

Caught in the Borderlands: Negotiating Cultural Identity Between College and Home for
Working-Class Latino Males

by

Ivan Enzo Cabrera

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Stephen M. Quintana, Professor, Department of Counseling Psychology
Alberta M. Gloria, Professor, Department of Counseling Psychology
Stephanie R. Graham, Associate Professor, Department of Counseling Psychology
Diego X. Roman, Assistant Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Adrian H. Huerta, Assistant Professor, Rossier School of Education at USC

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my familia, Alexandra and Samantha Ramirez, thank you for your love, encouragement, and patience. I also want to dedicate this dissertation and degree to my mother Ana Maria Cabrera-Nuñez Melgar who has inspired me to be who I am in this world, and to my little brother Stephen Cabrera who helped me shoulder the load. Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to all the Latino men in college, who dream of making something of themselves for themselves and their families and who have had to navigate harsh environments to get there.

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Abstract

Latinx college students at predominately White institutions (PWI) encounter a culture incongruence between the culture of college and back home, which can make them feel like they have to juggle two cultures. This cultural incongruence (Gloria & Kurpius, 1996) is often engendered through racial hostility from White peers, that diminishes their confidence and belonging, as well as from a misalignment between the cultural expectations and values of college and back home. Prior research reported these factors diminish college persistence among Latinx students, especially among Latino men who are graduating at lower rates than any of their counterparts. This study used a phenomenological approach to explore how Latino men navigated their experiences in college, and how they managed the expectations of college and back home. Data collection consisted of interviewing 10 working-class Latino males attending a large midwestern institution. Findings indicated that students commonly experienced *institutional disregard* as a result of racial microaggressions and exclusion by their White peers; exclusion enacted by White peers overlooking and ignoring the participants, theorized in this study as a *micoerasure*. To avoid and ward off racial hostility, participants engaged in *cultural performance*, performing what they perceived to be White mannerism while concealing aspects themselves. In addition, they coped by accessing *counterspaces* in which they could be themselves and were culturally affirmed. At home (i.e., parents home), participants managed cultural and familial expectations by minimizing their identity as college students and emphasized their role as sons, which led them to conceal their struggles in college to uphold their image as the promising son. They managed their relationships back home by reprising familial roles established prior to college that had been outgrown. Their inability to bring their full selves back home created distance in their relationships with family and friends which further alienated them. These students were caught in-between two cultures feeling like they did not fully belong in either. Gloria Anzaldua's (1987) *Borderlands* is considered as a bicultural orientation that can capture the push and pull these students felt in each culture. Practical and clinical implications to support Latino men in college are discussed.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Current research has identified that Latino men are vanishing from higher education (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Although Latinx enrollment at four year degree granting institutions between 1993 and 2012 rose by 240% (Krogstad & Fry, 2012), graduation rates have not increased and are amongst the lowest compared to other marginalized groups (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016). In 2014, the Pew Research Center reported that only 15% of Latinx individuals between ages 25-29 held bachelor's degrees in the U.S., comparatively lower than their Black and White counterparts whose rates were 22% and 41% respectively (Krogstad, 2016). While Latinx college students' graduation rates are one of the lowest amongst other minoritized groups, Latino men are more likely to dropout at every stage of the Latinx educational pipeline than their female counterparts (Perez Huber et al., 2015; Solórzano, Villalplando, & Oseguera, 2005). Recent national reports have substantiated this trend indicating that Latino males are dropping-out at higher rates than Latina females (NCES, 2015; NCES, 2016). In addition, fewer Latino men are enrolling at four-year degree granting institutions and are generally taking longer to graduate than their female counterparts, widening the degree attainment gap between Latinx males and females (Cerna, Perez, & Saenz, 2009; Swali, Cabrera, Lee, & Williams, 2005). A recent report from UW-Madison identified related trends, announcing that, of the previous graduating cohort of 2017 (who started at UW-Madison as freshman in 2013), only 47.4% of Latinx students graduated on time. In addition, the same report identified that females graduated on time at a higher rate than their male counterparts,

70.2% and 53.2% respectively, during the same four-year window (Academic Planning and Institutional Research [APIR], 2017).

Research on college student persistence has identified several factors associated with the disproportionately low college graduation rates of Latinx students and (i.e., lack of academic preparation, less access to resources, low emotional states) their White counterparts. One theory that elucidates why Latinx college students have experienced lower levels of persistence suggests that their cultural patterns and values are culturally incongruent with the White middle-class values upon which institutes of higher learning operate (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). Through negative interactions based on race, social class and gender with peers, faculty and the institution influences how students of color (SOC) experience college (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Cervantes, 1988; Yosso, Ceja, Smith, & Solórzano, 2009). The cultural incongruence and alienation Latinx college students experience due to negative interpersonal transactions with White peers hindered their academic and social integration to the university (Huerta & Fishman, 2014), which is a key factor for student persistence throughout student development literature (Astin, 1993; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Pascarella, 1985).

The cultural incongruence and negative interpersonal transactions Latinx college students experience with peers and faculty members, signal to them that their cultural orientation and social class values are deviant; thus need to make adjustments to meet the expectations, and operate within the cultural norms of the university (Fiske, 1988; Gloria & Pope-Davis, 1997; Rendon, 1992). One seminal theory on student persistence asserted that students must abandon their home culture, and assimilate to the culture of the academy, or run the risk of not adjusting well to the college environment (Tinto, 1988). Yet, critical scholars have pushed back on the suggestion that SOC need to forgo their home culture, given the level of disenfranchisement they

experience (Valenzuela, 2002; Yosso, 2005). The adjustments that working-class Latinx males need to make often conflicts with their own enculturated values along the lines of social class, ethnic heritage and gender norms. For Latinx college students and other racial minorities, having to change themselves in order to be successful creates conflict, and they must negotiate what they can give up while trying to maintain loyalty to themselves, their culture of origin, and their family. In other words, for Latinx college students, attending a predominantly White institution (PWI) for college means learning new cultural norms, and becoming proficient navigating their new environment to achieve success; while managing their culture identity back home as well as their minority status (Boykin, 1986; Huerta & Fishman, 2019). Becoming proficient in a new culture also means essentially asking students what they are willing to change to be successful. Often students are caught in between two worlds, that of the preferred cultural patterns of the university and their own home culture creating a bidirectional relationship between them and both their cultural frames of reference as they figure out where the fit. Meanwhile, they feel pressure from their family, friends and community to succeed while maintaining their connection to their home culture (Hill & Torres, 2010; Perez, 2017; Schwartz, Donovan, & Guido-DiBrito, 2009).

1.2 Purpose of the Present Study

The purpose of the present study was to investigate how working-class Latino males in college negotiate their cultural identity between the cultural demands and norms of college and the back home, and they broker and navigate their presence in both (i.e., family, friends, and cultural community). Previous research has elucidated the racial hostility Latinx students experience in college and has given voice to students' conflicts between familial obligations and the demands of being a university student (Easley, Bianco, & Leech, 2012; Hurtado & Ponjuan,

2005; Schwartz, Donovan, & Guido-DiBrito, 2009). Consequently, in the current study I examine how working-class Latino males reconcile these two cultural forces, the adjustments they make in college, their trade-offs, and what these mean to them, their family, friends, and community back home.

Traditionally, managing contact between two cultures can be thought of as acculturation (Berry, 1980; 2005) According to Berry, individuals engaging in this process maintain that the culture they are in contact with is dominant and decide to what extent they want to participate in it. Assimilation describes individuals that decide they need to abandon their culture in exchange for acceptance by the dominant culture. Acculturation on the other hand describes adopting dominant cultural norms while continuing to be affiliated with one's own home culture (Berry, 1980; 2006). Berry's model describes unidirectional top-down relationships between dominant cultural and the subordinate culture yet does not consider the transactional aspects of how individuals decide how they will manage contact with a new culture (Tardiff-Williams & Fisher, 2009).

Building on Berry's work, LaFramboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) conceptualized acculturation as second culture acquisition that gave individuals more agency to manage a new culture alongside their culture of origin. Acquiring a new culture was described as biculturalism in which an individual could engage in two cultures, feel equal affinity towards both, without needing to give anything up. Two of the strategies they reviewed were Alternation and Fusion (Melting Pot). Alternation is a bicultural strategy in which an individual could choose to express separate cultural patterns based on the context. While Fusion described a process of bringing cultures together to create a shared culture. Alternation and Fusion are described as bicultural strategies through which individuals can engage in two cultures without assigning one as

dominant, yet the motivation to gain proficiency in a new cultural frame of reference conveys a need for acceptance. Alternating behaviors between contexts suggests individuals need to conceal culture in varying spaces. Meanwhile blending cultures into a new culture implies a loss of culture in the Fusion process.

Building on biculturalism, one study asked Latinx college students to rate their cultural orientation between *Hispanic*, *Bicultural*, *Anglo* and *Marginal*, results indicated that several students unexpectedly endorsed a marginal orientation which meant they didn't feel comfortable in either culture (Torres, 1999). The author suggests that students that endorsed a marginal cultural identity reject the notion that the system should impose how they should feel about themselves or their cultural identity. Instead, it empowers the individual to not seek conformity and convey their continued brokering of their cultural identity. Torres (1999) asserted that this orientation may capture a missing stage in the acculturation process.

Managing two different cultural frames of reference, at home and another at school, is difficult and psychologically taxing. Moving back and forth across these two cultural contexts can be considered as being caught in a psychological borderlands, in which one may be not be fully be accepted in a new culture while losing acceptance in their culture of origin, resulting in feeling stuck in-between both cultural frames of reference. The borderlands provides a much-needed model of the internal push and pull Latinx individuals experience as they manage their cultural realities both at school and back home.

1.3 Research Question

The present study, seeks to understand how working-class Latino male college students manage and negotiate their identity between their college and home environments. Specifically, the psychological aspects of their transition to college, their experience in college thus far, and

how that has influenced their experience at college and back home. In addition, although there are no hypotheses a priori, analyses may reveal a new understanding for how Latino males experience and navigate college, their life back home, as well as the adjustments and trade-offs they concede to try to live in-between two worlds

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Male Latinx students from working-class families are graduating from college at lower rates than both their male counterparts from other underrepresented minority groups, and their Latinx female counterparts (NCES, 2016). Like other minoritized (i.e., historically underrepresented minorities) groups, working-class Latino males often struggle in their transition to college. Most of all, they struggle acclimating to college environments and cultures which operate on a variety of rules, values and understandings that often differ from those with which working class Latinx students were raised (Huerta & Fishman, 2014, 2019).

The purpose of this literature review is to present theory and research findings about the intersecting identities of working-class Latino males that influence their worldviews and relationships to academia. In addition, I summarize theoretical perspectives of student socialization, as well as research on the experiences of Latinx students in college and barriers that may affect college persistence for working-class Latino males at four-year universities. Several strategies of acculturation are discussed to identify the possible strategies working-class Latino males use to manage their new collegiate environments and their contexts of origin.

Qualitative research on Latinx college student experiences has traditionally showcased descriptive accounts of what students deal with in their daily lives at institutions of higher learning. Similarly, this current literature review will begin with the story of Samson, informed by students I have worked with over the years and my own experience. Samson's story, like

many working-class Latino males, is one of progress and triumph, coupled with uncertainty in how he can reconcile the context from which he comes from, how he has been changed throughout his academic journey, and what he will need to change in order to continue to persist and succeed in academia.

2.1 Story of Samson

Samson is an undergraduate student at a large, predominantly White university in the Midwest. He is a first-generation, 20-year-old, third-year undergraduate student who identifies as a working-class Latinx male. He is currently majoring in environmental science, earning a Chicano studies certificate, and his tuition is funded through a merit-based scholarship offered to students from historically underrepresented groups. Samson's academic performance in college has had some peaks and valleys, but he has managed to do well enough to stay competitive for graduate studies for which he fully intends to apply in this coming year.

Samson was born in Mexico and grew up in a predominantly Latinx working class community after immigrating with his parents to Chicago when he was four years old. He is proud of his Latinx heritage and the community in which he was raised. Samson is the oldest of four of an intact family. Being the first member of his family to attend college, his parents often remind him that he is expected to be a role model for his younger siblings. Samson is proud of his parents, appreciates the sacrifices his parents have made for him to have the opportunities that have allowed him to attend college. Upon arrival to the U.S., Samson's father worked in the service industry while his mother had jobs as a housekeeper in various hotels in downtown Chicago. Growing-up he spoke Spanish with his family and friends, when he started school he was placed in ESL, but was placed back into the mainstream class when he was in third grade.

Samson is a hard worker, which he attributes to his working-class family. Growing up in his community was tough and at times dangerous, but he tried to stay away from gangs, drugs, and other things that would have gotten him in trouble because he didn't want to worry his family. Also, because both of his parents worked he spent a lot of his time outside of school looking after his younger siblings. Samson is one of the few kids from his peer group in his neighborhood to go to college and he is thankful to have the opportunity to be attending college. Because Samson's parents did not attend college, he has had to navigate college on his own, from the application process to the new experiences he is currently having.

In high school, Samson took it upon himself to apply and test for the high school lottery in Chicago and was admitted into a prestigious high school in downtown Chicago. The high school he attended was predominately White and the home school too many kids that lived downtown and that were from upper middle-class upbringings. Although he went to a predominantly White high school, his core group of friends were Latinx students that also were able to attend his high school because of the lottery. He remembers that when he started high school, the friends he grew up with would often tease him that he would soon replace them for his new friends at his new high school.

Samson loved his high school because it challenged him, and it was source of pride for his family. Yet, he would often feel out of place because he noticed that his classmates did not share the same type of experiences he grew up having. He recalled that his White peers would tease him for the way he spoke, the music he listened to and the brands of clothing he wore. Samson was especially aware of the differences between himself and his peers when they talked about the vacations they would be taking, cars they wanted when they got their driver's license, and their weekend plans that included shopping and dinner with friends. Most of the time, Samson had never heard of the places that his friends vacationed in, nor did he anticipate being able to afford a car if he got his license. Samson spent most of his weekends in his neighborhood with the friends he grew up with, helping his father with odd jobs he did on the weekends for extra money, and attending family functions (i.e., quinceañeras and birthdays) that he could not miss. Samson felt it was his obligation to go along with whatever his family was doing and help them in any way he could. He also felt a responsibility as the oldest to take care of his younger siblings and guide them through high school, so they could attend college as well.

Samson's transition to college was difficult, he was often homesick and went home almost every weekend. When he first arrived at college he felt disconnected, out of place, kind of like when he first started high school. Samson was often the only or one of few Latinx students in his classes. He noticed that when group work was assigned or when he wanted to join a study group he had difficulty finding a group to join. Difficulty joining groups in his classes often looked like Samson being told that the group he wanted to join was full, being excluded from communication about meeting times and not being allowed to take on more academically intensive portions of group projects. Socially, Samson had made some "friends" in his residence hall, but they usually didn't invite him out to parties and would only talk to him about superficial topics (i.e., sports and movies). Samson's lack of close relationships at school made him contemplate leaving school a couple of times during his first year, especially during the academic breaks. When he would go home he was reluctant to share with his family about how lonely he felt in college and how hard school was. With his friends back home, he would say that he was having a lot of fun and that things were going okay.

After Spring Break, he found the Chicano studies certificate program, and through their social gatherings he met other Latinx students, including members of a Latinx fraternity which he joined in his second year. After he found "his people" he felt more stable and didn't go back home every weekend. He also looked forward to spending time with his new friends on the weekend. He noticed that since he started spending more time at school his visits back home started to change, his parents often consulted him about concerns they had with his siblings, financial issues, and issues they were having at work. Although he wants to help his parents, he feels frustrated when he offers advice or recommendations on issues they asked him to weigh in on, and they get upset by them. His parents are especially triggered when he tells them they could be doing something different to help address their concerns. When he sticks by his unpopular recommendations, his parents accuse him of being disrespectful, having changed since he went to college, or that he is out of touch with his family and cultural values. His parents have commented on how he has changed the way he dresses, his taste in music, and his "reluctance" to speak Spanish. They have also shared that what

he decides to talk to them about makes them feel uncomfortable (LGBT+ topics, racism, and politics).

He faces similar struggles with his friends back home. His Latinx friends back home tease him for acting “bougie” (slang for having upper-class tastes or preferences), “talking White” (using more formal language) or because when he explains what he is learning at school, he does it in a way that his friends do not fully understand. Recently, one of his friends who is also attending a predominantly White university has shared with Samson that he has been having difficulty making friends, struggling academically, and that he has been thinking about leaving school. Samson shared some of his experience with his friend who also explained that he was having a hard time being in a predominately White school and that he might just come home and attend city college and transfer to a four-year college later. Samson believes that, although it has been hard for him to be at school, he had some preparation for being in predominately White spaces from his high school experience and that this may have helped help stay in school.

Samson’s experience is similar to what many Latinx students’ experience in college (Rendon, 1992; Yosso, Davis, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). What is important in his story is the interplay between social class, cultural heritage and gender. Samson’s feelings and experience of disconnection from his academic institutions manifest because academia is constructed on White, middle-class values (Warnock & Hurst, 2015). Samson’s experiences thus far have not helped him cultivate his proficiency in White middle-class norms and are erroneously not valued by the academy (Yosso, 2005).

Samson’s lack of awareness of middle-class taste and preference contributes to him feeling out of place in high school and difficulty connecting with peers at the university. Meanwhile, his cultural values have contributed to feeling an obligation towards his family, while it has also been a factor by which he has been identified as ‘other’ and racialized. In addition, Samson’s gender has functioned as a socialized force that has contributed to how Samson copes with obstacles. Although Samson’s social-class, ethnicity, and gender have each contributed to his experience, they work together influencing each other and blurring the lines between these formative forces, thus being intersectional. The following sections describe three

socializing forces (i.e., social class, culture, & gender) that have influenced Samson's thoughts, feelings and behaviors. Additionally, Samson is not at fault for experiencing adversity, but a reflection that higher education has not provided a context for Samson to effectively use his socialized capital and thrive in the academy.

2.2 Social Class

Social class influences how individuals develop relationships with each other and institutions and it is replicated through parenting and responses to contextual factors (Bourdieu, 1984). In order to conceptualize social class as a cultural construct and identify how it is replicated, it is important to understand the breath of what social class implies. Liu and his colleagues (2004) elucidated the factors that contribute to the meaning of social class, and its association to socioeconomic status. Liu (2004) defined social class as an individual's place within the economic hierarchy determined by income, education and occupation, accompanied by an awareness of their position in the economic hierarchy, and the positions of others that may or may not share the individual's social position. Meanwhile SES is defined as "one's perceived place in the economic hierarchy based on subjective indices such as prestige, lifestyle and control of resources", with an assumption of possible mobility around the hierarchy (Liu et al., 2006). Taken together both share an association with economic hierarchy but in different ways. Social class has a psychological component which is an awareness of one's own contextual position and the position of others, the self-awareness provides fertile ground for intrapsychic evaluation and comparison with others that manifest as classism both towards others (i.e., upward and downward classism) and the self-internalized classism (Liu et al.). Meanwhile, SES is a perceived notion of the power and agency an individual has, and the extent to which they can use their resources (i.e., social capital) to their advantage (Liu et al.)

For the current study, social class will borrow from both social class and SES, and conceptualized as a cultural dimension influenced by an individual's subjective understanding of their power and agency, their economic social level, how they respond to the contextual demands of their environment and how classism operates in their life. Liu and his colleagues (2004) referred to this conceptualization of social class as a *social class worldview* (SCW) which he describes as a lens influenced by social interactions, cultural aesthetic preferences and contextually relevant skills through which individuals evaluate their social status. The SCW bolsters the idea that social class is a cultural concept, with its own rules, expectations and behavioral patterns.

An aspect of social class that psychologically deepens the construct is social status, or the understanding of where one's position is in relation to others. Social status influences how individuals operate within their context based on their subjective perception of their place in the economic hierarchy and influenced by the degree to which they can access dimensions of social status which are economic factors (access to money), social prestige and social power (Fouad & Brown, 2012). Using Fouad's and Brown's (2012) three dimensions of social status clarifies our conceptual understanding between working class and middle class taxonomies, which refers to the degree an individual feels confident they can access each of the dimension, in other words working class individuals are thought of having less access to economic factors, social prestige, and social power and middle class have more. Fouad and Brown (2012) further reported that social class and status are also influenced by one's ordinate (majority) or non-ordinate (minority) identities (i.e., race and gender) which can create barriers to accessing the dimensions of social status. Taken together social class in this study refers to a cultural concept which is influenced by a variety of factors that include one's position in the economic hierarchy (income), their sense of

control and agency, cultural understanding of their social class contexts' demands and preferred ways to respond, and an internal sense of where they fit socially compared to others influenced by their access to economic factors, social prestige and social power. In this section I provide a review of how social class identity is socialized and replicated given the parameters discussed previously, and how differential socialized social class cultural norms influence students experience through the educational pipeline.

According to Bourdieu (1984), socialization depends on one's social class location. Indeed, Bourdieu argued that children in different social classes receive different messages as to how to operate in the world, based on what is familiar, what is of value, and the resources they have been allotted (Bourdieu, 1984; 1986). The values, expectations and resources with which children are socialized are collectively referred to as their capital (McLeod, 2005). Bourdieu (1984) asserts that capital is assigned value depending on how compatible it is with the values of the dominant institutions. This means that academic achievements and social rewards are not fully "earned" through individual attributes, but through the cultural training that children receive during child rearing (Lareau, 2011). One's socialized sense of proficiency to use one's capital effectively is known as *habitus* (Lareau, 2011). Although developing a new habitus is possible, it is challenging to use a new sense of habitus with the comfort associated with the habitus one learns in childhood (Lareau, 2011). The acquisition of capital and habitus differs between working-class and middle-class children and influences how children are prepared to interact with the world and institutions. The main differences between the capital and habitus of working-class and middle-class children, is the preparation and agency middle-class children feel in their educational context, compared to the lack of agency, belongingness, and conflicted

feelings of worthiness working-class children experience (Lareau, 2011; Warnock & Hurst, 2015).

