the investigator, Jonathan Montgomery via my email or you can email Dr. Usree Bhattacharya. Upon your request to withdraw, all information pertaining to you will be destroyed. If you choose to participate, all information will be held in strict confidence.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement below.

**Principle Study Investigator:**

Mr. Jonathan Montgomery  
M.A. TESOL – Indiana University of Pennsylvania Graduate Assistant – American Language Institute [JNQR@iup.edu](mailto:JNQR@iup.edu)  
570-447-1810

**Faculty Sponsor:**

Dr. Usree Bhattacharya  
Graduate Programs in Composition & TESOL/MATESOL English Department  
Leonard Hall 110  
Indiana, PA  
15701  
[usreeb@iup.edu](mailto:usreeb@iup.edu)  
724-357-4935
Voluntary Consent Form:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this informed consent form to keep in my possession.

Name (please print): __________________________________________

Signature: __________________________________________________

Date: ________________ Phone where you can be reached: __________

Best days and times to reach you: ________________________________

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

Date: ________________ Investigator’s signature: ____________________
Appendix C
Invitation Email

Hello everyone,

My name is Jonathan Montgomery, a graduate student in the M.A. TESOL program. I am conducting research about the experiences of undergraduate Latino/a Students attending a predominately white university (IUP), and their experiences with and attitudes towards different kinds of support systems. If you agree to participate, I would ask this of you: Participate in a 30 to 45 minute audio recorded interview, in which we would discuss some of your experiences attending IUP, and with support systems both on-campus and off. All responses will remain confidential throughout the course of the research.

This interview, as well as participation in this study are completely voluntary. If you are interested in the study and would like to participate, you will find an informed consent form attached to this email. I ask that you carefully read over the informed consent form, and if still willing, sign your name under the appropriate section. Once signed, the form can be scanned and sent to me via email, or an email signaling intent to participate can be sent to me, and the form can be signed in person at the beginning of the interview. Again, I thank you for your participation and valuable information!

Best,

Jonathan Montgomery
Appendix D

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. In what ways do you self-identify as Latino/a or Hispanic?

2. Would you consider IUP to be a predominately White community? Do you consider your Latino/a or Hispanic identity as something distinct from this community? How?

3. What kinds of challenges do you or have you experienced in this community or on campus as a result of your race or self-identification?

4. In what ways do you believe self-identifying as Latino/a or Hispanic affects the way you are treated or perceived on campus? How do you feel your self-identification as Latino/a or Hispanic has affected your interaction with your professors or peers? For example, interactions with mentors and academic advisors.

5. When you encounter these kinds of challenges who do you turn to for help or advice, or vent to?

6. Do you know of any Latino/a or Hispanic organizations on campus? How did you find out about them?

7. Where do you typically find information about Latino/a or Hispanic organizations on campus? What kinds of activities do the Latino/a or Hispanic organizations on campus host? From your experience what events have you participated in? Why did you choose to participate in these activities over others?

8. What are the different kinds of support systems for Latino/a or Hispanic students on campus? Do you think the university has made providing resources for Latino/ a Hispanic students a priority? Do you think the university does enough to create a welcoming environment for Latino/a or Hispanic students?

9. In your opinion, what are three things that could help incoming undergraduate Latino/ a or Hispanic students
Appendix E
Research Topic Approval Form

August 21, 2015

Jonathan Montgomery
1228 Oakland Avenue
Indiana, PA 15701

Dear Mr. Montgomery:

Now that your research project has been approved by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, I have reviewed your Research Topic Approval Form and have approved it.


Your RTAF indicates your anticipated graduation date as May 2016. This means that you must defend by no later than April 1, 2016 and all necessary documents are due by this date. A description of the required documents can be accessed at http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=116432. Your thesis or dissertation must be submitted to the School of Graduate Studies & Research by April 15, 2016 if you desire to graduate by your anticipated date. You must apply for graduation by May 1, 2016. For deadlines for subsequent graduation dates, please access http://www.iup.edu/page.aspx?id=19983.

Finally, if you change your topic, the scope or methodology of your project, or your committee, a new Research Topic Approval Form must be completed.

I wish you well and hope you find this experience to be rewarding.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Hillary E. Creely, J.D., Ph.D.
Assistant Dean for Research

HEC/ob

xc: Dr. Yaw Asamah, Dean
Dr. Sharon Deckert, Graduate Coordinator
Dr. Usmee Bhattacharya, Dissertation Chair
Ms. Julie Bassaro, Secretary
### Appendix F

#### Table of Student Organizations and Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Mission Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delta Sigma Alpha Latino Fraternity, Inc.</td>
<td>To serve the university campus and surrounding communities, To enable the interaction of college men on an academic and social basis, To provide a supplementary educational, social, and cultural experience for the mutual cultivation of its members, To advocate programs and institutions to help fulfill the needs and concerns of the students., To promote an awareness of diversity within many cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino Student Organization</td>
<td>Educate the [university] student and community about the Latino culture, Provide students with professional and social activities that will promote their educational and cultural concerns, Incorporate networking with other student organizations in order to expand the mission of the organization, Inform the [university] students and the community about current Latino issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grupo de Baile</td>
<td>Grupo de Baile is a student-organized dance crew at the university designed to promote Latino culture via dance. GDB hosts and participates in various events in collaboration with other student organizations that promote diversity in the university community. Auditions are hosted at the beginning of each semester, and all members of the university community are welcome to try out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement in the Sciences for Chicanos and Native Americans</td>
<td>Foster the success and attainment of advanced degrees, careers, and positions of leadership in science of Chicanos, Latinos, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and other underrepresented minorities in science - from high school to college to professionals; Increase and promote student recruitment/retention of Chicanos, Latinos, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and other underrepresented minorities in science at Indiana University of Pennsylvania; Improve the effectiveness of, and to further the work of other organizations in order to enhance the public understanding of and appreciation for Chicanos, Latinos, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and other underrepresented minorities in science; and Provide a forum for improving the governmental commitment to advancing in science resulting in increased resources, reduced barriers, and greater equality for Chicanos, Latinos, Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians and other underrepresented minorities in science.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Diverse Student Recruitment and Retention Team</td>
<td>Committed to increasing the retention rates of multicultural students by promoting academic excellence and creating awareness of the presence of multicultural students on campus and in the community. Membership in this organization is open to all members of the [university] community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council of Student Diversity</td>
<td>Promotes awareness, advocacy, and acceptance of all individuals on and off campus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Responsible for Social Equity</td>
<td>The office responsible for social equity works to assist in the creation of a campus environment that promotes diversity and values individual differences. The office responsible for social equity is actively involved in multiple areas, including: conflict resolution, regulatory compliance, campus climate assessment, and diversity support for Human Resources, student organizations, and established commissions. Additionally, all training on the following university policies and initiatives are coordinated through the office: Title IX Sexual Harassment/Sexual Violence, Protection of Minors on Campus, and Students of Concern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOG Scholarship</td>
<td>Awarded each year to academically talented minority students who have scored approximately 1000 on the SAT and who are in the top 25 percent of their high school class. The BOG scholarships are renewable for a maximum of eight Fall/Spring semesters for recipients who maintain a satisfactory GPA.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*Table 3 Student Organizations and Resources*