Annette Lareau's (2011) ethnographic study, *Unequal Childhoods*, described how working-class and middle-class children are prepared for life differently through distinct ways of parenting that influence a child's accumulation of capital and formation of habitus. Lareau (2011) identified that middle-class families often socialize their children via concerted cultivation, and in working-class families' parents use what she called natural growth. In the simplest terms concerted cultivation is a parenting style that utilizes structured activities to develop a child's talent and perspective, where natural growth focuses on providing children with their basic needs and boundaries so that they can develop naturally (Lareau, 2002). These alternative parenting styles are often influenced by access to financial resources and time and are implemented through distinct behavioral pathways that communicate what is important.

Lareau (2011) reported that in working class homes, daily life revolves around completing tasks essential for daily living, that often take both a considerable amount of time and effort to perform (i.e., using public transportation to access several services), and can leave little time and energy to invest into what working-class parents may consider luxuries (i.e., nurturing self-esteem, fostering creativity, engaging in play, etc.). Due to time and financial constraints, working-class children are comparatively engaged in fewer activities intended to cultivate skills or interest than their middle-class counterparts (Chin & Phillips, 2004; Lareau 2002; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). In response, children learn to be more self-sufficient and seek out their own free or unstructured activities in which they can be involved (Lareau, 2002; Lareau, 2011). Being self-sufficient is how working-class children contribute to their family, they are also encouraged to help complete daily activities (i.e., chores, getting dressed for school), be

helpful to their parents (i.e., help supervise younger siblings), and be attuned to family circumstances (Lareau, 2011). The role that children play in working-class families has been associated with a development of an interdependent orientation and an inclination towards more prosocial behavior (i.e., being more empathic, recognizing the distress of others, attunement to their context, and willingness to help) compared to their middle-class counterparts (Manstead, 2018; Piff, Kraus, Côte, Hayden Cheng, & Keltner, 2010; Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012). Thus, working-class children develop a sense of constraint, and are socialized to adjust to circumstances, and accommodating to the needs of others. (Lareau, 2011; Stephens et al., 2012). Coinciding with these working-class values and behavioral patterns, Samson engaged in behavioral patterns that working-class families' value. For him they manifest through his sense of obligation to help his father work on the weekends, take care of and guide his siblings, and seeking his own opportunities to learn and develop.

In contrast, middle-class families often have the resources to make sure that their children learn culturally rewarded behavioral patterns by cultivating their children's talents, tastes, and preferences (Bourdieu, 1984; Lareau, 2011). For example, middle-class families prefer to arrange their schedules and spare no expense so that their children can engage in structured activities (i.e., music lessons, educational field trips) that encourage them to explore their curiosity, interests and develop the skills necessary for success (Lareau, 2002; Lareau 2011; Chin & Phillips, 2004). The activities in which middle-class children engage in enriches their development, breeding comfort when speaking the language of the middle-class and to its preferences (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). The time that is dedicated to cultivating these skills and personal development, encourages middle-class children to develop an independent style in which they feel comfortable putting themselves first, expressing their

preferences, voicing their opinions, and standing out (Lareau, 2011; Stephens, Markus, & Phillips, 2014). Studies show that middle-class parents' dedication to developing their children's cultural capital and habitus through activity-based learning (i.e., going to museums, concerts, library visits) have better academic returns, such that middle-class children receive more positive responses from their instructors, are tracked into more rigorous curriculums and are more positively evaluated than similar performing working-class peers (Bodowski & Farkas, 2008; Dumais, 2002; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999).

Knowledge of middle-class customs and norms have been implicated as baseline knowledge to access educational curriculum (Chapman, Tatiana, Hartlep, Vang, & Lipsey, 2014). Several studies have identified that school curriculums, policies, and practice are often biased by both race and class, undermining the knowledge and understandings working-class students learn from their families and cultural backgrounds (Chapman et al., 2014; Valenzuela, 2002, Yosso, 2005). The level of cultural preparation that students are assumed to receive from their social class context, coupled with their ability to communicate their understanding of middle-class norms, becomes a means by which schools decide on their teaching methods and objectives for students (Anyon, 1981, Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). Likewise, other factors (i.e., race, first language) can negatively influence teacher evaluations by what is referred to as micro-political processes, limiting equitable access to instruction and curriculum, thus further substantiating institutional preference for White middle-class students (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999).

Evidence of the influence of class on how children are educated was captured in a seminal ethnographic study (Anyon, 1981) that evaluated approaches to academic instruction of several schools at several socioeconomic levels. Anyon's work found that instruction differs

between schools who are attended by upper-class children and those mostly composed of working-class students. She reported that working-class schools often implemented more remedial curriculum, focused on memorization and recall, valued product (i.e., right answers, following directions, executing skills) over process (i.e., understanding problem solving methods), and balked at encouraging students to push themselves because teachers did not deem it a worthwhile investment for their students (Anyon, 1981). In comparison, the author reported that curriculum at upper-class schools commonly focused on cultivation and preparation and encouraged students to think critically about what they were being taught, justify their assertions, and make meaning of what they learned (Anyon, 1981).

Moreover, research indicates that middle-class children from an early age have a better sense of their future and professional trajectory, aspiring to attain white-collar jobs at a higher rate than their working-class counterparts (Dumais, 2002). The preference for “middle-class jobs” are communicated through habits and patterns described so far, in which middle-class children are trained to value traits and behaviors that are required to get ahead in professional settings (i.e., critical thinking and sophisticated communication skills) that often resemble their own parents’ work settings (Dumais, 2002; Kohn, 1989; Lareau, 2011). The social class values, customs, and behavioral patterns rewarded in each corresponding educational setting reinforces the messages taught at home, thus schools extend social class learning and become an agent of social class reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986, Lareau, 2002, Stephens et al., 2012).

The preparation students from different social classes receive at home and school further influences the settings in which they envision themselves in the future. For example, middle-class children often expect that they will attend college and have shown to integrate more easily than working-class, first-generation students (first one in their immediate family to attend

college) who tend to struggle academically, have a lower sense of affiliation and belonging to their college, and leave college at higher rates (Hunt, Boyd, Gast, Mitchell, & Wilson, 2012; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Rubin, 2012; Stephens et al., 2012). For children, having access to people in their life that have attended college increases accessibility to college because they help make it seem more plausible to attend and they provide guidance about the college-going process (Hunt et al., 2012; Hurst & Warnock, 2015; Orbe, 2004). For working-class students, entering college involves learning to operate in the middle-class space, and it is often accompanied by marginalization and pressure to take on the middle-class values and/or abandon the values with which they were raised (Hurst & Warnock, 2015; Rubin 2012).

A recent article in the April 2018 issue of *The Christian Science Monitor* reported on the emotional struggles low-income students experience after graduating from elite Ivy League colleges. The graduates shared that while in college they felt pressure to abandon their working-class values for more middle-class values in order to fit-in and make it through college. Their shift in social class values (i.e., preferences, language, ideologies) ultimately created distance and difficulties with family and friends back home resulting in being labeled by family and friends as “being too good” for them. This shift in how their families’ and communities perceived them was difficult because the reasons they went away to college, endured social and financial hardships, was with the hope of coming back and helping improve their families’ financial situations, instead they were now seen differently. Moreover, the graduates reported that the social distance they feel makes it difficult to seek support from family and friends that have supported them their whole lives.

Research on how social class influences student adjustment in college has identified that working-class children often feel like there is a mismatch between their interdependent values

and the independent orientations colleges encourage and reward (Stephens et al., 2012). In fact, one study that surveyed administrators at the most elite universities in the country found that they characterized their universities as encouraging and rewarding independent values over interdependent values (Stephens et al., 2012). Devaluing interdependent behavioral patterns trivializes the reasons that low-income first-generation students attend college, which is often to help their family out of financial struggles (Stephens et al., 2012; Easley, Bianco, & Leech, 2012). The preference by universities to focus on and reward independence, makes invisible the struggles working-class students face in college that often affect their performance, like needing to work to send money to their families that depend on their help, playing an active role in the lives of their family, and serving as consultant for their family's problems (Hunt et al., 2012; Hurst & Warnock, 2017; Stephens et al., 2012). Universities often privilege independent-orientated students by promoting and giving much attention (i.e., websites, media coverage) to success stories of students who have "beat the odds," and not mentioning the students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who struggle and dropout (Hurst & Warnock, 2017).

In sum, children from working-class and middle-class backgrounds often differ in the values that they were encouraged to develop growing up. Middle-class children are encouraged to be assertive, self-directed, logically approach obstacles and contest ideas they do not agree with, while working-class kids are taught to be accommodating and interdependent (Lareau, 2002). Schools disproportionately reward middle class values and it influences a poor sense of belonging and efficacy for working-class students. The devaluing of working-class values often appears in college as well, as schools signal preferences for middle-class values that promote independence (Stephens et al., 2012). A review of how differential cultural norms are socialized based on social class give us an idea about why some values and behavioral patterns are

preferred, and it also important to get a conceptual understanding of what social class means and how it may differ from socioeconomic status (SES).

2.3 Cultural Influences

Culture, like social class, influences an individual's experiences and how they respond to the world. Yet, a satisfactory definition of culture is a contested concept because attempts to define it either omit key aspects of culture or are too general for the definition to have any precision (LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). However, Boykin (1986) suggests that philosophically culture is a combination reciprocal determinism (Bandura, 1978), which posits that one's cognitive and social environment influence their behavior and Gay and Abrahams's (1973) assertion that culture is constructed through a pattern of meaningful behaviors as a response to the environment in which it is cultivated (Boykin, 1986). Using these two theories to conceptualize culture makes central that culture manifests as behaviors and relational patterns influenced by the social environment, and not as traits and values (Boykin, 1986).

To understand how common behavioral patterns, influence an individual's experience, it is important to first provide a reference to the behavioral patterns that are germane to this study. In Latinx culture, *familismo*, being *bien educado* (well educated), and *respeto* (respect) are three relational behavioral patterns that are common and important (Arredondo, Gallardo-Cooper, Delgado-Romero & Zapata, 2014; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). *Familismo* refers to the importance of maintaining and nurturing family relationships. For Latinx individuals, *familismo* is a complex relational pattern that shows a sense of responsibility, solidarity and loyalty to their nuclear family as well as extended family that can include aunts and uncles, cousins, godparents, close friends of the family and community members that have high levels of contact with the nuclear family (Arredondo et al., 2014; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). The breadth of

people included in the *familia* (family) has a relational aspect as well, known as *compadrazgo*, as individuals are considered part of the *familia* due to their special and intimate relationships with parents (Arredondo et al., 2014). *Familismo* centralizes the *familia* as an influential force on the lives of Latinx individuals that can influence the choices they make (Arredondo et al., 2014). The influence of the *familia* on the lives and choices of Latinx college students has been well documented as an integral part of their college experience (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Guardian & Evans, 2008; Schwartz, Donovan, & Guido-DiBrito, 2009; Torres, 2004). This familial relational pattern is indicative of a collectivistic relational pattern in which an individual is highly concerned not only with their own growth and success but also with the growth and success of their family and people in their support network (Nichols, 2013).

A related relational pattern common in Latinx families is the notion of being *bien educado* or well educated. Being *bien educado* means much more than attaining and prizing education; it signals that one has learned to engage proficiently in the relational patterns that communicate the values preferred by the *familia* (Arredondo et al., 2014; Reese, Bolzano, Gallimore, & Goldenberg 1995). The importance of being *bien educado*, is something that is observed through action, thus being *bien educado* manifests in interpersonal exchanges, that can include making others around you feel comfortable and being hospitable (*amabilidad*) or engaging in conversation with someone one may not know, in order create a friendly environment (*personalismo*). Being *bien educado* is associated with being aware of how much one's own behaviors affect those around them, and so Latinx children are encouraged to make good moral decisions, also seen as staying on "*el buen camino*" (the right path), put the family first, and to achieve success through hard work and perseverance (Arredondo et al, 2014; Reese et al., 1995).

Lastly, *respeto* (respect) is a preferred and prized relational value upon which *familismo* and being *bien educado* operate, its characterized by a deference to authority and considered a cornerstone of Latinx relationships (Arredondo et al., 2014). *Respeto*'s relational quality manifests in relationships, through a process of being considerate of other's needs, being open to advice from *familia* and valuing familial sacrifices that are made on one's behalf by acknowledgement or reciprocating the sacrifice (Easley, Bianco, & Leech, 2012; Hill & Torres, 2010; Perez, 2017; Rendon, 1993; Torres, 2004). Honoring sacrifice with sacrifice has shown to lead Latinx college students to sacrifice their psychological well-being as they often prefer to not burden their families by asking for help and feeling pressured to appear like ideal students when they are experiencing difficulties (Ortega, Wang, Slaney, Hayes & Morales, 2014; Perez, 2017).

Familismo, being *bien educado*, and *respeto* can be observed in Samson's educational story. His sense of *familismo* manifests through his dedication and prioritization of his family, taking on responsibility without prompting because he knows his family's expectations. Samson's willingness to take care of and guide his siblings, make his family proud, as well as his reluctance to burden his family when he is dealing with his own difficulties are ways that he honors them and their hard work. Through these acts of *familismo*, Samson shows that he is *bien educado*, and that he has *respeto*. In addition, Samson communicates these values by self-imposed restrictions, he does not ask for more than he is given, he expresses gratitude, and he does not overstep his role as a son when he is signaled that his advice is not helpful. Although these behavioral patterns seem to be limiting, it is important to acknowledge that Samson is exercising restraint because he knows that communicating need will trigger his family's *familismo* and they would likely exhaust all their resources to provide for their son.

In addition to the preferred relational patterns that are common in Latinx families and communities, there are also epistemological preferences in how knowledge is constructed and transferred (Arredondo et al., 2014; Comas-Diaz, 2006). A common method by which Latinx individuals learn life lessons, build knowledge and understanding is through the use of *dichos* (sayings), or *cuentos* (stories), that transfer wisdom based on personal experience and cultural values (Comas-Diaz, 2006). Although Latinx parents can use direct, and sometimes authoritative communication (Arredondo et al., 2014, Reese et al., 1995), the use of a story *cuentos*, or *dichos* possess the intimate and relational aspect that is favored while providing a guiding message that shows *familismo*, *respeto*, and *personalismo* (Comas-Diaz, 2006). The relational aspect and connection of passing on knowledge and understanding through relationships may be linked to the benefits Latinx college students report in mentoring or support relationships with faculty, peers, and campus-based organizations (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2017; Gloria, 1999; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Museus & Neville, 2012).

Although these Latinx relational patterns and values are important to Latinx college students they are often not upheld outside the context in which they were enculturated, requiring students to reconcile additional cultural input. Contextually, the subordinate status that Latinx individuals have in the U.S, impels acculturation, which is the process of negotiating and navigating cultural frames of reference when a subordinate group is in contact with a dominant group (Berry, 1980). According to Berry (1980), acculturation begins with contact between two cultures, followed by conflict, and inevitably leads to different types of adaption to the dominant culture. The reasons why and how a subordinate group comes into contact with the new culture (i.e., colonization, enslavement, migration) influences the acculturation process and how an individual responds psychologically (Berry, 1980). Seminal writings on how individuals manage

a subordinate cultural identity in the context of dominant culture, asserts that managing two frames of reference is complex, and can result in a cultural conflict that can be psychologically undesirable, and associated with identity ambiguity, confusion, and normlessness (Stonequist, 1935). Berry proposes that individuals psychologically respond to the conflict with a new culture through three psychological processes, adjustment (moving toward), retaliation (moving against) or withdrawal (moving away). These styles of adaptation further engender the strategies by which subordinate individuals manage two cultures.

Berry (1980) asserted that individuals manage two cultural frames of reference by deciding, “Is my cultural identity of origin of value and to be retained”, and “Are positive relations with the dominant society to be sought?” These two questions drive Berry’s seminal model of acculturation strategies which includes: Assimilation, characterized by an individual who sheds their heritage culture and seeks absorption into dominant society; Separation, designates an individual that intentionally limits their interactions with the dominant culture, preferring to stay encapsulated in their heritage culture; Integration, depicts an individual that wants to retain their culture while becoming a full participant in dominant society; and Marginalization, a strategy in which one is forced to abandon their heritage culture while simultaneously being excluded from the dominant culture (Berry, 2005). Berry’s model provides a basic framework for how Latinx students may manage culture in college. However, it does not capture the iterative process students experience negotiating their cultural identity, or the influence of the transactional interpersonal exchanges with peers, faculty, and family (Tardiff-Williams & Fisher, 2009). Models that provide further insight on how an individual’s environment signals that they need negotiate their identity and how it changes over time will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.4 Gender Dynamics

Another formative factor that influences how students engage with academia is through gender roles. Gender socialization encourages how individuals engage with the world, physically, cognitively and emotionally. Traditionally gender roles suggest that males should be strong, intelligent, offer protection, are more aggressive and engage with obstacles without seeking help; while females should be sexually pure, emotional, passive, submissive, and ask for help when they are met with obstacles. The author notes that patriarchal and sexist ideas encourage these gender roles, yet these gender norms are the frameworks that socialize children. That said, these instilled gender values render rigid behaviors that sometimes become obstacles for individuals across several contexts, like education, and specifically higher education (Gloria, Castellanos, Scull & Villegas, 2009; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Pérez, 2017).

School has historically played a part in socializing children into gender roles both explicitly and implicitly through the curriculum. Until recently, schools have commonly encouraged traditional gender roles that guide males and females to seek success in academic subjects that are associated with a particular gender, like men traditionally gravitating and performing better in mathematics and science, and women excelling in reading and writing (APA, 2012). Although males have historically been considered as the primary beneficiaries of gender inequality in education (Menges & Exum, 1983), the recent gender disparity that has developed over the last few decades, finds females outnumbering males in higher education enrollment and graduating at higher rates, particularly in the social sciences and humanities (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). This “gender gap” does not erase the fact that sexism and gender inequality persist and have deleterious effects on females, yet it is important to identify what gender dynamics are contributing to male underrepresentation in higher education. Although the

current gender disparity in academic achievement is present across races and ethnicities, it is most pronounced in the Latinx community (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009).

Although males in our society have been privileged in countless ways, their indoctrination into what is expected from a man or masculinity has had some lasting negative effects on how they think and cope. Pollack (2006) noted that traditional psychological models of early male development have emphasized that healthy boys are to be autonomous and possess an individualistic coping-style. Through this type of gender socialization, which he calls “boy code,” boys are often silenced from expressing interdependence and vulnerability. “Boy code”, based on White Euro-American culture, often shames boys towards extreme self-containment, toughness, and separation (Pollack, 2006). Moreover, boys are often represented as psychologically unaware, emotionally inept, and physically dangerous in society (Pollack, 1998). These societal perceptions of boys also influence their experiences in education with educators preferring girl-typed behavior over boy behaviors, rating boys at higher risk for behavioral problems, and being over-represented in referrals for special education (APA, 2012). Taken together, Pollack (2006) reports, that the perceptions of boys and their experiences lead them to; feel conflicted by what is expected of them as males in North American society, compelled to hide their confusion with a facade of self-confidence, see manhood as isolating and disappointing, and to hide loneliness and alienation through acting cheerful and content

Teachers’ biased views of boys are exacerbated when race is a factor in their perception of boy behavior, disproportionately affecting boys of color negatively (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). One study on teacher perception of Black boys (Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridgest, 2003), found that teachers often perceive Black boys as lower achieving, aggressive, and disrespectful based on cultural movements (i.e., walking style) and language patterns (i.e.,

slang). The association that some teachers endorse between boys of color and aggression and deviance communicates a different set of standards in which they are not afforded the privilege of being “naughty by nature” or able to display mischievous behavior that is attributed to “boys will be boys” unlike boys that identify as White (Fordham, 2008). The skewed perception of boys of color, has resulted in consequences as Black and Latino boys are often labeled “at-risk”, influencing their overrepresentation in behavior referrals and special education when compared to their White counterparts (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). In response to these attributions, boys of color may choose to distance themselves from their cultural patterns (i.e., changing speech pattern, appearance) in order to seek approval, avoid stereotyping and punishment (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). These early messages boys of color receive about their social position may also be attributed to the Subordinate Male Target Theory, which asserts that the White male hegemony perceives males of color as uniquely threatening to society (intrasexual competition) and therefore must be disempowered, neutralized, and “put in their place” by constructing barriers that are difficult to navigate (Sidanius & Viniegas, 2000).

Boyhood is often made more complex for boys of color, who are expected to abide by the gender specific attitudes practiced in their culture of origin. For example, Latino boys get cultural messages that they are expected to be physically hyper-masculine (i.e., messages of valuing facial hair and deep voice), independent, in control and providers, because as men they will be expected to be protectors, breadwinners and responsible for their family’s well-being, reinforcing the idea of boyhood and masculinity (Rodriguez, Vasquez, & Salinas, 2017; Arredondo, Gallardo-Cooper, Delgado-Romero & Zapata, 2014). A similar phenomena is seen in African American boys who often cope with feelings of insecurity by a facade in which they

display invulnerability and masculinity called “Cool-Pose” (Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009; Pollack 2006).

Gender dynamics learned in boyhood persist for boys as they enter college and they negotiate their identity as men. One qualitative study on the social construction of male identity for White male college students, explored what is like for men experiencing gender role conflict (Davis, 2002). *Gender role conflict* can be defined as “a psychological state occurring when rigid, sexist, or restrictive gender roles learned through socialization result in restriction, devaluation, or violation of others or self (O’Neil, 1990, p.25). Davis’ (2002) found that men in college, often to their detriment, project a sense of masculinity is painful because of societal expectations. More specifically, he found that male college students valued self-expression, but didn’t feel skilled at it or felt like they were not being masculine when they engaged in it. Men also held back communicating their emotions with other men and feared they would be perceived as feminine (Davis, 2002). Finally, he identified that college men did not feel supported when they did not understand academic material, giving them the impression that they are not supposed to ask for help (Davis, 2006). There are many gender role expectations which college men feel obligated to uphold, such as competitiveness, emotional control, being seen as a provider, and aggression, that feel incongruent (Edwards & Jones, 2009). Performing these gender roles has been described as “Putting my man face on” in which men conceal what they are feeling and can isolate them when they are feeling the most vulnerable (Davis, 2006; Edwards & Jones, 2009).

Similarly, isolating and invulnerable facades persist and are exacerbated during college for men of color by these cultural gender dynamics. Among the results of a study investigating the factors that limit persistence in Black men at an HBCU, the investigator found that Black

men often do not seek help when they are struggling. The men in the study reported that seeking help seemed foreign, because they are heads of their household and are accustomed to taking care of others or because they had too much pride to admit they were struggling. Another barrier was caring for others, as the students reported losing sleep and feeling stressed about the daily hardships their family members encountered (Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009).

Often, for Latino men the attributes that may contribute to the difficulties they encounter have been associated with machismo, which stereotypically includes being domineering, aggressive, and fearless (Cervantes, 2006). Yet, Cervantes identified that what is also communicated are the ideals of what makes a man in Latinx culture, which includes being a protector, responsible, and a leader, as well as having integrity with one's word, and respect and loyalty for their family. Values such as protection, responsibility and loyalty can be activated when Latino males report getting messages from their family and community discouraging them to go to college, and encouraging them to join the work force in order to provide for their family (Cerezo, Lyda, Beristianos, Enriquez & Connor, 2012; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2012). Studies show that for working class Latino men, strong peer encouragement to pursue higher education increases the likelihood that they engage in post-secondary education (Cerezo et al., 2012; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2012). When working class Latino males do opt in to college they endorse strong familial pressure to succeed in order to achieve happiness and upward mobility (Cerezo et al., 2012; Saenz, Garcia-Louis, De las Mercedez, & Rodriguez, 2018). Being socialized to be 'bread winners', they feel financial pressure to be financially independent and to help provide for their family financial burdens back home (Gloria et al., 2016; Ojeda, Navarro, & Morales, 2010). Familial respect and pressure also manifest in Latino males endorsing that they need to *agunatar*

and *echarle ganas* through difficulties that they may face in order to achieve for their family (Easley et al, 2012).

Latino males' socialized gender expectations also have implications in the way Latino males cope with difficulties. Latino males' tendency to want to protect their family often encourages them to avoid burdening them with their difficulties and cope on their own. A study about how Latino college students cope, identified that they practice several methods of avoidance such as; minimizing problems, shifting their focus to long-term goals, and suppressing anger, sadness, and frustration (Rodriguez, 2016). Gloria, Castellanos, Scull and Villegas (2009), similarly found that Latino males in college primarily preferred to cope with perceived barriers by taking positive planned action after finding out more about the situation and by drawing from previous experiences. Their secondary options were to cope by talking to others and engaging activities that would keep their mind off their problems, while consulting a professional was their least preferred style of coping. The authors noted that their findings were consistent with the social and cultural norms for Latino men to provide, protect and solve problems alone (Gloria et al., 2009). Going at it alone, and not seeking help when challenged by perceived barriers are common for Latino students, while their female counterparts in college preferred to employ active coping strategies to overcome obstacles, and to nurture formal and informal support networks with Latina peers to help them navigate the academy, known as "cultural translators." (Gloria, Castellanos & Orozco, 2005; Barajas & Pierce, 2001). Latino males also endorse using anger as motivation and armor to overcome and persist when they encounter obstacles such as emotional pain and negative racialized experiences with peers (Gloria et al, 2016). Latino college student coping strategies can be perceived as self-reliant, but scholars have found that overall

these coping strategies negatively influences Latino college students' psychological well-being and exacerbates both academic and social obstacles (Rodriguez, 2016; Gloria et al., 2009).

2.5 Student Socialization and Development

To understand the challenges that working-class Latino males, like Samson, encounter while attending college in predominately White institutions (PWI), it is important to acknowledge that the transition to college for all students is a process of socializing to a new environment. Student development and their socialization to college and the factors that affect it are well documented. Based on Chickering's (1969) and Tinto's (1975) seminal research on student socialization, Pascarella's (1985) *Causal Model* suggested that four key factors influence how students socialize to the college environment. The four factors of the *Causal Model* include: (a) student background and pre-enrollment characteristics; (b) structural and organizational characteristics of the institution; (c) interactions with faculty and students; and (d) the extent to which a student experiences successful and rewarding interactions with the academic system which includes satisfactory academic performance, intellectual development, and course work that stimulates academic integration (Pascarella, 1985). The interplay among these four student socialization factors influences how students feel about themselves and their college experience.

Student backgrounds and experiences play an essential role in the *Causal Model* because it represents what students bring into the new environment and sets the stage for how students will interact with the institution. Chickering and McCormick (1973) identified that when students first arrive to college, they do not arrive with a 'cultural' blank slate, but as individuals that have been influenced by their family, friends and community. Students bring with them their "strengths and weaknesses, prides and prejudices, clarities and confusions, and a lot of unfinished business" (Chickering & McCormick, 1973, p. 67). Each of these factors plays a role

in how individual students feel at a university. Chickering and McCormick's study, conducted across thirteen universities, found that students change across several domains during college, but the main determinant of academic persistence is whether students feel like a "fit" or "misfit" with the college environment. According to Chickering and McCormick, institutional cultural patterns and priorities communicate to students that they do not fit in along many personal dimensions such as intellectual competence, values, cultural sophistication and levels of autonomy. When students experience high levels of not fitting in, it often leads to early departure from the academy (Chickering & McCormick, 1973). Moreover, if the college environment affirms a student's insecurity, instability or different-ness and fails to attend to their "special situation" then there is great potential for damage (Chickering & McCormick, 1973). Chickering and McCormick's (1973) work as well as Pascarella's (1985) model, suggest that it is the University that needs to provide the right conditions or interventions so that different types of students can succeed. This is in contrast to Tinto's (1988) assertion that students depart from the university because they are not successful in both separating themselves from the context which they originate from and adjusting to the college environment.

The assertions presented in the *causal model* were further expanded by Astin. Astin's (1993) work in *What matters in college?* found that student peer relationships are the most powerful source of influence in a student's academic and personal development.

The role of race in peer interactions was also found to significantly affect student socialization and development, exacerbating the differences between minority students and White students (Astin, 1993). The difference between minority and White students' college experiences reflects the structure of the North American higher education system which caters to and privileges White students (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Lopez, 2005; White & Lowenthal, 2011; Yosso,

2005). This racialized systemic practice where, despite affirmative action policies, a disproportionately higher number of White students are admitted into college, disenfranchises historically underrepresented racial minorities (URM) and makes them feel out of place. Pascarella's (1985) study and analysis of his *Causal Model* found that the socializing agents of the university (i.e., students, faculty & curriculum) influence both social and academic integration (Pascarella, 1985).

Building on the theoretical foundations described thus far, as well as the research on how the university environment (i.e., campus climate, Hurtado, 1992) affects students from diverse marginalized backgrounds (i.e., race, low socioeconomic status, gender) new methods have been considered to improve student persistence that focuses on their psychological, social, and cultural backgrounds (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). Although Pascarella's study was conducted more than 30 years ago, its findings remain relevant today as the institutional dynamics have not fundamentally changed over three decades. Overall, theories on college student socialization and development posit that, when students feel like they belong or matter at their university, it facilitates their social and academic integration (Dueñas & Gloria, 2017; 2000; Pascarella, 1988).

2.6 Campus Racial Climate and Latinx Student Racialization

Expecting students to grow, develop their own identity and integrate into the college culture seems like a reasonable expectation. However, URM students' transitions into the college environment can often be contentious and hindered because they encounter racially hostile environments that they must navigate and reconcile throughout their college experience (Rendon, 1992; Yosso, Ceja, Davis, & Solórzano, 2009). At many colleges, students experience racial microaggressions which are subtle and not-so-subtle, intentional or unintentional that creates an inhospitable racially hostile environment for URM students (Fiske, 1988; Gloria & Robinson

Kurpius, 1996). For example, in the past couple of years, the racial climate at University of Wisconsin-Madison has revealed to be hostile, as URM students have been spit on, had swastikas drawn on their doors in the residence halls, taunted while celebrating and performing cultural rituals in public spaces, and felt disrespected when White students dress-up in cultural outfits and racist stereotypes as costumes for Halloween and racist themed parties (Cinco de Mayo celebrations or “Ghetto” parties). In addition, through national media coverage, SOC have witnessed other SOC on several prestigious, predominantly White, academic institutions be forcefully removed from campus (i.e., dormitories, campus common areas) by university officials, as well as beaten, and killed, by university police, for not “looking like a student.” Although all URM students do not experience these racially hostile incidents, the vicarious experience of these incidents via news outlets, social media and student reports can result in URM students feeling angry, fearful, unwelcomed, and targeted (Gin, Martinez-Aleman, Rowan-Kenyon & Hottell, 2017). In all, these racially charged incidents send to URM students a powerful message about how they are seen as “out of place” in college environments. Although the literature on the experiences of diverse student populations in hostile racial campus climates is extensive, I will focus on how hostile racial campus climates have influenced the experience of Latinx college students specifically.

There is extensive research that has found that a university’s racial campus climate is associated with several aspects of Latinx student experience and well-being (Hurtado, Faye-Carter, & Spuler 1996; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen & Allen, 1998; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Lopez, 2005). Racial campus climate can be described as a psychological construct that communicates how hospitable and inclusive an academic institution feels for SOC, and how much social distance SOC experience from the institution (Hurtado, 1992). Several studies have

identified that Latinx college students experience alienation and greater social isolation compared to White students on predominately-White institutions (PWI), this is concerning as several student integration models have identified the salient role positive peer relationships play in persistence (Astin, 1993; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Hurtado, 1992; Pascarella, 1985).

Hurtado and Faye-Carter (1997) examined the influence of campus racial climate on Latinx college students' sense of belonging and found that Latinx students often experienced exclusion that made them feel like it was difficult to establish, academic and social, peer relationships at several PWIs. Moreover, these students endorsed lower levels of belonging compared to their White peers, rating their campus racial climate as tense and hostile and describing their transition to college as difficult (Hurtado & Faye-Carter, 1997). Latinx college students that experience a racially inhospitable campus climate often experience psychological distress, cope through isolation, and show higher levels of academic amotivation (Hurtado et al., 1998; Reynolds, Sneva & Beehler, 2010). Often to cope with isolation Latinx college students seek in-group peer relationships that provide comfort and academic encouragement, which can exacerbate feelings of alienation and a lower sense of belonging (Levin, Van Laar, & Foote, 2006). Seeking in-group peer relationships is a survival tactic to cope with a campus racial environment that is overwhelming White, communicated by institutional student programming and curriculum that does not include diverse participation or perspectives respectively (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Ramirez, 2014). Interestingly, for Latinx college students who have a strong cultural/ethnic orientations, has shown to be a protective factor (Solórzano, 1998; Yosso et al., 2009); in addition, they are more likely to report racial hostility and a low level of belonging than students who endorsed weaker cultural/ethnic orientations (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Levin, Van Laar, & Foote, 2006).

Through the discussed patterns that contribute to an institution's campus racial climate, Latinx college students receive the message that their cultural orientation is either deviant or abnormal (Gloria & Pope-Davis, 1997). Moreover, Latinx students are forced to value and adhere to a White middle-class orientation in order to fit in at college, while being encouraged implicitly to abandon their own cultural patterns (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996; Tierney 1999). The social distance that Latinx students experience in the U.S. at their institutions of higher education has been attributed to a lack of cultural congruity (degree to which a student is a cultural fit with university's cultural values) between Latinx students and the academy (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). One study investigating the role of belongingness on Latinx self-esteem and mattering found that belonging fully mediated the relationship between cultural congruity and mattering (Duenas & Gloria, 2017).

Theoretically 'cultural incongruence' can be conceptualized as how well the person (student) fits into an environment (college), known as person-environment fit (PE fit). Taken from vocational psychology, PE fit theory elucidates the factors that influence how and to what degree an individual fits into a formalized environment with which they have a hierarchal relationships based on performance (Caplan, 1987). The PE fit literature suggest that there are several dimension upon which fit can assessed of fit which includes; *Needs-supplies fit* (psychological), *demands-abilities fit* (knowledge and skills), and *supplementary fit* (similarity between the person and environment) measured by similarities in values, personality and demographics (Edwards, Cable, Williamson, Lambert, & Shipp, 2006). The higher the degree of agreement in either dimension between the person and the environment has implications on an individual's satisfaction and ability to persist in the environment (Lent, 2008).

The *Needs-supplies fit* dimension is a comparison between the psychological needs of a person (i.e., need for affiliation, social support) and the capacity for the environment to supply resources for these needs (Edwards et al., 2006). When Latinx college students experience campus climates that are racially hostile they are experiencing a misalignment or lack of fit with the environment that seemingly is not built with them in mind and does not cater to their needs (Hurtado and Ponjuan, 2005). Similarly, working-class Latinx students' social class and cultural preferences often do not jibe with the social demands of the college environment. For example, colleges often encourage and reward independence, meritocracy, and value middle class tastes and preferences, and perceive students that do not display similar patterns as ill-equipped (Hurst & Warnock, 2015; Stephens et al., 2012). The degree to which the cultural patterns and social skills that are demanded by the environment, align with the abilities a person has to fulfill the demands is considered the *demands-abilities fit* (Edwards et al., 2006). Low levels of fit along this dimension has been associated with low levels of commitment by the person to the environment, which may have implications for Latinx student departure (Caplan, 1987). Lastly, Edwards and his colleagues (2006) discussed *supplementary fit*, which is how much a person feels they fit the environment based on demographics. For working-class Latino males they may feel a lack of fit because they may not see themselves well represented within the larger student body, making them to feel like a 'lonely only.'

In all, the social distance, the lack of belonging, and lack of cultural congruity that American universities communicate to Latinx students enacts a process of racialization (Quintana, 2007). Race has been described as a construct whose function is to mark social distance and set apart groups with different cultural patterns and behaviors as different (Quintana, 2007; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Furthermore, it is inconsequential to conceptually

separate race, culture, and ethnicity are inconsequential, as they all signal social distance (Quintana, 2007; Smedley & Smedley, 2005). One example of how these terms have been used interchangeably can be seen in the historical classification of Irish immigrants, who were first labelled as racially different, then deemed culturally different once they were integrated into American culture and reclassified as White, and now seen as simply an ethnicity within people classified as racially White (Smedley & Smedley, 2005). Therefore, it is more accurate to think of the labelling of race, culture and ethnicity as an assignment of social distance, social location and power, inherently associated with symbols, attributes, and qualities that are meant to describe individuals who are not classified as White (Lewis, 2003).

Moreover, individuals and institutions racialize SOC and determine their social location through everyday incidents of inclusion and exclusion (Lewis, 2003). Latinx students often experience instances of exclusion in the college because they are not American enough, a designation that connotes that Latinx students are not “White enough” to fit in (Tran & Paterson, 2015). Besides the exclusionary messages (i.e., exclusion from friend groups, social invitations, cultural representation) that academic institutions communicate to SOC, they also communicate the acceptable circumstances by which they can be included (i.e., cultural translator, diversity, voice for their ethnicity) and tolerated. Boykin (1985) identified that, in academic settings, Black students are not only socialized into White middle-class culture, but also into the role of being the minority, and elucidates the difficulty managing the different roles they are socialized into playing, known as the *Triple Quandary*. Socialization into minority status leads to a psychological stance that produces “adaptive and compensatory reactions, social perspectives, and defensive postures” to cope with the predicament of contending with oppressive forces (Boykins, 1985). Thus, working-class, Latinx male students also face a triple quandary to which

they develop their own unique adaptive reactions (Boykins, 1985). Latinx college students, like our student example Samson, often experience social distance from their White peers. Samson experiences amicable interactions with his floor mates, engages in topical conversation yet is not invited to social activities with his peers. The message Samson receives is both that not only is he not of the same kind, but that he is also not allowed to join in activities that his peers are engaging in. Mentioned at the beginning of this section, implicit exclusion among more explicit messages of not belonging reveals the campus climate for SOC and it produces feelings of alienation, isolation and negative psychological well-being.

2.7 Latinx Student Experiences

While a university's racial climate is an important factor for students' academic and social integration, and to develop a sense of belonging, their daily experiences on campus are guided by more proximal factors such as racial microaggressions and stereotype threat (Solórzano, 1998; Steele, 1997; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, Solórzano, 2009). "In the college environment, racial-microaggressions may be subtle, appearing innocuous, intentional or unintentional, verbal or kinetic (e.g., facial expressions, body positioning), put downs based on racial identity, that SOC have to deal with (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009)." Moreover, microaggressions create a hostile campus climate that often leads to an erosion of students' self-confidence and self-image (Yosso et al., 2009). In addition, stereotype threat, which are internal cognitions of fear that the student will be identified as an example of the negative stereotypes that exist about their ethnic group, has shown to have significant effects on academic achievement and social experiences (Steele, 1997). These two phenomena occur frequently and are threats to student integration to the campus community. Dealing with these proximal racially charged occurrences causes *racial battle fatigue*, which can be described as exhaustion from

coping with racial occurrences affecting their psychological (e.g., fear, resentment), physiological (e.g., panic symptoms), and behavioral health (e.g., stereotype threat, poor school performance) (Franklin, Smith & Hung, 2014). Indeed, consistently experiencing racial slights influence student's interactions with their peers, faculty and campus. Students simultaneously want to join and feel a part of this new and exciting place (e.g., college), yet experience rejection repeatedly, reminding them that they are either not welcome or not full members of the academy.

The influence of race on the experience and socialization of students on college campuses is evident. The racial incidents listed above occur interpersonally and can be significant, as they can cast a shadow over students' social interactions with faculty and peers, even when specific microaggressions are not part of the interactions, which are important factors that influence student viability in college (Astin, 1993). For Latinx students, their interactions with faculty and peers often remind them that the university context is not designed with them in mind and consequently contribute to them feeling out of place (Fiske, 1988; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). As mentioned earlier, racial differences can influence the nature of peer interactions and exacerbate differences between students that are culturally distant (Astin, 1993).

Latinx college students report a variety of ways that White peers remind them that they view them as different, foreign, or out of place, by commenting on their clothing and style or confessing that they initially viewed them as intellectually inferior (Fiske, 1988; Rendon, 1992). Latinx college students also report being told that they do not belong at the university when peers suggest they took the place of a 'more deserving' White student and were only admitted to the university due to diversity quotas or being told they are exceptional or a "good" version of their ethnicity (Fiske, 1988; Lopez, 2005; Solórzano, 1998, Yosso et al., 2009). Another way Latinx college students learn that they are perceived as less deserving than White students, is through

social and academic exclusion which includes being told they cannot join study groups and feeling like they cannot go to social events in which URM students are not attending (Yosso et al., 2009; Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013). In addition, Latinx students report overt racism that includes derogatory ethnic epithets and being the subject of racial jokes that leaves them feeling angry or offended (Yosso et al., 2009). In short, Latinx college students receive these messages through subtle and overt communication pathways.

Another anecdote illustrating the challenges faced on campus by Latinx students include incidents which communicate disregard. Recently at UW-Madison, a statistics professor included an item on an exam that asked students to consider, “how tall a border wall between the U.S. and Mexico would need to be in order to prevent “kangaroos” from jumping over.” Given the current political climate for Latinx students this exam question symbolized hurtful ideas against them. It also communicates that the professor may be aligned with conservative values that oppose immigration from Latin America, that the professor supports a racist, xenophobic, misogynist commentaries by our current president who espoused these ideas as central to his campaign, or that the space in which the exam is being administered is a space that holds these values. Moreover, it communicates privilege in variety of ways, in that the professor must have thought the question was funny, was oblivious to the ways Latinx students in the classroom might be affected by it, was oblivious (or uncaring) that there were students in his statistics course who identify with the group that is being implicitly attacked, was not concerned about why this question is problematic, or simply felt entitled to disparage a group for the sake of appearing clever or *avant-garde*. The professor apologized after receiving criticism, but these incidents reinforced questions for students about their status, psychological well-being, and physical safety as well as who belongs on campus.

The aforementioned situation is not unique, as studies that examine the experiences of SOC at PWIs have identified other situations in which professors and their institutions have made students feel unsupported and out of place. In Yosso and her colleagues' (2009) study identifying the microaggressions Latinx college students encounter, they found that students were having difficulty reconciling incidents with faculty members that left them asking themselves "Did that just happen?". One student reported an incident in which he asked to meet a professor for office hours and was denied, only to overhear the professor make plans to meet another student a few moments later (Yosso et al., 2009). In the same study, students reported feeling as if their professors held low expectations of them, and like they couldn't come to them for help on course material. Similarly, Latinx students shared that White professors often miss or dismiss their contributions in class only to affirm a White student's contributions seconds later repeating an identical point (Solórzano, 1998). Furthermore, Latinx students report a global sense of feeling unsupported by their faculty and institution by not feeling affirmed in several situations, such as: being denied to pursue paper topics or projects on issues that impact people of color; dismissing epistemology or theories forms of knowledge that are not from a White-European knowledge base; a lack of hiring faculty or instructors that identify as racial minorities; feeling unprotected when racist comments are made in the classroom setting; having their perception of racist incidents minimized; sorting racial minorities into racially segregated dormitories with-out consulting students; and a lack of social activities geared toward minorities unless they are initiated by SOC (Loo & Rolison, 1986; Solórzano, 1998; Yosso et al., 2009; Harwood, Hunt, Mendenhall, & Lewis, 2012).

2.8 How Norms Are Maintained

Experiences of alienation, and reminders of otherness that are normalized and justified by the systems in which they occur and maintain the dynamic in which SOC have to negotiate their legitimacy as part of the university (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Sidanius & Pratto, 2011). The implicit and explicit messages that Latinx college students receive about their importance and position within the university produces fertile ground for them to ponder, “what must I do to feel fully accepted?” For example, some Latinx students reported that they cannot be “fully” themselves at school, and made adjustments to actively conceal parts of themselves (i.e., speaking Spanish, religious beliefs, familial and community influence) in an attempt to fit in. While others who maintained strong connections to their ethnic and community identities often felt more marginalized and perceived by their peers and faculty as out of place or against the status quo (renegades). Influenced by an institution’s conventions and standards, college SOC often temper parts of their identity between the borders of concealment and visibility to find comfort with peers, faculty, home and themselves. Although an institution’s conventions and standards appear to be intrinsic, they are reinforced by the institutions’ ecosystem to maintain the status quo (Sidanius & Pratto, 2011).

However, the conventions and rules of the institution are concealed and culturally encapsulated in dominant White middle-class ideologies. SOC often perceive that to gain status, they need to conform to institutional rules and conventions. Consequently, conforming seems necessary for survival and achievement, yet it reifies the dominant narrative that one must fit into a mold to be considered part of the academy, justifying the system (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004). In psychology, two prominent theories that describe how institutional hegemony is constructed

and by which norms seem unassailable are Social Dominance Theory (SDT) and Social Justification Theory (SJT).

Sidanius' and Pratto's (2011) SDT provides a rationale for the alienation Latinx students experience in college, asserting that asymmetrical group-based hierarchies are maintained by "legitimizing myths" that provide a seemingly inherent milieu for how individuals should behave and think, as well as the risks for rejecting these conventions. In PWIs the milieu is created by the institution that determines the parameters of inclusion and exclusion (i.e., valid discourse and language, valid theories, methods of creating knowledge, achievement narrative), benefitting those that already operate on similar preferences to feel at home or like they belong. Institutional preferences can be described as "hierarchy-enhancing" in that they reinforce the system that is positioned as benevolent and necessary. Working-class Latinx students adjoining this milieu, based on White middle-class values and preferences, often feel as if they cannot maintain their full identity while seeking integration. Conceptually, SJT explains that an institution's power to set the rules of the game legitimizes those who know the rules, while it denigrates and delegitimizes those who are not privy to how to play (Delpit, 1993; Jost, Banaji, Nosek, 2004). Jost, Banaji, and Nosek contend that the set rules are ethnocentric and are ideologically meant to maintain uniformity as well as status quo, hence anyone operating outside of these rules are reminded that they are not playing by the rules (i.e., feedback, classroom status, unequal treatment by professors). Therefore, SOC are encouraged to behave against their intuition and prefer the values, behaviors, and tokens of power that represent the inclusion of higher status group. The motivation for lower status groups to prefer privileged norms, reinforces the inequalities between groups, and legitimizes the system.

On many college campuses, one “legitimizing myth” is that SOC feel most comfortable in only certain parts of campus. Space on many college campuses carry with them social conventions in that they are politicized and influenced by social interchanges that communicate to SOC that they belong in designated areas. Harper and Hurtado (2007) reported that one factor that affects campus climate is the visibility of SOC. Often SOC and the services they access are found in only a few places on campus (i.e., multicultural center, special interest residence halls, ethnic studies departments) relegating these spaces to where SOC exist. Thus, it changes the equity of the space, and of its occupants to a status of inferiority, while degrading their ownership and legitimacy of occupancy of the entire university. In other words, students have been shown to be treated unfairly in “general population”, to address this issue, separate spaces were created so that students can find refuge from what they are experiencing. Although these spaces are at time refuge for students, in this example the system is not changing, the message to students is, “the system will continue to treat you unfairly, but you have a refuge that you should be grateful for” thus, reifying the system. This place-making paradigm not only justifies the system but leaves students to feel like visitors at their university.

2.9 Managing Two Cultures: A Transactional Process

Latinx students’ transition to college initiates a multi-dimensional acquisition of culture, constructed through the interpersonal transactions they have with the people they encounter in college (LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Tardiff-Williams & Fisher, 2009). During this transition, Latinx students receive subtle and overt messages that some aspects of themselves (i.e., social class, cultural patterns, gender norms) do not align with what they are supposed to be, know, and understand. These messages leave Latinx students to do the cognitive and emotional heavy lifting of surmising what they need to do in order to be considered “part of” the college

environment. Building on Berry's (1980) work on acculturation, LaFramboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) conceptualized acculturation as guided by interpersonal transaction and focused on how individuals are affected psychologically by routine experiences influenced by race, gender and social class. The authors also referred to new cultural immersion as second culture acquisition, fitting with the experience Latinx students have encountering the people and culture of college after their formative cultural experiences growing up. This sequential exposure to new culture, frames cultural identity as iterative, spurring a new process of brokering their cultural identity between who Latinx students are molded to be in college and who they are at home (Tardiff-Williams & Fisher, 2009). Seeking to be successful in their new environment, Latinx college students think about what changes they need to make and how they need to be different. For many, this process of acquiring a new culture occurs while they are away from their families for the first time and surrounded by peers who do not share similar cultural patterns (Cervantes; 1988; Fiske, 1988; Nenga, Alvarado, & Blyth, 2017).

The critical feedback Latinx college students receive through interpersonal transactions encourages students to absorb culturally incongruent cultural patterns (i.e., individualism, language use) to fit in, causing a culture clash between their cultural experiences at school and back home (Barajas & Pierce, 2001). The cultural immersion is catalyzed by a racialized environment in which their culture is not only seen as foreign but also inferior (Cervantes, 1988; Harper & Hurtado; 2007 Rendon, 1992; Yosso, Ceja, Davis & Solórzano, 2009). Feeling out of alignment with peers and faculty, curbs how students express themselves and signals that they need to adjust to be in alignment with peer and faculty expectations. When individuals have interpersonal exchanges that signal to them that they have violated an institutional convention, it triggers compensatory strategies that mitigate feeling like they do not belong. LaFramboise and

her colleagues elucidate the transactional nature of assimilation and acculturation, while providing a frame work for biculturalism that positions alternation and fusion as viable strategies by which to manage two cultural frames of references without feeling like individuals need to concede their cultural heritage. Moreover, Torres' (1999) conceptualization of biculturalism and identification of a marginal cultural orientation, that differs from Berry's (1980) definition of marginality, reveals that strategies of managing a second culture have not been fully explored to account for how an individual may retaliate towards accepting cultural norms when they do not feel comfortable or at home with either one of cultures they are managing.

2.9.1 Assimilation and Acculturation. To review, some of the compensatory strategies that students use are assimilation and acculturation which are used when managing two cultural frames of references that position the dominant culture at a higher status than their culture of origin. In assimilation, an individual relinquishes their culture of origin in exchange for dominant culture to gain acceptance, whose consequences include negative psychological states, poor social relationships, and a loss of support from their culture of origin or being accused of selling-out (LaFramboise, Coleman & Gerton, 1993; Rendon, 1993; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). The message that SOC need to forgo their culture and community of origin to improve their academic integration has been termed ethnocide (Tierney, 2000). Acculturation describes a strategy in which one becomes proficient in the behavioral patterns of the "dominant" culture while continuing to always identify in part as a member of the minority culture (LaFramboise, Coleman & Gerton, 1993). Yet through this form of adaption, individuals experience varying degrees of stress, reify dominant systems and accept second-class citizenship, while experiencing alienation until they have gained proficiency in the new culture. For college students this

conceptualization of acculturation continues to task them with identifying how the need to mold themselves to culture of college.

2.9.2 Biculturalism. Biculturalism has been defined as an integrated cultural identity that emerges when one can comfortably balance two cultural frames of reference, without valuing one of the cultures over the other or having to surrender one's cultural identity of origin at the cost of the other culture (LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Torres, 1999). Being able to balance two cultural frames of reference takes a proficient understanding of each culture and confidence that one can operate in each culture competently. One way that individuals are able to balance each culture is through situating each one in its own context and alternate between them. The Alternation Model is one form of biculturalism that has been referred to as representative of how individuals manage two cultures they feel a part of, characterized by alternating their expression of one culture and then the other according to the context in which the individual finds themselves, like code-switching (LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Being able to alternate between two cultures without feeling anxious in either, is the premise upon which the Alternation Model is based; it differs from both assimilation and acculturation in which anxiety about managing the new culture (i.e., acculturation stress) is inherent (LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). In addition to being bi-culturally competent, individuals who are bicultural, can hold both cultures in positive regard, can engage in each culture separately while having equally affirming relationships and experiences in both, and can control their degree of affiliation in either culture (Coleman, 1995).

One assumption associated with second culture acquisition (i.e., assimilation, acculturation, biculturalism) is that when a person is engaged in this process their objective is to seek acceptance, through developing their competence and proficiency in the dominant culture's

behavioral patterns (Torres, Driscoll, & Voell, 2012). Although behaving more like the dominant culture has been associated with lower levels of psychological distress in Latinx individuals, it has also been connected with weakening an individual's connection to their culture of origin (Padilla, 1980; Torres, 1999; Torres, Driscoll, & Voell, 2012). Similarly, bicultural individuals who learn to manage their cultural frames of reference through alternation, acquire the ease of managing both cultures presumably through a process of gaining competence and learning to operate in both cultural contexts. The implication that a process of developing bicultural competence precedes biculturalism has been associated with models of biracial identity development and suggest that individuals often experience conflict in that process until they gain acceptance in both of their cultures (Renn, 2008).

Thus far, these strategies of second culture acquisition have been framed as unidirectional models founded on the premise that an individual's goal is to move towards adaption in search of comfort in new cultural contexts while their original cultural preferences are at stake to some degree (Berry, 2005). This view of the acculturation process makes it so that an individual can only move away from their cultural preferences and toward the dominant cultures' behaviors and attitudes. In response, Vasti Torres (1999) developed the bicultural orientation model (BOM), that situates Latinx college students in one of four cultural orientations (represented in four quadrants) based on their intersecting levels of acculturation as well as how much they identify with their ethnic identity (Torres, 1999). The cultural dimensions of the BOM includes a Hispanic, Bicultural, Anglo, and Marginal cultural orientations. The Hispanic Orientation represents individuals that endorse low levels of acculturation and a high level of ethnic identity; the Bicultural Orientation is reflective of students that have a high ethnic identity and a high level of acculturation; the Anglo Orientation corresponds with students that identify as highly

acculturated and having a low of identification with their ethnic identity; while, the Marginal Orientation describes students that endorse low levels of acculturation and ethnic identity and feel like they do not at home or comfortable in either of their cultural contexts (Torres, 1999).

The development and validation of the BOM could be a useful tool for practitioners (i.e., counselors, academic program directors or mentors) because it provides a theoretical framework to understand how Latinx students are negotiating the cultural preferences they grew up in and the dominant cultural preferences of college. The study also identified an unprecedented group of Latinx students that endorsed a lack of comfort in either culture (Marginal Orientation) that may represent an unidentified stage of conflict in the acculturation process (Torres, 1999).

Interestingly, current ethnic racial identity models (Vandiver et al., 2001 (Cross Model); Phinney, 1990; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014) and acculturative models have not captured, nor have they explained this sense of discomfort or lack of belonging in both cultures (Berry, 1980, 2005; LaFramboise, Hardin, & Gerton, 1993; Torres, 1999; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2007). The obvious question is, how do students that endorse a Marginal orientation manage culture when it appears that they do not feel at home in either?

The Marginal Orientation in which Latinx students experienced conflict and a lack of comfort in both cultures provides an opportunity to investigate, not only Latinx students' experiences in college environments that implicitly communicates to them that in order to succeed they must adopt Anglo values (Barajas & Pierce, 2001), but also the conflict individuals might experience with their home culture. Several studies have reported that Latinx students commonly experienced racial microaggressions, cultural incongruence, exclusion, and stereotyping in the academy, that negatively influence their sense of belonging, confidence and self-esteem (Fiske, 1988, Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996; Gloria & Pope-Davis, 1997; Harper

& Hurtado, 2007; Solórzano, 1998). Meanwhile less attention has been given to Latinx college students who reported that while in college they felt less connected to, unable to talk with and distant from their family, friends and culture. Some explanations for this phenomenon include, cultural incongruence between the preferred values, discourse, and behavioral patterns of the academy and Latinx cultural patterns; as well as a benevolent positioning in which Latinx students do not want to burden their family with the problems they encounter in college. Yet, students reported that their ideas and values as well as their social tastes and preferences change, and they become less understood and distant from their families (Fiske, 1988; Rendon, 1992). The way Latinx students change their expression and ties to their culture of origin could be an artifact of racism and being in contact with dominant culture, but it also provides space to consider that their enculturated preferences are not static and may also be shifting. Parham (1981) asserted that for people of color, cultural identity is constantly being revised through a variety of points of contact with dominant culture and through contact with their own people, at different stages in the life span (Torres, 2003). Thus, cultural identity may not be static but in flux through an iterative process of revisions based on self-discovery.

2.10 Latinx Students' Relationship with Education

Latinx students have instilled family values, cultural values, and expectations that may conflict with their experience in academia, their expectations and their individual goals. One of their struggles is the balance between their family's expectations and educational expectations, which is rooted in the idea that Latinx individuals living in the U.S. develop their identity by balancing North American and Latinx culture (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Torres, 1999). Part of this balancing act for Latinx students includes deciding what they share with their family, how they clarify expectations and how they maintain their family image (Rendon, 1992).

Family for Latinx students are often their main concern as they navigate and negotiate college. Students maintain an awareness and consciousness that their actions and academic achievement represent and communicate how much they value their family, their role in their family's upward mobility and respect for the sacrifice that were made to get them to college (Torres, 1999; Perez, 2017; Schwartz, Donovan, & Guido-DiBrito, 2009). These assumptions made by Latinx students are derived from multiple preferred cultural patterns and values (described previously) that Latinx individuals learn growing up. When Latinx students move away for college, the transition and distance may cause challenges and tension for *familismo* because it challenges the unquestioned authority of the parents and senior members of the family (Arredondo et al., 2014). It may be worth noting that universities in Latin America tend to assume the students will live with family, not residence halls, when attending college and thereby family remains central in a university student's life. On the other hand, dormitories or residence halls in North America, intensely are segregated by age and focus college life on peer relationships.

As Latinx students navigate the cultural difference of academic settings, they still seek motivation and use coping skills through their culturally diverging familial values. For example, *familismo*, *respeto*, and being *bien educado* manifest through how students *aguntan* or bear the perceived responsibility to honor their parents' struggle and sacrifice with academic achievement (Easley, Bianco & Leech, 2012). Easley and his colleagues (2012) interviewed Mexican heritage students to learn what motivates them to succeed. Students in the study identified a strong desire or *ganas* to succeed in hopes of honoring and not taking for granted the financial, physical and emotional sacrifices their parents have made in order to help them get to college (Easley, Bianco & Leech, 2012). Students in the study shared being inspired by their parents working long hours

doing manual labor, enduring poverty, and leaving family behind in their country of origin so that their kids (students) would have more opportunities in the U.S. Some students in the study acknowledged that their success would embody or be a testament to their family's sacrifices and connect them to their family's story as they overcome their own obstacles (Easley, Bianco & Leech, 2012). In another study, students identified that their success is a way to communicate to their family and community that through education they too can access opportunities and financial stability, thus become an example for what is possible (Fiske, 1988).

Cultural values also influence the conflict Latinx students experience when navigating and communicating what they are experiencing, because it may not align with how their family understands their new lives (Hill & Torres, 2010). Hill and Torres (2010) explained that for first generation Latinx students, the disconnection between them and their parents arise because their parents often have different expectations and understandings about what education would be like in the U.S. The disconnection is often overwhelming for parents as they find themselves excluded from school politics; thwarted when trying to gather information because school materials are often not translated; feel alienated in their interactions with teachers; and talked down to when they try to help their student access educational resources (Hill & Torres, 2010). There is also a marked struggle with the expectation that school values continue on into the home. Specifically, Latinx families have difficulty integrating the independence and autonomy American schools purport and expect families to abide by, which include giving-up power and engaging in an equal-partnership with teachers in regard to educating their children, while being amenable to the cultural perspectives and values that North American schools instill in their students (Hill & Torres, 2010). The incongruences between Latinx families and schools often lead to parents feeling like they do not have a place in their students' lives and their involvement

recedes over time. These early educational experiences for parents, often leave Latinx students to fend for themselves throughout their educational trajectory, establish boundaries between academic and personal family life, and learn to balance and negotiate their identities with family at home, and with teachers, peers, and educational system at school.

2.11 Burden of Acting White

The *Burden of Acting White* is a controversial concept which communicates the history of minority individuals needing to perform Whiteness in order to achieve acceptance, upward mobility, or safety in predominately White spaces (Ogbu, 2004). Although the historical manifestations of “acting White” have changed over time, currently it manifests as pressure by institutions of higher learning for students to fit the mold of an ideal American student. This can include preferred ways for students to dressing professionally, use language, enjoy music, and express themselves artistically. Minorities in the U.S. often feel compelled to “act White” because White hegemony has arbitrarily, with the power granted to them by a history of conquest and enslavement, deemed those that are not part of the dominant class to be seen as inferior, also known as *Involuntary Minoritization* (Ogbu, 2004). According to Ogbu (2004), “acting White” is one aspect of how minority individuals manage their contact with White society, and try to abate the lasting effects of domination which have included: *Involuntary minoritization* (described above); *Instrumental discrimination*, denial of equal access to systemic resources (i.e., education); *Social subordination*, policy that prevents empowerment, (i.e., segregation); and *expressive mistreatment*, denigration of preferred cultural patterns of people that are non-White (i.e., language, familial roles). SOC may also be compelled to change their interaction styles, values, interests and perspectives not only to cope but because they are changed by new ideas, knowledge, and understandings they learn in college (Fordham, 2008; Rendon, 1992).

At once, the “Burden of Acting White” is a common cultural experience, the rule more than the exception. Men (and women) of color are know that in order to be promoted, succeed, or be seen as competent, they will need to learn to perform “Whiteness”. Put another way, for those who work and live in close proximity with Whites, their ability to “make it” is contingent on their willingness to conform to values and behaviors that have been legitimized by Whites and develop an interpersonal style that is perceived by Whites as non-threatening (Tatum, 1997). For Latinx individuals in White spaces this can mean feeling motivated to change their language patterns, hide their religious beliefs, and other cultural references that are not shared with the White-American middle-class. Although Latinx individuals in the U.S. are motivated to behave in ways that can be described as bicultural (White and Latinx), their attempt to bridge the gap between cultures may be perceived within their family, friends, and romantic partner as a rejection of the “old country” and may lead to alienation (Tatum, 1997).

“Acting White” is often perceived to some degree as a rejection of one’s culture of origin. Choosing to ascribe to cultural patterns that are perceived as White has bidirectional relational consequences for both the person that is “acting White” as well as their friends, family and community. First, being told one is “acting White” is accusation of treason against one’s culture of origin, self-hatred, venerating Whiteness and denigrating non-Whiteness (Ogbu, 2004; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Second, it implies that the person “acting White” has been bamboozled into thinking that if they mimic White cultural patterns, then Whites will see them as equals. In addition, the phrase conveys exclusion from a collective identity to which the person “acting White” is not adhering (Ogbu, 2004; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Because non-White cultural patterns are denigrated, to compete in the professional world one must submit to “acting White” to some degree. In the past, one way individuals have coped with the need to “act White” has

been through alternating their cultural patterns depending on which space they occupy (code switching) described previously as *alternation* (LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993) or *accommodation without assimilation* (Ogbu, 2004). Yet, if someone who has been accused of “acting White” maintains White behavioral patterns in spaces in which they are not necessary (i.e., family gatherings, cultural events) or identifies with “White” values at the cost of their own then one might be considered a *sell-out*, or in Latinx spaces, a *vendido*, which means “to be sold” (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). In essence, the person “acting White” has crossed a metaphoric border or boundary that excludes them from citizenship in their culture of origin.

For students, the ‘burden’ in the *Burden of Acting White* is a conscious and unconscious struggle to gain acceptance into academia and avoid domination, while trying to stay rooted in one’s own culture of origin (Fordham, 2008). For black students performing “Whiteness” or “Acting White” in the presence of other black students is a violation of their cultural citizenship (Fordham, 2008). Early in their college transition, Latinx students receive similar encouragement to maintain ethnocentric attitudes and loyalty to their culture and discouragement of “acting White” (Lopez, 2005). Moreover, when Latinx students adopt new preferences and behavior patterns in college, often communicate to them that they feel estranged, and frightened that their child’s values are being polluted, often causing feelings of guilt and distance (Fiske, 1988 & Rendon, 1992). Yet, adjusting to college culture is necessary, to defy negative stereotypes, convey competence, and navigate unwelcoming peer and faculty relationships that make them feel like they do not belong (Fiske, 1988; Rendon, 1992; Saenz, 2008 & Yosso, Ceja, Davis, Solórzano, 2009). Often, SOC are compelled to simultaneously acquire confirmation into academia and maintain their citizenship in their culture of origin, feeling caught between both their culture of origin and that of the academy (Rendon, 1992). Signithia Fordham (2008)

accurately captures the cultural balancing act SOC perform when she writes, “Acting White epitomizes the strangeness of being concurrently erased and embraced, displaced and calcified, perceived in both [contexts] as out of place.”

When individuals are caught in-between these two worlds they construct new types of relationships to dampen the feelings of distance, and betrayal toward their culture of origin. One relational strategy SOC use is engaging in *counter-spaces* with other SOC (i.e., clubs, fraternal organizations, friend groups) that understand the experience of needing to concede some of their cultural identity for upward mobility while losing ground in their own cultural home. A *counter-space* is when students, professionals, or people from historically marginalized groups come together in predominately White spaces (Case & Hunter, 2012; Tatum, 1997). In this context, the *counter-space* provides a sense of belonging based on tacit understanding of what it feels like to be a minority in a space created by and inhabited by the dominant group, providing safety, nurturing and confidence (Carter, 2007). In *counterspaces* students can commiserate about the difficulties they experience in predominately White spaces, such as racism and other things that are important to them.

In addition to *counter-spaces*, individuals cope with “acting White” through *Camouflaging*, support groups and mentoring. *Camouflaging* is when individuals become involved in ethnocentric causes and spaces as a way to communicate that they are still present in their home community (residents in their culture of origin) and have not “sold out” (Ogbu, 2004). *Camouflaging* manifests as activism, joining ethnocentric organizations, or moving into neighborhoods inhabited by minoritized groups; it can also include defending their race when it is attacked, and claiming citizenship and loyalty to their culture of origin (Ogbu, 2004, Anzaldúa, 1987). Finally, some students cope through engaging in support groups and mentorship. Support

groups provide similar benefits as *counter-spaces* by bringing together individuals that can empathize with the struggles of being in a predominately White spaces (i.e., Black and Latinx professional and alumni associations. Similarly, the mentoring relationship provides guidance by someone that has experience navigating upward mobility while managing one's family, friends, and home community. For many, the mentoring relationship is a "stabilizing force" that mitigates peer pressure and self-doubt but is limited due to mentors' limited structural opportunity (Ogbu, 2004).

Finally, the burden of "acting White" is an artifact of racism, colonization, and enslavement that communicates, "if you want to be better", "want to be more", or "want to be treated equally", then you should've been White. Fordham (2008) elucidates that "Acting White", speaks to the difficulties of feeling as an equal in hegemonic culture which exerts social dominance over oneself and one's racial group. The burden of "acting White" involves not only adopting a different cultural orientation but accepting the legitimacy of White hegemony over other people of color. Institutions of higher learning create a gate-keeping function, in which success requires competence in "White" culture. For SOC, accessing opportunities and persistence require cultural concessions to successfully navigate the educational system. SOC often feel like the ideas and language of the university have no place within their family and among their friends back home rendering their identity in both contexts separate and incompatible (Rendon, 1992). Although necessary, cultural concessions made by SOC come at a cultural and psychological price. If students drift too far from their culture of origin they run the risk of being labeled a sell-out by their peers, family, and friends (Fiske, 1988; Saenz, 2009). The idea that one cannot be successful and be fully themselves justifies the system and reifies the

system that communicates that SOC are not good enough, disadvantaged and can only be if they abandon parts of themselves that are undesirable (Boykins, 1986; Jost et al., 2004; Ogbu, 2004).

2.12 Borderlands

Current theories of acculturation do not adequately capture the psychological “tug of war” that occurs for working-class Latinx students in higher education while acculturating to their new academic environments. Working-class Latino male students are prime examples of individuals simultaneously managing their social class, Latinx identity and gender, whilst they figure out their student identities at an institution rooted in middle-class Anglo European ideologies. Their transition to college is a labor-intensive process in which they must navigate cultural membership dynamics of acculturation, actively learn to participate in a new cultural environment, while trying to stay rooted in their cultures of origin. Moreover, they must strive to integrate into their academic institution, overcome the rigor of course work in hopes of upward mobility, which often creates distance from their family and friends that will struggle to reconcile who the student is becoming and who they were when they left home.

Latinx students wrestle with the push and pull of each cultural frame of reference to feel like they belong and are whole in both their home culture and at their institution. In 1987, Gloria Anzaldua wrote that for many who live in-between cultures and manage incompatible frames of reference there is a constant cultural *choque* or collision. Anzaldua (1987) identified that people who live in-between cultures are living in metaphorical borderlands. Conceptually, borderlands are psychological places in which individuals manage their residence in more than one culture. Part of the experience of living in the borderlands is experiencing *Nepantla*, a Nahuatl word meaning ‘in-between space’ (Keating, 2006). *Nepantla* represents both a place and process inherent in transitional life stages, in which identity is renegotiated and worldviews are

challenged. The process is described as a painful, messy and confusing space, which is simultaneously a time of self-reflection and growth (Keating, 2006). Anzaldua (2000) described *Nepantla* as a limitless paradigm which can be applied to the process of exploration of the multiple layered realities that people inhabit.

Conceptually, borderlands and *Nepantla* can be used as an intersectional theory from a Latinx perspective to understand how individuals bargain between cultural realities. In the case of Latinx students like Samson, they may be trying to reconcile a multitude of realities (e.g. geographical, cultural, ideological) that have their own rules and expectations. Those that are residents in the borderlands and *Nepantla* are engaged in a bidirectional relationship between the multiple worlds they are in-between. For example, as a college student Samson is tasked to manage his own expectations as well as those that emanate from his family, culture, community, and institution. More specifically by attending college Samson is simultaneously bargaining: what he hoped college would be and what his experience has been so far; what his college attendance means to his family and their understanding of what he is experiencing; what his college attendance represents to his community back home and how it influences their perception of him; while navigating the rules of the academy, new relationships and his identity. The complex balancing of all these realities provides an opportunity to consider what the effects of these competing expectations can be for students that are in-between worlds. Scholars have identified that Latinx students often perceive their educational settings as hostile, unsupportive and culturally incongruent (Valenzuela, 2002; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996) and further investigation is necessary to understand how students manage to reconcile realities that at times may seem to be mutually exclusive. Anzaluda (1987) suggested that it is necessary to develop theories based on the complex intersectional realities that

marginalized individuals manage to conceptualize the struggles they encounter and meet their diverse and complex set of needs.

2.13 Summary and Purpose

In sum, working-class Latino college students are living between two cultural frameworks of college and their home environment. In college, some of the demands and values of the university environment, culturally contend with those of Latinx students' home environment resulting in what has been identified as 'cultural incongruence' (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). For Latinx students 'cultural incongruence' often exacerbates feelings of not fitting in or a lack of belonging in the college environment which has shown negatively influence their coping strategies and persistence. In order to abate these negative feelings students often feel the need to make cultural adjustments in order to 'fit in', and students respond through several acculturation strategies that entail cultural shifts that can call into question their citizenship in their home culture (Ogbu, 2004, Torres, 1999). For some students negotiating their cultural identity between what and who they are expected to be in college conflict with the expectations of home, which can result with feeling of discomfort in both cultural context. The discomfort they feel signals them to conceal parts of their cultural identity of wholeness in their transitions between college and home. One way to explain what it might be like for Latinx college students to be in-between these two cultural frames of reference is what Anzaldua (1987) called the borderlands. The borderlands can be conceptualized as a psychologically taxing place in which people live between cultures, feeling incomplete or unable to be their whole self in each context and needing to constantly shift and reformulate their cultural identities as they go back, and forth (Keating, 2006).

The purpose of this investigation is to elaborate on how working class Latino students experience ‘cultural incongruence’, and how they manage and negotiate their cultural identity between college and their home environment. Although there are no hypotheses a priori, some assumptions are salient in approaching the study and the population of interest. One assumption is that according to the literature, Latinx students are experiencing a ‘cultural incongruence’ in the college environment and it negatively influences their sense of belonging and fit (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996) Latino men in particular struggle because when faced with difficulties they tend to respond in ways that align with their culture, gender and social class messages which can include a reluctance to seek help, bear the difficulties, and suppress their feelings (Easley et al., 2012; Rodriguez, 2016;) In addition, there is an assumption that Latino students that are targeted for the study are experiencing racial and social class microaggressions and hostile campus racial climates, that influence cultural shifts in order to minimize their effects, which may change their relationships in their home environment. The hope is that through a better understanding of what Latinx males experience interventions can be development in order to meet their needs and improve their persistence.

Chapter 3: Methodology

For the current study I used a phenomenological approach for the current study, a qualitative method of scientific inquiry. My inquiry was focused on learning and understanding how working-class Latino males experienced navigating and negotiating their cultural identity in a predominantly White university in the Midwest. Currently, Latino men are graduating from four-year degree granting institutions at lower rates than their Latinx female counterparts and at lower rates than their male counterparts from other underrepresented communities. Research indicates that historically, hostile racial campus climates and discriminatory sequela have

influenced persistence outcomes in Latinx students. In addition, a lack of cultural congruence has had negative implications on how working-class Latino males adjust to the college environment, a process that has been identified as a key factor in persistence. It is important to understand how working-class Latino men experience their transitions to the college environment, how cultural incongruence influences how they reconcile their identities and the impact it has on managing the cultural contexts they move between. The Phenomenological approach appeared to be the most appropriate form of inquiry to understand the experience of working-class Latino males as it is ideal for describing what one perceives, senses, and knows, as well as explaining that knowledge as it appears into consciousness and how it is experienced (Moustakas, 1994). “The phenomenological account describes what individuals have experienced, how they experienced it, and the meanings they make of their experiences (Perez, 2017, p. 127)”.

3.1 Site

The current study was conducted at a large, public, predominately White, degree granting university in the Midwest (pseudonym; University of the Midwest*). The university’s size, status and racial composition coincided with the types of universities described in previous research that have been hostile to SOC, and specifically Latinx students (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009; Solorzano, 1998). In the two years prior to when the study was conducted several public incidents of racial bias against SOC as well as Latinx students specifically had occurred at the University of the Midwest.

Moreover, the data was collected during a time in the United States (U.S.) in which incidents of racial bias were occurring frequently (i.e., police shooting unarmed Black men) and covered extensively in the media which lead to public uproar around the country. Finally, the President of the United States and his political allies routinely used racist rhetoric to stigmatize

Latinx individuals as criminals, and put forth immigration policies that resulted in the imprisonment of undocumented Latinx individuals and barrier attaining legal status in the U.S.

3.2 Sampling Strategy and Recruitment

Purposeful and snowball sampling strategies were utilized in order to maximize the variation of participants that met criteria for inclusion. Sampling strategies were selected based on the importance stressed by scholars, to intentionally seek participants that are familiar with the phenomena being investigated that can provide information-rich experiences for in-depth study (Coyne, 1997; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). To that end, purposeful sampling allowed me to identify working class, male Latino students that have experienced managing the cultures of college and back home and how these contexts play a role in their lives. In addition, snowball sampling was utilized through word of mouth to identify more working class Latino males students that were interested in telling their story.

Recruitment was conducted on several levels to target working class Latino men across the university to increase diversity in the sample. First, an organizational approach was utilized in which I targeted several Latinx organization through email and by sharing recruitment material through social media pages. Organizations that were pursued were Latino Greek-letter organizations, MEChA (Latinx political action organization), as well as other social justice student organizations that focused on Latinx issues. In addition, various Latinx career orientated organizations were targeted to recruit students interested in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) fields, business, law, and humanities.

Another approach to recruitment was contacting professors, that teach courses in Chicanx/Latinx Studies (CLS), as well as Latin American, Caribbean, & Iberian Studies (LACIS), to request approval to solicit participation from their current students, via email or

through announcements during lecture. In addition, the CLS certificate program sent out recruitment announcements via their email listserv as well as their social media accounts. The CLS certificate program was selected specifically because the certificate is completed by a variety of Latinx students from diverse majors, helping widen the diversity of participants; CLS was also selected because of its status as a supportive space within the Latinx community. Finally, I also made in person presentations in several spaces that were frequented by Latinx students. Interestingly, snowball sampling became an important primary pathway for identifying individuals interested in participating in the current study, as only a few students responded to initial recruitment materials.

Eleven Latino students were recruited that met preliminary inclusion criteria which included being a working class, Latino man, and currently enrolled at the university. The participants working class background, was determined initially by how they self-identified their social class. Additional, inclusion criteria included: a.) raised in the U.S. b.) of traditional college age (17-24), c.) attended high school in the United States d.) entered UW-Madison as a freshmen, e) currently in their third year or beyond, f.) and enrolled full-time at UW-Madison. One participant shared, during his initial interview that he did not attend high school in the U.S. nor was he raised in the continental U.S. at any point prior to college; thus, a follow-up interview was not scheduled for the students and the data collected from his interview was excluded from analysis. In all, ten participants were included in the sample, meaning that they engaged in an initial interview as well as a follow-up, and their data was used for analysis.

3.3 Sample Description

Participant pseudonyms as well as details about their social-class, academic recruitment, as well as campus involvement can be found on Table 1. All of the participants in the present

study were full-time college students that started at the University of the Midwest as freshmen. All of them were at least in their third year of college and had at least Junior standing when the interviews were conducted. Eight of the ten participants grew-up in the Midwest, one grew up in a large coastal city on the West Coast, and another one grew up in a large coastal city in the Mid-Atlantic.

Table 1
Demographics and Distance from home

Participants*	Age	Year	Major	Connections	Home**
Ricardo	21	4 th yr. Senior	Dietetics	Previously a part of diverse club	842mi
Gilberto	19	3 rd yr. Junior	Marketing Statistics	Latinx Fraternity, Hispanic Club, Radio Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers	146mi
Walter	20	4 th yr. Senior	Civil Engineering	Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers	147mi
Lalo	21	3 rd yr. Junior	Bio-Chemistry & Economics	Latinx Fraternity	73mi
Ernesto	21	4 th yr. Senior	Life Sciences Communication	Hispanics Professional of Greater Milwaukee	79mi
Alberto	21	4 th yr. Senior	Communications, International Studies, & Spanish	Multicultural Fraternity	147mi
Francisco	21	4 th yr. Senior	Computer Sciences	Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, Latinx Student Union	2023mi
Marcos	20	3 rd yr. Junior	Political Science & Economics	Latinx Fraternity, ChiLaCSA	41mi
Jorge	22	5 th yr. Senior	Rehabilitation Psychology	Multicultural Fraternity, Latinx Student Union	147mi
Vicente	21	4 th yr. Senior	Environmental Studies & Zoology	Latinx Fraternity, Latinx Student Union	5.5mi

* Participants names are pseudonyms

** Miles away from home

Nine of the ten participants were recipients of academic scholarships, that fully funded tuition at the university, and contributed to their choice to attend the University of the Midwest. These scholarships were associated with the university's Department of Diversity, Equity, and Educational Achievement Educational Equity(DDEEA) which has helped recruit students who have been historically underrepresented (i.e., racial minorities, first-generation, low SES) in

higher education. The University of the Midwest's DDEEA scholarships has been an ambitious initiative meant to remedy previous neglect on behalf of the university to recruit underrepresented students in the region as well as overcome an image of being inaccessible to these types of students.

Table 2
Institutional Recruitment & SES

Participants*	Recruitment*	Work (hrs/wk)	Afford w/o work	SES
Ricardo	DDEEA/ Gates	12	Yes	Middle Class
Gilberto	DDEEA	40	No	N/A
Walter	DDEEA	40	No	Lower Middle Class
Lalo	DDEEA	30	No	Middle Class
Ernesto	DDEEA	35	No	Lower Middle Class
Alberto	DDEEA	30	No	Middle Class
Francisco	DDEEA	10	Yes	Low-Income
Marcos	No Recruitment	17	No	Lower Middle Class
Jorge	DDEEA	20	No	Low-Income
Vicente	DDEEA	50	No	Middle Class

All but one of the participants in this study were recipient of four different types of DDEEA scholarships which included P.O.S.S.E., Chancellor's Scholars*, PERSONS*, and LOCAL* (Table 2.). P.O.S.S.E. is a highly competitive national merit based scholarship that recruits underrepresented high school students from larger metropolitan cities that demonstrate academic and leadership potential. Once the scholarship is awarded these student can choose to attend a university affiliated with the scholarship. Once the scholarship recipients choose their college, they are put into cohorts with other recipients from the same city that will attend the same university, while in college they receive academic and non-academic support throughout their college career. The Chancellor's Scholars is a prestigious academic scholarship awarded to underrepresented students who demonstrate high academic achievement in high school as well as

financial need. PERSONS* and LOCAL* scholarships are financial need based scholarships for underrepresented students that have been admitted to the University of the Midwest and reside in the same state or a neighboring state. These last two scholarships are meant to provide college access through financial support for local students who have met the academic standards of admissions to the university but could otherwise not afford attending. In addition, most the participants noted that they chose to attend the University of the Midwest because of its prestige in the region as well as what it meant to their families.

In addition, five of the ten participants self-identified as low-income or lower middle class, four self-identified as middle class, and one did not specify. Yet among the students who identified as middle class three worked more than thirty hours a week and specified that if they did not work they would not be able to afford college. Ricardo was the only student who self-identified as middle-class and endorsed being to afford college without working on his demographic sheet although he did work; but throughout the interviews he referred to his family as working class, and in a illustrative exercise in which each student selected their level of resources in comparison to others, on a 10-rung ladder, he placed himself between the 3rd and 4th rung, thus he was considered working class as well.

3.4 Study Visit Procedure and Interview Protocol

The research team conducted two semi-structured interviews (Appendix B) with each participant that was included in the sample. For continuity the research team member (RTM) that conducted the initial interview also conducted the follow-up interview. In addition, most of the communication between the research team and each participant was completed by the RTM assigned to the participant. The initial interview was scheduled for approximately 90-mins and was recorded using the Quick Time Player, the follow-up interview was scheduled for 60-mins

and was recorded using the same program, both interviews were conducted in a private room which was reserved by the main researcher.

During the study visit the research team member RTM consented the participant, administered the demographic information sheet (Appendix A), answered questions, and reviewed any items that were not completed on the demographic information sheet, if items were not answered they reminded the participant that an answer would be helpful but not required. Next the RTM asked the participant for their consent to begin recording and administered the interview. At the end of the interview the RTM answered questions, compensated the participant, and discussed next steps to scheduling the follow-up interview. Students were compensated twenty dollars for each interview they completed, thus they were compensated forty dollars if they completed both the initial interview and follow-up.

The first interview was semi-structured developed to better understand how Latino students' experienced their transition to college, cultural incongruence and what it is like and how it feels to manage their cultural identities between college and home. The RTM administered the interview by asking principle questions, and sub-questions, in order to guide the participant to discuss how they experienced the phenomena. During each interview the RTM took notes to capture inconsistencies in the way the questions were asked or understood, and about their experience with the participant and how the RTM felt while they administered the interview.

Follow-up interviews were conducted for each participant, after initial interviews were transcribed, annotated, and preliminary themes were discussed. The second interview was utilized to clarify and better understand the phenomena of interest. Questions for the second interview were generated based on the initial responses participants provided. Subsequent

interviews are often recommended in phenomenological research in order to elucidate the essence and structure of the phenomena being investigated, and to get a deeper understanding of what the students are experiencing (Creswell, 2006; Jones et al., 2014). Additionally, the second interview was also utilized as a *member check* (Creswell, 2013; Jones et al., 2014). *Member checking* is a reliability strategy in which the researcher consults with participants about preliminary themes that surfaced during preliminary analysis and check if the themes align with what the participants are experiencing (Creswell, 2013). This collaborative approach is intended not to just confirm understanding or correctness but to learn from the data and develop questions that may provide more texture and structure to what and how students are experiencing.

3.5 Researcher Positionality

In preparation to initiate this phenomenological inquiry it was important for me to reflect on my biases and presuppositions as a researcher that would potentially share several identities and experiences as the participants in my sample. This reflective process, known as *epoche* in phenomenological inquiry is intended to improve the validity and rigor of data collection as well as for the analysis (Moustakas, 1994). As the primary researcher of the study the *epoche* process challenged me to attempt to name, reflect on and try to eliminate my own pre-understanding about the phenomena I was preparing to investigate (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005; Perez, 2017). Moustakas (1994) acknowledges that knowledge based on intuition and essence precedes empirical knowledge, therefore the *epoche* process also helped me differentiate from my experiences to better center the narratives and experiences of the participants in my study. The *epoche* process began and was supported by my dissertation chair Dr. Stephen Quintana, who guided me in developing an interview that attempted to not lead students to pre-suppositions and allow them to share their experiences. The *epoche* process was iterative and continued through

multiple meetings with Dr. Quintana during data collection, coding, and analysis (discussed later in the Analysis section), in which we dialogued about possible bias in my perspective.

As the primary researcher it important to acknowledge my own positionality. I identify as a cisgender, heterosexual, working class, Latinx man. I was born in South America and immigrated with my parents at a very young age to the U.S. I grew up in southern California in a working class, diverse community. My first language is Spanish, and I learned English through ESL when I started school. As a first-generation college student, I often figured out my own path through school, navigating and negotiating my identity while relying on peers and mentors. My experiences as a first-generation college student, have made me feel that the college environment for men of color is difficult and at times hostile. One of the most difficult aspects of navigating academia has been learning and understanding the rules, expectations and culture of the academy while simultaneous trying to remain rooted in my cultural experience. I have found that being in between these two worlds has created a psychological dilemma in which I never truly feel like I am fully part of or belong in the academy, meanwhile the longer I spend in the academy, I feel I am getting psychologically further from my cultural roots, community and family.

My research team was made up of three members. Two undergraduate students (Samantha de Santiago and Carlos Ortega) who provided support conducting interviews, transcribing, identifying preliminary themes after initial interviews, and developing follow-up interviews for *member checks*. My other research team member was my doctoral advisor Dr. Stephen Quintana who is a professor in the Counseling Psychology department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Dr. Quintana served as a guide in all phases of the research process, but took a more active role as an auditor during the data coding phase of the study as well as throughout the analysis.

Carlos and Samantha were both first-generation Latinx college students from working class background, and they were both seniors, Carlos was majoring in psychology and Samantha majored in Human Development and Family Studies. Given that Carlos and Samantha were both students at the university where this current study was conducted, the research team discussed participants as they were recruited, and processed potential contraindications for specific RTM to conduct interviews with certain participants. RTM did not interview participants with whom they had a conflict of interest or a close relationship. Given that I had several roles at the university in which the study was conducted I refrained from conducting interviews with participants I knew personally.

Carlos identified as a cis-gender heterosexual male, who grew-up in a predominately Latinx working class community in a mid-sized city in the Midwest. His parents were both from Mexico but grew up in the U.S., knew English, thus Carlos grew up predominately speaking English and did not speak Spanish fluently. Carlos attended a private predominately White all boy private high school in which he earned high marks. Carlos described that growing up his peers in his community often joked that he “acted White” because his tastes and preferences often aligned more with his White peers in his high school. Carlos came to college he noticed that although he connected with some of his White peers he never felt fully accepted until he joined his Latino fraternity. After joining his fraternity Carlos found his niche, he took on leadership roles within his fraternity as well as in other settings that were predominately made up of SOC. Carlos was also able to capitalize on his academic abilities and academic aspiration as he was admitted into a selective TriO program that prepares first-generation college students for graduate school as well as finances their graduate studies. As a current student at the university where this study was conducted and by sharing several identities with the participants in this

study Carlos was helpful in providing insights about their academic experiences as he had intimate knowledge of the phenomena under inquiry.

Samantha identified as a cis-gender heterosexual female, who grew-up in a low-income predominately Latinx community in a large urban city in the Midwest. She grew up in a single parent household, her mother immigrated from Mexico and Samantha grew up speaking Spanish at home fluently. Samantha went to local high school that was predominately Latinx in which she was distinguished as a high achieving student and leader, and received a scholarship that financed her undergraduate education after being admitted into the university. When Samantha arrived to college she felt like she did not fit in, and it took her some time to acclimate to the culture of the university. Samantha questioned whether she belonged at the university until she took a course in which she engaged in critical dialogues and felt like her voice was heard. At the end of this course her instructor approached her about leading the course in its subsequent offerings which affirmed her belonging at school and encouraged her to take on other leadership roles. Samantha then joined a multicultural sorority in which she made further connections, received support, and took on leadership roles which further affirmed her belonging at the university. Although Samantha shared several identities with the participants, and was a current student at the university she brought a different perspective because she was not male and had a different experience than the students in the sample. Therefore Samantha was able to provide feedback about how the participants' experiences were perceived and helped to ground assumptions in the data.

Finally, my last team member was Dr. Stephen Quintana. Dr. Quintana grew up in the southwest region of the United States in a working class family that made their living through skilled labor. Dr. Quintana identifies a heterosexual cis-gender male and biracial. His father was

of Mexican descent and his mother was White. Dr. Quintana was the first and only one of his siblings to attend college. As a researcher, he has been interested in and conducted research to better understand how race and ethnicity influence identity formation. In addition, he has done some work on how students adjust to higher education. Dr. Quintana's identities, experience, perspective and his research experience have provided much support in mitigating bias throughout the project and in particular in the analysis.

3.6 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted by the author as well as two research assistants. Data for the study included a demographic information questionnaire (Appendix A), data from the initial and follow-up interview for each participant (audio recordings and transcriptions). Field notes that included reactions and thoughts about the interviews, as well as after session disclosures which were consulted to help clarify phenomena during the analysis process. Data was used for the bracketing process and triangulation of data (Creswell, 2013).

3.7 Analysis Process

Analysis was conducted using a combination of an *interim analysis* framework and a strategy of analysis for phenomenological inquiry combining both Creswell's (2006) approach he adapted from Moustaks (1994) and Hycner's (Groenewald, 2004) simplified approach. Interim analysis is described as the cyclical or recursive process of collecting and analyzing data multiple times during a single research project (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Creswell's as well as Hycner's analytical framework for phenomenology utilize a step by step process by which data is processed to elucidate participants experience of the phenomena. Informed by *interim analysis* data analysis started immediately after the first interview had been completed.

Each interview was analyzed in their entirety, because each piece of data provided a different aspect of student's experience of the phenomena.

Data analysis initiated immediately after the conclusion of the first interview with each participant. Each initial interview was transcribed within a few days in order to preserve any aspects of the interview that could influence analysis. Before the interview was transcribed it was listened to in its entirety and then transcribed verbatim using F5 transcription software, field notes were added to the end of the transcription if applicable. After each initial interview was transcribed, the interviewer met with the me discuss preliminary themes, if I conducted the interview I met with my dissertation advisor to discuss the interview and identify preliminary themes as well. After preliminary themes were identified and discussed the follow-up interview, *member check*, was constructed, reviewed, and discussed. Finally, the follow-up interview was administered and served as a *member check* to deepen textural understanding. After the follow-up interviews were conducted they were also listened to and transcribed, any new possible themes were discussed. The process of identifying preliminary themes, checking them, and allowing for further analysis was an important aspect of *interim analysis* part of the process (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

After all the interview data was cleaned using the F5 transcription software I engaged in an inductive preliminary coding process using F4 coding software to develop a coding scheme, identify meaning units, called *unitization*, and initiate coding evaluation. Dr. Quintana reviewed and provided feedback on the coding scheme and also engaged in the *bracketing* process in which he provided feedback about how my presuppositions could be reflected in the initial coding. Dr. Quintana also reviewed the coding and shared his own coding ideas that challenged me to consider what the participant's responses meant to them and consider process and not just

content. Dr. Quintana reviewed transcripts after I identified the units of meaning, in this current study *unitization* was not standardized. Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, and Pedersen (2013) reported that within the qualitative literature there is little agreement or guidance as to how units of meaning are decided upon and that arbitrary methods that use, length of a statement or complete sentences often obscure the phenomena being studied. In addition, these types of categorizations can often decontextualize participant narratives or make the meaning of what was shared appear to be disjointed. Thus, I decided on the units of meaning for each transcript, highlighted them, and shared it with Dr. Quintana for him to code. This process was repeated for the three interviews Dr. Quintana was assigned to code. After, Dr. Quintana coded the interviews we met, discussed the coding, received feedback and then I recoded each interview that Dr. Quintana assessed in order to reach consensus.

After the coding scheme, which included preliminary codes and meaning units, was agreed upon, I developed a code book and coded the remaining interviews. Codes were discussed throughout the coding process during routine check-ins with Dr. Quintana. The next phase of analysis, was *clustering* together units of meaning that seemed to be related and were categorized together in order to allow the formation of themes that were emerging from the data (Hycner, 1999). Through this process of *clustering* a clearer understanding came into focus about what the participants were experiencing as they managed their culture between their academic context and back home. After *clustering*, I reported the emerging themes to Dr. Quintana, which were discussed and further analyzed leading up to reporting the findings and discussing the phenomena that was observed. Throughout the analysis, for which Dr. Quintana was the auditor, the iterative process of *epoche* and *bracketing* continued with Dr. Quintana for which he guided me to reflect on my assumptions and consider how I reported my findings by staying very close

to the words and narratives of the participants. Dr. Quintana served as an experienced voice that helped me continue centering the phenomena that was being studied.

3.8 Write-up

The last phase of a phenomenological inquiry is for the researcher to construct a *textural* and *structural* description of the phenomenon. Yüksel and Yildirim (2015) described the *textural description* as a narrative that “explains participants’ perceptions of a phenomena, (pg12)” using verbatim excerpts to illuminate what the participants’ are experiencing. This *textural description* was presented in the write-up of the results which used the verbatim excerpts to explain what the students were experiencing. To compliment the *textural description* of what the students experienced, a phenomenological researcher also presents a *structural* description which identifies the contextual forces that explain how it happened (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). The *structural description* was represented in the discussion which identified the structural factors that contributed to the difficulties the students encounter in college and further contextualized their experience by using the existing literature focused on the experiences of Latinx students in academic environments. Put together these descriptions provide insight into the *essence* of the phenomena of how Latino men negotiate their cultural identity between college and back home.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Introduction

Throughout the interviews the participants in the current study reflected on and described: their academic and familial experiences before college and how they learned what was expected of them; their experiences during their transition to college and the adaptations they made to fit in; and how their college experience shifted their image, relationships, and

expectations back home. Analyses of these interviews indicated a broad pattern whereby these Latino men struggled with the social and cultural norms of how they were supposed to perform their roles as students at this predominantly White institution or (PWI). The interviewees described their enculturation to the role of student, and how upon arriving to the university they sensed that their socialization in a working-class Latinx family and community, ‘rubbed’ against the White middle class norms that dominated their university. These students described the friction between the culture of college and back home and the adaptations they made to their social performance in order to fit-in, which often included concealing aspects of themselves. Finally, the participants described their difficulty bridging the culture of college to back home and their decisions to conceal aspects of their experiences in college as a way of manage the expectations and relationships back home.

Through the analysis of the interviews three main contextual-themes emerged that applied to all the participants in the study that described their relationship to and expectations of each context. The contextual-themes were 1.) In search of a better life, 2.) Navigating the racial hostility of the PWI, and 3.) Reprising former roles to navigate back home. Within each contextual-theme, *textural* themes emerged that gave *texture* and detail to what the students experienced in each context as well as their responses to these experiences. To illustrate and ‘give life’ to the themes that emerged within each contextual-theme, two student narratives representative of the stories of the students in this study are presented in this following section.

Within the contextual-themes, the frequency of how often the *textural* themes occurred within the sample will be described by using labels and parameters adapted from Clara Hill and her colleagues’ (2005) work that describes ranges of the occurrence of thematic categories in qualitative data. The ranges Hill and her colleagues (2005) described were as follows: *General*,

described themes that occurred for all cases or all but one case; *Typical*, represents a theme that occurs in more than half the sample up to the cutoff for general; *Variant* includes at least two cases up to the cutoff for typical; and *rare* includes two to three cases. The parameters that Hill and her colleagues' (2005) defined for each range will be used for reporting of the findings of the present study but the labels will be adapted as some of Hill's labels appear to be stigmatizing (i.e., *variant*) and disembody the narrative from the person. Thus, *all or all but one* will replace *general*; *Most* will replace *typical*; *Several* will replace *variant*; and *a few* will replace *rare*.

4.1.1 Student Narratives

Julian

Julian grew up in a diverse working-class community and was socialized into Latinx¹ culture to value hard work and family [**Latinx cultural socialization**]. As the eldest son he learned that as a man he needed to be a provider and if he did not go to school, he would have to sustain himself through manual labor like his father, who took Julian to work with him so that he could learn the family business. In addition, because both of his parents worked, as the eldest he was expected to take care of his younger sisters, manage school on his own, and help out with whatever the family needed [**the good son**]. Early on at school, Julian was put in ESL classes but by middle school and through high school his teacher took notice of his high marks, he was considered “gifted”, placed into advanced courses, as well as recommended him for scholarships that would make college financially accessible [**early academic experiences**]. Although Julian attended a predominately Black and Latinx high school, his peers in the advanced courses were predominately White wealthier students who came to his school from the “rich” part of town because his school offered the advanced courses. Often the only Latinx student in the advanced courses he split his time between the peers he grew up with and his White friends he made in his classes with whom he felt comfortable despite racial and class differences [**early academic experiences**]. While his peers in his community got caught up in drugs and gang life, he stayed on the “straight path” in which he focused on his plans to succeed [**el buen camino; bien educado**]. Excited by his academic potential and his parents' pride, he would bring his schoolwork to family gatherings and was often teased for being “a brain” by cousins and friends. He was motivated by his parents' reminders that education was necessary to make something of himself [**son that will make something of himself**] and their cautionary tales of struggles they faced due to a lack of education. Julian believed that if his parents could make a life for him and his sisters without any formal education then he would use college as a way to get out of his hometown where there were few opportunities and seek a better life. Julian set his sights on college, applied, took the required exams and visited campuses on his own, he received a scholarship that would pay for the costs of his education.

¹ The term Latinx and Latine are both currently being used to provide more inclusive language in the Spanish-speaking community. This study uses Latinx because that is the term that students used at the time of the interview.

Julian arrived on campus excited and confident but was perplexed by his struggle to connect with his White peers in academic spaces and in his dorm. The White students in his dorm seemed to do everything together, but Julian was not invited to join. Julian considered himself an extrovert so he would push himself to join his peers albeit not invited but often felt unwelcomed and endured racial jokes at his expense [**institutional disregard**]. He experienced other microaggressions as well such as being made fun of for speaking in Spanish while on the phone and having confrontations with peers who made racially insensitive comments about Latinx people. Julian prided himself in what he called a “warriors’ mentality” and felt like he had to dawn an aggressive stance to deal with the racial hostility and refused to temper his cultural expression in those instances. Yet, in other settings like academic work groups with all White peers he felt like he couldn’t be fully himself and was more subdued in his interactions, at school he generally felt like he needed to ‘tone down his Latino-ness’ [**cultural performance**]. It wasn’t until Julian purposefully sought out other Latinx students his second year that he felt more connected to the university. Among other first-generation Latinx students and students of color, he made friendships in which he felt he could be himself. He became actively involved in his newfound community, frequenting events at the cultural center and joining a Latino interest fraternity which felt like family. He felt supported within this community of students from similar backgrounds because they could likely understand what he was going through [**counterspaces**]. When he encountered financial and academic struggles, he relied on his friends at school to listen because he did not want to add to his parents’ worries and thought they wouldn’t understand. School consisted of several demands, yet his parents also asked that he attend to demands back home. When his mother would call and ask him to come home for a family event, or to help with something they had trouble navigating because of language barriers, he had to choose between working to make ends meet as well as academic demands or go home and attend to his family duties [**college student vs son**].

Going back home was a busy time for Julian full of several demands such as spending time with his mother who wished he would come home more often, mentoring his younger sisters, and helping with whatever his father needed [**reprising childhood roles**]. Julian enjoyed spending time with his family but was often preoccupied with all the demands waiting for him at school. When Julian was home, he reported his academic achievement to reassure his family that he was working hard, but concealed struggles, ‘put a nice coat of paint on it’ to not lose face or worry them [**maintaining the image of the son who will make something of himself**]. Julian dreamed of becoming a doctor and being able provide for his family and thought that if he shared his struggles, his parents would lose confidence in him or believe he was wasting his time and not making the best of the opportunities provided. Julian often thought he had to manage everyone’s expectations back home and he could not be his full self. Because most of the people back home had not gone to college, he thought they would not understand what he was dealing with [**family difficulty relating to college**]. Julian noticed a similar trend with his friends back home who did not go to college, had different priorities and goals, and whom he thought just wouldn’t understand what he is pursuing [**difficulty connecting with friends back home**].

Domingo

Domingo grew up in a predominately Latinx working class neighborhood in a large Midwestern city. His culture was everywhere in his community and from an early age he learned that he needed to be obedient and follow the path that his parents set out for him [**Latinx cultural socialization**]. Domingo recalled having a structured upbringing with rules, expectations, and consequences because his mother wanted to keep him safe from the community violence that was common in his neighborhood. His parents made sure he worked beyond his workload at school,

stressed the importance of education, and made it clear that “failure was not an option” and that anything less than academic success was failure **[son that will make something of himself]**. Determined to make something of himself, Domingo stayed away from peers that were getting involved in gangs and drugs and focused on his academics to show his parents that he valued his opportunities and would make them proud **[bien educado]**. To meet his parents’ high academic expectations, he worked hard and earned good grades, he considered himself a “smart kid” and knew he would fulfill his parents’ goal to go to college **[early academic experiences]**. Although his parents did not go to college, his sister had gone a couple years prior, and he had been warned that if he did not make it to college, he would be failing his family. His academic confidence and determination led him to pursue a prestigious academic scholarship to fund his education, even though his high school advisor expressed doubt that he would win the award **[son that will make something of himself]**. Despite winning the scholarship that would fund the cost of his undergraduate education, Domingo was hurt that his advisor did not believe in him, but he learned that he could overcome challenges through hard work like his parents.

Excited to start his college education, Domingo recalled his transition to college initially being good, he lived in the residence hall with several other Latinx students his first year. But outside of that environment, among White peers and faculty he felt unwelcomed and insignificant. Domingo’s professors did not see him as the “good student” and conveyed having low expectations of Domingo and refused to help him when he asked on several occasions **[institutional disregard]**. As one of the only Latinx students in engineering, Domingo was eager to connect with his White peers, but they often excluded him from group work on class assignments, ignored his contributions, and rejected his bids for them to connect outside of class. In social settings, White peers called him racial slurs, mocked him for the way he talked, and scrutinized his diction often pretending like they couldn’t understand what he said or asking him to repeat himself **[institutional disregard]**. Domingo described being in a ‘fishbowl’ when he was in the presence of White peers and felt like he had to monitor his diction and the way he expressed himself **[cultural performance]**. He noted that when he was alone in public spaces, he sensed that he was being watched so he avoided going into public spaces without a group of friends, stating “[I] do not even put myself in situations in which I feel uncomfortable.” Due to the difficulties connecting with his White peers as well as some academic struggles, Domingo considered quitting school, but stayed because he thought, “My parents didn’t come all this way for me to go home.” Domingo tried to engage with his White peers and in common activities students at his college participated in (i.e., football games) to feel a part of the school but was routinely reminded that he was perceived as an outsider. Domingo described losing faith that he would ever feel part of the university and a distrust that his White peers would treat him as an equal **[institutional disregard]**. To seek respite from unaccepting peers and messages of not belonging, Domingo sought out the cultural center, joined a Latinx fraternity, and spent most of his time with other first-generation Latinx students and other students of color who made him feel like he mattered and belonged. Within this college cultural community, Domingo established relationships in which he did not feel judged, spoke Spanish, used slang, expressed himself any way he wanted and did not worry about managing the perception of his White peers or faculty **[counterspaces]**. These peers became like family with whom he shared his emotions, struggles, and worries, something that he could not do with his parents because he thought it would jeopardize the trust and faith he had established, that he was taking advantage of his opportunities **[maintaining the image of the son who will make something of himself]**. Thus, when Domingo experienced difficulties at school, he did not let his parents know because he wanted to manage their perception; for example, when he struggled with depression due to feeling isolated, he did not tell his parents because they did not believe in mental health.

The influence Domingo’s parents’ expectations had was clear when he visited home in which Domingo transitioned from independent college student back to the role of son. He was expected to

adhere to curfew, prioritize his parents' plans, and update his parents about his academic progress **[reprising childhood roles]**. During these updates, Domingo described a rosier image of his experience in college and concealed academic as well as mental health struggles because in the past sharing these difficulties resulted in family ruptures **[maintaining the image of the son who will make something of himself]**. When he was home, Domingo's parents reminded him that failure was not an option which he said, "silenced him." Domingo stated that because his parents didn't go to college, they thought it was as simple as going to class and doing homework, they did not understand that aside from school he had to manage his finances, relationships, extracurricular involvements, and mental health **[difficulty bridging back home with college; family difficulty relating to college]**. Domingo stated that he felt like he was living two lives between school and home and that he preferred that these lives not come into contact. Domingo also concealed his school life from his friends back home because he believed they wouldn't understand his struggles, goals, or priorities. Most of Domingo's friends back home didn't go to college and were focused on surviving, Domingo thought his friends saw him as privileged and if he shared his college life he would be perceived as boastful and remind them that they hadn't taken advantage of their opportunities **[difficulty connecting with friends back home]**.

4.2 In Search of a Better Life (Theme 1)

The interviewees in the study described the feeling that from an early age their family, peers, and community believed in the student's potential. All of the students described what they believe was a concerted effort from their parents to invest in their academic success. The students described these investments coming in different forms, such as, parents using some of their savings to help pay for an elite preparatory school, parents volunteering in their classrooms to make sure their child was doing their best in school, taking their son to their place of employment to demonstrate the difficulty of manual labor, to working several jobs so their son would not be burdened by worries about finances. In reflecting on their experiences, most of the students recalled experiences before college that communicated the belief that they could make it to college if they did their part. In this section I have presented the messages the students reported receiving regarding the expectations they had the potential to and responsibility to meet, and how being seen as having potential put them in spaces and in contact with students that differed from their families culturally and by socioeconomic status.

4.2.1 Meeting High Expectations (Theme 1.1)

Upon reflecting on expectations and experiences prior to college, most interviewees reported their perception of how the importance of attending college, and high academic expectations were communicated by their parents. Most of the students indicated that ‘high expectations’ were communicated by their parents by how much they emphasized the student’s school performance, extending themselves financially to invest in education, were involved in school, and by seeing their parents struggle financially. Marcos a 20 year old political science major described, “And that’s what, at my young age, after being harped on by my parents, like ‘You have to go to college, that’s the only way you’re going to make it,’ so that looked like the right path to make it.” In addition, a several of the interviewees reported that they remembered that their parents made sure to keep the students away from peers and social contexts that put them or their academic aspirations at risk. Lalo a 21 year old majoring in bio-chemistry and economics from a rural community stated:

“My parents knocked into me, you better good grades, don’t do drugs, that type of stuff. [I had to stay] on the straight path. So it was just a battle avoiding peer pressure and just keeping a clean mind-set, like I need to focus on [school] education right now is my main goal.”

A few students described that their parents expected them to go to college and failing to do so would be seen as a failure. Walter a 20-year old civil engineer major described his parents high expectations:

“They had really high expectations. I was the first person from my family to leave out of the state. My dad was more lenient, and said, “you know I believe in you, you’re gonna push forward”. But my mom has always been more like, “you can’t fail,” like if you fail...you can’t drop out of school, if you come back it would have been a waste of time, you know? My family didn’t really give me an option to fail, they’ve always had high expectations for me.”

Several students also described their own desire and initiative to perform well, to be the “good student” not only by earning good grades, but also by being a good athlete, a student council member, and being involved in other groups and activities. Gilberto a 19-year old majoring in marketing statistics who had parents with high expectations described:

“I wanted to stand out as a student. So, I was vice president of Key Club and co-captain for my JV swimming team. Yeah, I guess what I did in school and all my extracurriculars took up the bulk of my time in high school”

All of the students reported that the main reason they were driven to work hard at school and try to follow the path toward college because they wanted to make good or fulfill their parents’ dream for immigrating to the U.S., which was to provide a of a ‘better life’ for their children. Marcos stated:

“Because ultimately, my goal was college. So, I think if you really sum up, like my background or where I'm from, it's, I am the child of couple immigrant parents whose goal, of which they would remind me all the time was to get me to college.”

The participants in this study reported that prior to college their parents expressed their expectations that they needed to succeed. These students were driven by these expectations because they did not want to let their parents down, which kept them out of trouble and on the right path, as well as encouraged them to push themselves in school. In addition, how the students responded to these expectations indicated that even prior to college these students were controlled their image as students to meet their contextual demands.

4.2.2 Full of Potential (Theme 1.2)

Several of the students described that graduating from college was a goal related to what they perceived was a wish or a hope from their parents that they would go on to succeed through education and realize their potential. Several of these students reported that their parents wanted them to have a “better” life, stable work, and more opportunities than they themselves had. In

addition, a few of these students described a sense that their parents hoped that their son would not have to work as hard as them. Marcos reported his father's hope that he would have more opportunities and not work as hard as him, "you have to go to college so you don't like end up like me, tired all the time, maybe something in an office where you can just sit down and make a good buck." Similarly, Lalo described how his father conveyed this message by making him go to work with him during Lalo's 'free-time' in high school:

"And then, just working with my dad, kinda made me hate manual labor. I realized I don't want to do manual labor for the rest of my life, because that is what a majority of my family does, they do landscaping or some other type of manual labor. So, that was what motivated me to pursue education."

In addition, a few students described their perception that their family believed that amongst the family members their age (i.e., cousins), they were the most dedicated, the most likely to succeed through education, and some pressure to live up to their potential and image.

Lalo stated how his family viewed him:

"Out of my cousins, I'm the only one to go to the four-year university, they didn't love education as much. At times, when I would go to family parties, I'd bring my books and stuff, and they'd throw little jokes at me like, "What are you doing? Come on you fucking nerd." And I was like, "Okay, but when I am in college, you'll rue the day!" I was teased for being "the nerd," and going to school and stuff like that."

Shifting from family, most of the interviewees reported that through middle school and high school they saw themselves as high academic achievers and described sensing that aside from family, their teachers and peers also perceived them to be destined for college. These students described being seen as "smart" an image influenced by earning awards and recognition but also by the faith and hope others expressed in their potential. Alberto a 21-year old senior triple majoring in communications, international studies, & Spanish stated:

"So for most of my life, everyone has thought of me as like, he never does anything bad. [He] always does things good. But once I got my scholarship, everyone was like, "Oh, my God, like, congrats!" My teachers were also very proud of me, because they helped

me with recommendations and everything for the scholarship. My teachers' said that they thought highly of me and really wanted me to excel. They were all happy that I got the scholarship. And hopefully, I would be doing great things in college."

The students in this study described being seen as having potential and therefore set apart from other family member as the one that will make something of himself. The perception that they had potential expressed by family, teachers, and peers was affirming and it influenced their confidence and faith in themselves.

4.2.3 Early Crossings Into White Spaces (Theme 1.3)

Throughout the interviews several students indicated that at some point prior to college they earned admission either into a competitive school, were selected into advanced placement or gifted tracks at school, or attended schools that were predominately White. Several students described noticeable differences in race and socioeconomic status among the students with whom they were put into class, which they said helped them somewhat acclimate in their transition into a predominantly White college. These students described noticing that their classes within these programs looked different then their community or the rest of their high school, Lalo shared:

"Definitely the gifted program helped me a lot because there were a lot of other [White] students. The rest of the high school was predominately multicultural and the gifted program was mostly White, I believe me and my cousin were the only two Hispanic students in the program at least in our grade. It was like trying to prove yourself throughout high school, and [although you're] Latino you can be at the same level as the rest of these [financially] better off White students, White students [that came] from the east side, to the west side high school because that's where the gifted program was housed."

Another student indicated that entering college at a PWI reminded him of an earlier experience entering academic spaces in which he was one of few Latino students, Ernesto a 21-year old life sciences communication major stated:

“Coming to college was like going back to like elementary school, I just felt like a lot of the same emotions and flashbacks of moments were constantly coming back up. Coming here was not quite a culture shock, but a cultural throwback because I went to an elementary school that was primarily white in a really well off neighborhood.”

The students that described these early crossings into predominately White spaces also described that in addition to differences in race there was also a social class difference with which they became accustomed to navigating, as Marcos stated, “As soon as I stepped on the campus of the prep school I attended there was a change. I realized a majority of the students were you know, middle-class to a little wealthier.” In addition, a few students indicated that when they made this transition into these White spaces prior to college they were able to find comfort across race and social class unlike what they would encounter in college. Lalo stated, “in high school, I guess most of my friends were white.”

4.3 Navigating the Racial Hostility of the PWI (Theme 2)

All of the students in the study reported that once they arrived on college they sensed that they were in an environment that felt much different from their community back home. The interviewees indicated that their hometown and their new college environment differed along several factors including: racial demographics, cultural norms, social class, academic rigor, cross-cultural relations, proximity to their culture, open-mindedness towards personal expression, access to their heritage language, social connectedness, and how they were perceived the peers in their environment.

This section highlights the descriptions the participants shared related to: their perception of the differences between back home and the college environment and how it impacted their sense of belonging, how they navigated spaces and places in which they felt unwelcomed or perceived differences in cultural norms and preferences, and the strategies that helped them feel more stable and supported in their new academic environment. Overall these students reported

that they gradually felt like they were able to manage some of the perceived differences in their new college environment; most reported navigating these perceived differences through an ongoing process of learning, adapting, and coping with the cultural differences.

Most of the interviewees reported feeling eager to start college and excited by the possibilities, but also reported sensing early on that in order to feel like an accepted member of the school community they would need make adaptations. These students also described feeling that if they did not make these adaptations, they would be vulnerable to being stereotyped and excluded by their White peers. Navigating the racial hostility of the PWI for most of the participants was a shift from their cultural home in which they were mattered and perceived as destined to leave for more opportunity; into a culture where they sensed, through implicit and explicit messages, that they were seen as deficient in their cultural knowledge which kept them from being allowed full membership and access into the culture of college at their PWI.

4.3.1 Institutional Disregard (Theme 2.1)

The students in the study reported that throughout their time at the university they encountered incidents and implicit reminders that the university was not for them or that they were not important. All of these students described that when they arrived to campus one of the first things they noticed was the shift in racial demographics between their hometown and their college environment, as Ernesto stated, “It's much more diverse back home, especially in the area I lived.” Several students reported sensing the environment felt foreign because it was missing the cultural markers that felt familiar such as the food they grew up eating, opportunities to speak their heritage language and other forms of verbal expressions, as well as seeing peers that shared their racial, ethnic, or cultural background. Ricardo a 21-year old dietetics major from a large diverse city in the mid-Atlantic stated:

“I always think about how I am more culturally immersed when I am back home. I have all these resources, I have my family which kind of mainly defines my heritage but I also have access to Latino stores and things like that, just like having the Latino community as well, which I don’t have here in terms of culture.”

Most of the students in the study indicated that during their first couple of semesters in college the perception that there was little diversity across several contexts at their university often contributed to a diminished sense of connection with White peers and to the institution. When these students started college they were struck when they were one of few or the only Latino student, or student of color, in their residence halls, lecture halls, as well as at sporting events and parties, which were well attended by White students. They were also one of few in the community that surrounded the university, Lalo explained:

“It was a little bit of a shock coming here, and I felt like alright, there’s no Latinos. I thought there would be at least some. I didn’t know where they were, maybe they somewhere else on campus, but maybe there’s none at all.”

Several of the participants also reported the perception that because they were one of few or the only Latino student in their residence hall, their White peers were less interested in connecting with them and excluded them from building community in these spaces. The lack of interest these Latino students reported manifested in them being excluded from group outings with their floormates, roommates that showed little interest in connecting and developing a relationship with them, Macros described his experience:

“My floor was not diverse. It was, you know, similar identities (White peers) coming from [around the state] or other areas around the US. I think I didn't even hang out with my floor mates that much, my roommate either, I really didn't talk to him, we weren't really friends like that.”

Several of these students also reported experiencing microaggressions within these residential spaces. Ernesto described being stereotyped:

“The first day I moved in, one of my friends from high school was in the same dorm as

me, so another friend, who was also Latino and I went to help her move in and her roommate just gave me and my friend really awkward stares the entire time. And, every time I moved close to her to move something she would jump back like she was afraid of us. Afterwards, we asked our friend, what was her deal? She said that her roommate had never met a brown person before. And she was afraid that we would take something or hurt her”

Several of the students in the study described being surprised that they were having difficulty connecting with White peers because it had not been a challenge prior to college, as Jorge a 22-year old from a large midwestern city described, “Back home, I had white friends, here I don’t have any white friends. Back home, I felt like it was different.” A few students indicated feeling like their affinity towards the university diminished as a result of disinterest from White peers to connect, Walter stated:

“I just wish I had more of a social interaction with like people on campus, aside from like my group of friends. I wanna feel more involved on campus, I wanna see what its like outside my friend group, but like I don’t feel like I’m welcomed, because people usually just stick to their friend groups you know?”

A few students indicated having a perception that White students at the university were inadequately prepared to connect or interact with students of color (SOC). They also shared that by comparison the White students at the university were unlike the White individuals they were accustomed to in their hometown, whom they perceived to be more experienced in and open to interacting with people of color (POC), as well as able to value POCs without fitting them into stereotypes. Alberto shared :

“I feel like back at home people have more a sense of [the diversity of the neighborhoods], the melting pot of people. And they realize that so they know how to communicate and know about each other in the community because talking to people is a necessity in the city.

Students in the study also described experiencing disregarded across academic settings. Several of the students indicated that the disproportionate amount of White students compared to other SOC in their classes, contributed to their sense of being physically out of place in these

academic spaces. Alberto shared “so just like getting used to it, like being the only brown kid, in like a one-hundred-person class and stuff like that.” Many of these students described incidents in which faculty and peers contributed to their perception of feeling unimportant. A few students described discouraging incidents with White faculty members like Walter:

“When [...]the professors [asked], “Oh did everyone understand this? I raised my hand and said, “no, I didn’t understand it”. He responded, “Well everybody else did, [...] so were gonna pass it”.] And it kinda gives me like a sense of like, “damn like, you don’t even care about me”, basically, you know?”

Several of the participants in the study also described incidents in academic spaces with White peers that added to their perception that they did not matter to them, nor were they seen as equals. These incidents included: their White peers avoiding them physically in classroom spaces; selecting them last when forming academic work groups; rejecting their bids for further connection; and feeling ignored or irrelevant during group work, Alberto described his experience:

I’m not listened to [...] or given feedback as much because of my background. If I’m in a group of five people, and I’m the only [person of color] in the group, and I say something, no one responds, but when somebody else, a white person does, then it’s like, they get all the praise.

In addition, several of the participants indicated feeling denigrated when White peers directly and indirectly questioned their deservingness of gaining admission to the university as well as earning merit-based academic scholarships. These students noticed that their White peers openly voiced their perception that Latino students were given admission and funding primarily because of their ethnic background. Most of the participants in the sample that were on scholarship identified that these informal assessments of their academic legitimacy by their White peers were hurtful and brought up feelings of anger, frustration, and a diminished sense of pride. Ernesto, who was a recipient of an academic scholarship described how he manages “I try

to avoid telling people I'm in an academic scholarship most of time, just because they instantly think 'Oh, it's because you're brown'."

Finally, several Latino students indicated sensing that there are barriers for them to attend social gatherings and events like at football games, tail-gates, bars or parties on Greek row without feeling like they were out of place. Several students described the perception that by accessing these spaces they would be putting themselves in an unsafe position that were just not for them, Walter described avoiding these spaces, "I've never gone to like a [Main] street party because I don't wanna put myself in that situation you know?"

Several students reported some drawbacks of attending events that White peers mostly attend such as feeling outnumbered and under observation by their White counterparts. A few participants described feeling out of place at football games and being anxious that they were being watched and judged in this space and therefore were unable to act 'naturally'. Walter described his experience at a game:

"I remember one time, my sophomore year, I [went to a football game] with my girlfriend and a couple of friends and when everyone stood for the national anthem, we're like, "nah, never mind, we're not gonna stand up for that shit". And everyone just looked at us, they were all standing up, I couldn't see anybody else sitting down, and it really made me feel uncomfortable. [...] I feel like a lot of times I fall into a stereotype, I feel like White people are like, "oh this is why Mexicans are blah blah blah" and stuff like that you know?"

In predominately White spaces (e.g. classrooms or bars) the participants felt outnumbered, judged, and watched. Several students described that they often sensed safer when there are other SOC present because it often feels like it alleviates the perceived pressure for these students to perform, Alberto stated, "And just the relief that I sometimes get, from even someone from my own cultural background, just being in my classes like, "oh, we're going through the same thing." The disregard these students experienced was disappointing and it

diminished their sense of safety, acceptance, and belonging which they had manage in addition to their transition to a new cultural environment.

4.3.2 Cultural Performance (Theme 2.2)

Most of the interviewees reported that they often felt like they had to change how they behaved and presented themselves in college to fit-in. These students noticed that they spoke, dressed, and interacted with family and friends back home much differently than they engaged with their White peers and faculty in college. They reported that at school, in predominately White spaces, they felt a pull to conform to the, diction, style, and attitude that were common amongst their White peers. Most of the participants indicated that when they did not make these adaptations they sensed that their legitimacy, competence, and professionalism were questioned; thus they monitored how they presented themselves and made these adaptations in academic spaces as well as other contexts (i.e., internships or labs) to avoid judgement. The participants in this study described these cultural adaptations as performing White mannerisms, both directly as well as through coded language. Below I present the cultural adaptations that most of the students in the study perceived they needed to make in order to fit into the college environment.

Several students described noticing their diction was often one aspect of their interaction style that they felt was being evaluated and indicated the need to control it. Several interviewees described that when interacting with White peers and professors they perceived feeling more acknowledged and accepted when they used more formal or academic diction. Students described this form of verbal expression as a ‘performance’ in which they changed their tone of voice, refrained from using slang, avoided cursing and tried to sound ‘proper’ which appeared to be euphemism for White. Vicente a 21-year old senior who grew up in the town in which the university was located stated:

“Like I said before, like, I have to be someone else when I'm in class, and when I'm around white people. I feel like I have to be very, very proper. It's like acting, more quote, unquote “smart”, knowing what you have to say and stuff like that. But like in a different tone of voice, and using proper English.

Several students described that using academic diction was important to their persona as a Latino man in college because they sensed that their White peers and faculty used this part of their expression as a factor to determine their competence, familiarity with university culture, belonging, and professionalism. Several of the participants reported that their diction was an important aspect of their role as a student that they had to control in order to blend-in, “sound smart,” avoid being misunderstood, or asked to clarify what they said, Alberto stated:

“I have to change up a lot. Like, if I'm in the presence of a White teacher, I'm going to act professional, I'm going to not swear I'm not going to do anything that separates me from a White individual as a POC on campus.”

A few of students identified that they monitored how they dressed as well. These students shared that they often had to decide between what felt *natural* and what felt more traditional or common with how other students dressed on campus. They indicated that the way they dressed paired with their phenotypical features often elicited different responses from their peers. They reported that part of what they considered when choosing what to wear, was fitting in while trying to maintaining their sense of identity. Ricardo stated:

“I always have conversations with my friends about it, like if, I should naturally dress the way I dress to my liking or if I have to limit myself for everyone else here on campus, or like my surroundings. I would say I have to be a little bit more cautious here than back home, with the way I express myself. Sometimes I feel like I get looks when I am walking to class or something like that.”

Ernesto described judgement he receives from White peers when he tries to conform to the style of college:

“I guess another difference [between home and school] is how I dress too. When I am here at school I typically have to dress more like nice. Even when I dress nicer [then I do

back home] people are still like, “Oh, you look very *urban* today”. And I kind of hate that word at this point. So it's one of the things I try to avoid.

Finally, several students reported that another aspect of themselves they needed to control was their emotional and behavioral reactions when they felt offended or marginalized. They described instances in which they perceived that a White peer, faculty member, or community member hurt or provoked by using racially biased language or stereotypes. Several of these students reported that this occurred through racial microaggressions which included being dismissed, their work denigrated, racial epithets, delegitimization, and physical threat. These students indicated that when these incidents occurred they felt like they had to accept or show restraint to the affront out of the perception that if they reacted inappropriately, they would incur some consequence which they wanted to avoid. Gilberto described an experience in which he was physically encroached upon:

“It was this big white dude saying “perdoname, perdoname (excuse me in Spanish),” which is kind of problematic. And he was trying to move [past me] and then he just pushed me and said, move over Jose (euphemism for Latino man). I was like, “Noooo!” I was in a state of shock. And he left, and I just felt so bad. Like, I didn't say anything. I didn't do anything. And when I told my friends, they said you should have swung. And I thought, I should have. You're completely right.”

Marcos explained the restraint and patience with which Latino students need to manage anger and disappointment when they have been offended:

“And it isn't until it happens that they (White students) are aware. And I think the big threat here is: will that (Latino) student who sadly has been offended, insulted or minoritized, will they educate that individual? Because it's hard after you've been attacked, even if unintentionally, it's hard to then educate the White person and look the other way. Like, I know you just said something that isn't okay but now I have to tell you why it isn't.”

For most of the participants in this study the adaptations they made to blend into the culture of the PWI were intentional decisions to avoid being judged and having their legitimacy questioned. These adaptations required them to culturally perform what they believed were

White mannerism and override the diction, style, and emotional responses that seemed to be most authentic. Embedded within their descriptions of their cultural performance was sense of being evaluated, that indicated a hypervigilance to perform in the presence of their White peers and faculty, which raised the stakes of these interaction.

4.3.3 Spaces of Affirmation (Theme 2.3)

Described above, most of the participants indicated that in many spaces they perceived that their presence made their White peers uncomfortable, was unwanted, a nuisance, or inconsequential. All of the students in the study described being most comfortable among the Latinx organizations they belong to, in informal or formal spaces that were designated for SOC, and spending time with SOC. These Latino students described that within these spaces they felt seen, understood, taken care of, recognized, and not alone. Ricardo stated:

“I am super glad that I joined this magazine here on campus last year, that is when I started to feel the most comfortable at the university because it is a very diverse group of students and we all come from very different backgrounds.”

Several participants described their college environment in what seemed to be two different campus spheres of “the college experience,” one in which White students and culture were emphasized and another that occurred within specific spaces and programs in which these Latino men felt like their experience was centralized. Francisco stated:

“I feel like there's two communities like the bigger communities [the university] that sometimes [feels] a little iffy for me to say that, yes, I am accepted [...] then the smaller community of, you know, the [diversity programs] that allows me to feel a little bit closer to connected to my culture. “

Several students also described that within this *diverse* community which seemed to exist on a different social plane than the larger university, they were established connections and received affirmation. This occurred in spaces that were both formal and informal, that most of

the perceived were where they belonged and felt welcomed. These spaces included: hang outs and outings with Latinx students as well as other SOC in establishments within the community that catered to Latinx culture; scholarship meetings with students who mostly identified as first-generation or SOC; Latinx or multicultural Greek organizations; to physical spaces like the Multicultural Center that served as a hub for campus life for SOC. Lalo described where he felt connected:

“I guess my experience now, of how I feel on campus, is that I feel more included, especially going to places like the multicultural student center, being part of the multicultural Greek council, being part of my fraternity, so you start interacting much more with a multicultural crowd so now I feel included, I feel like I’m not constantly struggling to meet people.”

Most of the students in this study belonged to Latino Greek-letter organizations and reported that their organizations have been a place in which they felt most connected. Students described that within their organizations they presented themselves more authentically, were more comfortable seeking emotional support, shared their struggles, and could express frustration with both back home and school. Alberto described his experience with his organization in comparison to his connection with his family, “So I’m just not gonna talk about it [back home], while over here, like, if [I] bring up something up, it’s like, ‘Damn, bro, How do you feel? Like, Are you good?’” Most of the participants also indicated that interacting with other first generation students or other SOC gave them a sense of being better understood and supported, as described by Lalo, “being first generation you kinda don’t know what you’re doing and then once you start meeting other people who are also first generation you start figuring it out [...] making that little network kinda helped out.”

Given the cultural differences between back home and college that were previously described, these spaces of affirmation were very important to the Latino men in this study. These

spaces provided a respite from the judgement and scrutiny most of the participants encountered in predominately White spaces. According to the participants these affirming spaces improved their sense of belonging, provided emotional support, and an opportunity to be their authentic selves and not feel like they had to perform like in other spaces on campus.

4.4 Reprising Former Roles to Navigate Back Home (Theme 3)

After starting college, the interviewees described perceiving changes in how they interacted with their family and friends back home. The students indicated that the changes they felt pertained to: how they reported their experiences in college and what they believed was useful to share and omit in order to manage what they believed their parents' expectations were; how they balanced their role as college students and what they believed was expected from them as a son; and finally, how they perceived a shift in their connection in their relationship with their parents and friends back home.

Students reported that, when they went home, they had to negotiate their role both as a college student and as a son. They described feeling that they were expected to perform aspects of their roles as before leaving to college with their friends and family, while also acknowledging that their college experiences had shifted their perception of their role with them. Several of the interviewees described a sense of loss when they talked about their new roles in their families and communities because of the changes they had made learning and adapting to the culture of college. These students indicated feeling out of place because they could not bring their full selves into their relationships back home.

4.4.1 Maintaining the Image of the Son Who Will Make Something of Himself (Theme 3.1)

Most of the students in the study reported that a common aspect of being back home was feeling like they needed to manage their parents' perceptions of how they, the 'good' student,

was fairing in college. How they were fairing was determined by how their parents perceived their academic performance, future career path and prospects, and their overall confidence that the students were taking the right steps in order to succeed. Most of the interviewees reported that they often navigated this perceived expectation through the intentional omission of the struggles they may be experiencing in college, based on their belief that reporting difficulties would worry their families. Several participant reported that one way they concealed their struggles was through projecting confidence and control over their college going process, in hopes that they could convince their families that there was no cause for concern. Several students also described that the struggles they faced in college were often incompatible with the image they believed their parents held so they chose to provide a *watered down* version of their experience and conceal academic struggles, insecurities, and uncertainty. Lalo described how he filtered information back home to appear in control:

“Back home, I try to act like I know what I'm doing. [This way] everything just sounds simpler and [my parents can think], “Oh, yeah, he's fine [and] that everything's good.” But they don't know like, “Oh shit, I have this project. I'm struggling here.” I'm doing this and that. So I guess [I present] an, “I know what I'm doing” mentality at home. Whereas here [at school] it's like, “Oh, shit, I'm on my own right now.” [I] just put a “nice coat of paint” on stuff when [I] go back home like everything's fine”

In addition, several students also indicated that one of the reasons they chose to omit that they were struggling was because of their perception that their families' held a high expectation for their academic performance. These students described that it was more important to them to maintain the image of a high achieving student, than to be forthcoming about their struggles, because they did not want to feel like they were letting their parents down or degrading the image their families' held of them. Walter explained concealing his struggles

“My parents have such high expectations for me academically [that] when I go home I don't like to tell them like, “Oh I was struggling with this class”, and so [those expectations] kinda push me into silence about my academic struggles, but also about my

social struggles, and I don't feel comfortable enough to tell them, I'm going to counseling. You know?"

A few of the students described that they felt like their parents expected that when they went home they would be able to describe a plan charting a path towards success. The participants described this expectation often included being able to list how their current academic decisions and work are connected to career aspirations, and the steps they have taken to network with individuals that can set them on the right path. These students further reported that they often spent time preparing how they would communicate their plans to their parents to ensure they preserved the positive image they believe their parents had of them as intelligent and hardworking sons. The students reported noticing that in communicating these plans, there was little opportunity to share their struggles, uncertainty, or their own understanding of how their plans fit together if they believed their vision would not satisfy what they perceived their parents expectations to be. Ricardo reported preparing for these check-ins:

"It is difficult because the [flexibility I have at school] gives me time to figure out things, but I feel like whenever I have to go back home I have to be aware of my next step in terms of my career. So [when I am] coming home [I have to come] with like an answer or some plan of what I need to be doing."

Several students described that when they went back home they usually shared superficial information about their goals, opportunities, and their progress towards their career aspirations because they believed that their parents had gaps in their knowledge about college; which could lead to misunderstanding how their current academic path was related to their goals. The students described that their parents' gap in information led to the assumption that the path to a well-paying job or career was clear cut and linear. Macros describes this gap in information:

"My mom asked me, 'what are you going to do after you graduate?' I told her, 'oh, my degree is political science which opens me up to many options, I'm trying to go to law school.' And she's like, 'oh, but is it prepping to ensure you a job right away?' [She continues], 'Oh, I know that there's programs like nursing, engineering, or business that

as soon as they get out, they have a job lined up.’ [My mom says], ‘you should do something like those programs or you should do something like a skilled labor tasks, you should go into accounting so that you can you go learn accounting, and be an accountant.’ And I always tell my mom, ‘No that’s fine, I want to go to law school, I have an open course ahead.’”

A few students reported difficult conversations with their parents about staying in college a year longer than expected because their parents believed that college needed to be completed in four years and more time indicated that the students were encountering setbacks, this phenomena was illustrated by Walter:

“One of the hardest things for me was to tell [my parents] that I was taking a fifth year because I feel like they would [think], “oh why is he taking that whole extra year to graduate, when college is four years.”

Most of the interviewees indicated that it meant a lot to provide their parents a sense of within the family. A few of the participants reported being proud that their parents could report that they were doing well in college or that they themselves could tell their aunts and uncles how well they were doing in school, how much time was left before they graduated, and clear career plans. Several of the students who were the eldest shared the importance of doing well so that they could fulfill their parents expectation that they guide their younger siblings on how to get into and navigate college. Guiding their younger sibling was part of the image they had to uphold as the example and the son who will make something of himself. Jorge described the importance of his role in the family:

“Being the first one to go to college means a lot for my family and to the people that come after me, especially my little sister, being able to be that role model, an example for her to follow is just huge and important.”

All of students in this study reported that it was important to make good on what they perceived their parents’ hopes and dreams were for them, which included: graduating from college, having a good career, financial stability, being their parents’ legacy in this country,

putting forth the effort necessary to succeed, and to be successful in life. Moreover, several of the students described how they wanted to honor the sacrifice their parents had made and struggles they had endured in order for them to have the opportunity to go to college. Marcos described his father's message, "My dad always tells me, 'Oh, man, my dream is to see you walking [across] the college stage.' That's what he wants, he always says, '*Si dios me da permiso.*' (If God gives me permission). So, I'll be there."

Although several of the participants reported that they had to uphold the image their parents had of them, it was not unwavering and there were moments when their parents provided reassurance. Several students described moments in which they felt too exhausted to keep up the image of 'the son who will make something of himself' and let their parents know that they were struggling academically, and feeling surprised when they were met with words of encouragement, validation, and affection. Alberto described sharing an academic difficulty:

"I was struggling through calculus 1. I used to love math before I came here, [...] but I knew during those weeks, that something bad was going to happen. I just knew in my head, couldn't come back in this class from a bad performance on a test. So I knew what was going to happen, and it was gonna suck. So I was telling my dad all about this, and he was like, 'Oh, It's gonna be okay, son. I know, you can do it. You've done it for like years and years. So you're going to do good.' And then he said, 'I love you.' I was like, thank you. '*Gracias.*'"

Throughout this theme the students in this study expressed difficulty being forthcoming and vulnerable about the struggles they encountered in college because they were afraid that this would compromise the image their family held of them as the son who would something of himself. Many of these students described not wanting worry their parents but also reassure that they were on the right track. According to these students this relationship dynamics created some isolation and prevented them from being fully know by their family. Interestingly even though these most of the students described being unable to share struggles or failures due to their

parents' expectation, when they were open and sought support their parents met them with care and encouragement.

4.4.2 Student Vs. Family Roles (College Student Vs Son; Theme 3.2)

Another theme that emerged in regards to how the students in this study navigated back home was their description of how they managed their relationship with their parents as a son. Several of the students reported the belief that their parents had trouble grasping that as full-time students, living away from home, they could not attend to family life the way they perceived their parents wanted them to engage in it. Several students indicated that they had difficulty managing what they perceived was family obligation and the competing demands on the university which included attending classes, homework, projects, exams, work, internships, friendships, leadership roles in organizations, romantic partnerships, and finding time to rest after managing the demands on their time. Lalo described the pressure his mother put on him to devote more time to her, ““Oh you don't call me enough!’ I’m like, ‘Mom I'm making the effort, I’m trying to call you,’ it might be like five days in between because I'm swamped that whole week.” For most of these students the expectations they had to attend to, as a son, appeared to be incompatible with their obligations of being a college student.

It appeared that although the demands in the participants' lives had changed due to college their roles in their families and their family's expectations were not adapted to accommodate these new demands. Several of the participants reported feeling guilty that they could not visit home with the frequency they would have like to, or the frequency their parents would have liked, in particular their mothers who reminded them that they were not coming home enough. These students were concerned that if they did not go home enough it would be perceived that they were intentionally staying away, not interested in their family, prioritizing

other people or events, or neglecting their “responsibility” as a son. Gilberto described his mother’s disappointment that he could not come home for enough time during the summer because of his internship:

“When I told my parents, I got the internship, I remember I called my mom right away. And she was not happy. She said, ‘I thought you were going to be here *mijo* all summer with me.’ And I told her, ‘this is a really good experience and I really want to spend the summer here. She said ‘okay,’ but I remember she hung up the phone and she seemed really sad. On the other [hand]. I called my dad and he said that it was a great opportunity, that he was proud, and that I should definitely accept it. I told him mom's not happy. So we were able to create a happy medium. So for two weeks before my internship, I was back home just to keep her happy and it made me feel better.”

Most of the students in the study described that when they went home they had to perform the roles and responsibilities they had before they went to college and for some of the participants this also meant they had to abide by the same rules they did growing up (i.e. curfew). Thus, going back home was mostly time for family and to attend to their obligations as sons which meant helping, doing chores, or accompanying their family on routine errands. Alberto reported how he spent his time back home:

“I like helping my parents, but they ask me to help out a lot when I come home. I'm not against it, but I want to spend time with my sister. [Instead] I have to go do the groceries or the laundry with [my parents]. Which is kind of kind of like quality time. But it's very quiet quality time. There's not much talking.”

Several of the participants described frustration that their families had difficulty understanding that the competing demands of college decreased the time they had to dedicate to their family. These students reported they avoided going home because when they were there they had a hard time allocating time for their academic responsibilities. Thus, several students indicated that when they had free-time they preferred to stay at the university to either recuperate from their demanding schedules or to complete schoolwork because they perceived their time

back home would be accounted for by family. Ernesto described the difficulty of balancing family time and student demands

“Back home, it's more like we do things for each other. Here at school it's more ‘I’ focused, back home it's more ‘we’ focused. And while I appreciate [my family] for what they are, back home can be tiring. But being here at school can also be a lot less rewarding. Balancing [these two perspectives] is the biggest challenge. Like if I know I have midterms coming up next week, I try to avoid going home because I know I'll come back and not be ready for them.”

Because for most of the students their role in their families were not renegotiated despite having left for college, at times they had to attend to their roles as a son and prioritize their families’ needs while they were physically away from home. Lalo described attending to family:

“My parents don't really know how to manage computer stuff. So they still call me up to help make online payments, [and] other things [...] they still depend on me to do that for them.”

Several students also indicated that on some occasions visits back home were restful, and a much needed break from academic spaces in which they had to monitor what they said, what they wore, and how they were being perceived. A few students described back home as a place in which they disconnected from school and left some of their academic worries behind. Several students indicated that home helped them recharge their confidence through their connection to family and culture (e.g. food, language, and diversity). One student described how much it meant for him to go back home and dance with his sister for her quinceañera.

Finally, several students in the study reported that although it was difficult to discuss their struggles, they perceived that while in college and physically away from home they noticed that their parents provided more encouragement. The students reported that during phone check-ins their parents told them to keep striving, be proud of their accomplishments, give themselves a break when they are tired, be cautious with elevated stress levels, and to not be too hard themselves. Ricardo describes how his relationship has changed while being away ‘Since being

away at college, I've gotten closer to my family because the distance has motivated me to talk to them more often and have more deep conversations about my experiences here.”

This theme described the difficulty several of the participants had balancing the obligations of being a college student and trying to fulfill their roles as sons back home. Most of the students described having to decide how to allocate their time between each context which often made it seem like they had to choose between college and back home. This dilemma further separated these two contexts as several students realized that it was difficult to fully fulfill these roles. These students were torn between fulfilling their parents' expectations of being academically successful and the cultural and familial expectation that they prioritize their family.

4.4.3 Difficulties Bridging School and Home (Theme 3.3)

Finally, most of the interviewees indicated feeling that as college students the strength of their connections back home had been difficult to maintain with both with their family and friends. They reported being misunderstood by their families because many of them had not attended college themselves. In addition, they reported that their disconnection with their friends from back home might be because these friends believed that the participant might have lost touch with their home community.

4.4.3.a Family Difficulty Relating to College (Theme 3.3.a)

All but one of the students that were interviewed reported feeling that as they continued their educational journey in college, they had more difficulty relating to their parents. The students reported that the primary barrier for relating to their parents was that their parents had not gone to college so they had difficulty understanding their college-going experience. Several students reported that the most common topic they held back on was explaining what they are studying because they thought their parents could not contextualize what they were learning. The

students reported that this perception lead them to speaking broadly or giving few details when their parents asked them about their coursework, their major, as well as their academic and career goals. Lalo stated:

“I don't really talk much about my major because I feel like most of my family just won't understand biochemistry. I would have to go down a rabbit hole to explain [...] Back home the main reason they think I'm in school is to be a doctor. I don't really try to explain that much to them because they just won't understand it.”

Several students indicated that the difficulty their parents had understanding what they were experiencing also discouraged the participants from sharing their ambitions, aspirations, and beliefs, or asking for help or guidance. Thus, many of the students believed that they had to be more self-sufficient. Marcos described college as coming between he and his parents.

“Being here at school, I have almost separated from my family in terms of being able to share the experiences I have here. Like yeah, I can tell them to my mom and my dad, but they can only comment so much. They [can say], “make sure you're doing this or that and go look for help, but it's very limited. So being here at school, it's hard to talk to them. So I really learned how to be independent coming here [to college].”

For several students the experience of going to college became a difference between them and their parents that was difficult to overcome because there was little continuity between the worlds of college and back home. These students found it difficult to translate their experiences and learning process in terms their parents could understand because the context of college was so unfamiliar. This difference between the context resulted in more distance between most of the students and their families.

4.4.3.b Difficulty Connecting With Friends Back Home (Theme 3.3.b)

Several students in the study reported that since they have been away at college they felt like it was more difficult to connect with their friends back home. These students indicated that their difficulty connecting with their friends back home was due their belief that they no longer

shared the same ambitions, goals, or life experience with these friends. Several of the participant described perceiving that their friends back home were stuck in old unproductive patterns while they saw themselves as in the process of attaining a “better” life, Alberto stated:

“[My friends back home] are not very goal setting people trying to progress in life. So I feel like that's why I fell off with that friend group. It's not that they're not doing anything with their lives, its that they're very stale in everything that they do. And there's not much progress in the things that they do. I mean people always say you surround yourself with people that are like you, the same, I have goals and aspirations.”

Many of the students also shared that because they felt like their friends could not relate to their experiences in college they often avoided talking about their college experiences with them, made tentative plans to spend time with them when they went back home, rarely reached out to them, did not return their bids for connection (e.g. texts and social media), or stopped engaging with them altogether. A few of the students reported that one of the reasons they no longer spent time with these friends was because they were not interested in or had outgrown the interests and activities their friends back home engaged in. Vicente:

“I want to be the best version of myself as I can you know, [I] feel like being in the north side, constantly hanging out, and doing the same things I was doing in high school is not gonna help me.”

A few of the students described that their closeness with their friends back home diminished because they had to conceal their college experiences out of concern that their friends back home might see themselves as less than or perceive them as acting superior. In addition, these students also indicated that attending college was seen as privileged amongst their friends back home and they might be jealous because they did not attend college, get a scholarship, or because they dropped out. Walter described concealing his college experiences:

“A lot of times it's weird hanging out with my friends from back home because I'm used to talking about like, “oh this is what I do in college” and stuff like that. And, I don't wanna make them feel like they're any less because they dropped out of college or they

didn't go at all and they're working full time. I don't wanna rub it in their face, [that] I'm going to college because I got the chance to you know.

A few students also described that the disconnection from their friends back home occurred gradually and unintentionally. These students described some regret that their connections with their friends had faded because they had to make choices that were necessary for them to achieve their goals. Vicente stated:

“It kind of makes me miss a little bit of who I used to be. But I know this is for the best because I want to be successful and this is what it takes. And so I do it. But I hope my friends can realize that, because I still really care about them, and I still want them in my life.”

Finally, a few of the students described remaining close with friends back home that also attended college. These students described their perception that these friends understood them better because they went to college and had similar goals, were also first-generation college students at a PWI, had immigrant parents, and could share their own experiences to which the students in the study felt they could relate.

Several students in this current study described difficulty connecting with their friends back home. They noted that they no longer shared the same goals or experiences with their friends back home because they were not in college. In addition, these students expressed that they saw their friends back home as stagnant, not evolving, and sensed that they had outgrown them. Several of the participants in the study mentioned that they no longer saw these relationships with friends back home as positive influences, thus there was little reason for them to hang on to them. Interestingly the participants' shifts in preferences occurred in college which again emerged as a barrier to overcome in relationships back home.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to better understand how working-class Latino men negotiated their identity in college at a large predominately White institution (PWI) in the Midwest, as well as how they managed the cultural expectations and values of college and back home that at times seemed to be in conflict. The students elucidated the expectations and messages that guided who they needed to be and how they needed be in each context in order to persevere. In all, the finding suggest that these students made several adaptations throughout their academic trajectory. Findings will be discussed to highlight the adaptations these students made to meet the expectations of each context and will be contextualized in the current literature.

First, I will discuss the factors that influenced the participants' cultural and familia enculturation and how it influenced their early educational experiences; within this phase of their academic trajectory students described a nourishing environment in which they were encouraged by their family, peers, and educators that helped them develop confidence and a strong student identity. Second, I will discuss the participants' transition to college in which they encountered messages and social barriers that made them feel isolated, unwelcome, and question their belonging despite being promising students. Contextual messages of the culture of college that influenced the participants adaptations will be unpacked. Next, I will focus on how the participants managed the expectations and their relationships back home that clashed with demands of college. The transitions between each context, were transitions between two cultures of which the participants lived on the border, they required cultural shifts that often prevented the participants from being their full selves. Finally, *Borderlands* (Anzaldua, 1987; Keating; 2006) is discussed as a way to understand the experience these students had living between two cultures.

Recommendations are provided for PWIs, college counselors, and support programs to better support Latino males as well as other under-represented students.

5.1 Latinx Cultural Socialization and Early Academic Experiences

Prior research has reported that to understand how Latinx students manage and negotiate their identity in college we must consider the environment in which they grew up, specifically their *situating identity*, made up of the messages they received about themselves from their family and academic settings (Torres, 2003). For the students in this study, their *situating identity* was forged 'back home', a formative context that nurtured their cultural and student identities through messages that conveyed the belief that these students were capable of and expected to attain academic success. Their cultural and student identities were further strengthened through overcoming several challenges at home and school, while fulfilling expectations held by their parents, teachers, and peers. Furthermore, most of these students viewed their academic goals as intertwined with their families' hopes and dreams and described being on a mission from a young age to succeed not only for themselves but for their family as well. Thus, many of the students described being conscious that their parents expected them to make something of themselves which meant meeting expectations both at home and school.

Previous research has reported that one of the most salient influences on how Latinx individuals understand what is expected of them occurs early in life through *familismo*, a cultural value that socializes individuals to prioritize their family's needs before their own as well as a willingness to help when the family is struggling (Marin & Gamba, 2003; Santiago-Rivera, 2002). *Familismo* at times can be stressful and burdensome (Arredondo, Gallardo-Cooper, Delgado-Romero, & Zapata, 2014), but research has also reported that being able to support family through their struggles and in achieving their goals, engenders pride and a strong sense of

belonging for Latinx individuals (Santiago-Rivera, 2002). This interdependent value is often intensified among immigrant working-class Latinx families in which goal attainment requires everyone to contribute, thus working-class Latinx children often learn that their contribution is to manage their education on their own (Hill & Torres, 2010). Previous studies on how social class influences child development reported that working class and low-income children often demonstrate more independence in their academics to not burden their family, and a willingness to provide support for their family (Laureu, 2011; Piff et al, 2010). Moreover, for Latino men early socialization is often gendered which may lead to their proclivity to aspire to be breadwinners, family protectors, and hard workers; for eldest Latino children these roles as well as parental roles for younger siblings are performed during early development (Arredondo et al., 2014). For the participants in this current study, the influence of family and *familismo* extended beyond home life into their pre-college academic settings and social life; a hallmark of *familismo* is interdependence, but these participants often enacted *familismo* by demonstrating high levels of independence in order to fulfill their parents' expectations.

The participants in this study described the importance of showing their parents that they were someone they could be proud of and that they were on the right path to fulfill their potential. Previous research on the influence of *familismo* on Latinx students often focuses on students' familial dedication by highlighting their willingness to prioritize family needs and their dependability, but *familismo* is also a performance that reassures parents that their child is on the right path, or *el buen camino*. Reese and her colleagues (1995) interviewed 32 Latinx parents of young school age children and reported that the main concern these parents had was that their children be *bien educados* or well-educated. But, being *bien educado* was more than academic education, it also inferred good moral development and an intimate understanding of Latinx

cultural values and preferences. Moreover, these parents described that being *bien educado* meant their children would demonstrate they were on *el buen camino*, which meant that they valued education, knew right from wrong, put family first, and showed *respeto*, or respect.

For the participants in this current study, it was important to show their parents that they valued education, knew right from wrong, and could make choices that indicated they were living up to their potential. The importance for Latinx students to live up to their potential and make something of themselves was also reported by Reese and her colleagues (1995). Being *bien educado*, on *el buen camino*, and living up to their potential were interrelated values that extends our understanding of how *familismo* is enacted; through their choices and behaviors these students demonstrated their intention to stay the course to fulfill their perceived familial expectations. Thus, most of the students wanted to show their parents they were *bien educados* and on *el buen camino* both in the community and at school. In the community, many of the students described staying away from friends caught up in drugs or gangs, or the “wrong crowd,” because they did not want to be associated with these elements of their community out of concern that their family or community would perceive them as being on the wrong path. Little attention has been given to how Latino college students navigate community barriers that can get in the way of academic motivation and achievement, or that can lead them away from college. Buriel (1975) briefly mentioned that part of the acculturation process for working-class Latinx immigrant families is that the second generation has to navigate the difficulties that come with growing up in low resourced communities.

At school, the participants enacted *familismo*, by becoming exemplary students who were involved in several extra-curricular activities, earned high grades and academic recognition, while they managed their responsibilities at home. Through their effort and dedication at school

they demonstrated that they were *bien educados* and on *el buen camino*. These students believed that academic excellence infused their family with the confidence that they were committed to their academic success and merited parental investment, resources, and sacrifice. Favorable academic performance positively influenced their relationship and standing within their parents and family. For most of the students in my study, tangibly demonstrating being *bien educados* and on *el buen camino* prior to college through their academic achievement was an influential force that fused their familial and student identity development into ‘the intelligent son who will make something of himself.’ This identity connected home and school, two worlds that are often seen as discrepant (Hill & Torres, 2010), because it maintained a consistent image of our participants between these two contexts. Furthermore, by using academic performance as a means to demonstrate being *bien educados* and on *el buen camino* they showed their parents that they also valued hard work and sacrifice. Previous research has reported how important it is for Latino students to show their parents how much they value the work ethic that has been modeled by their parents (Easley et al, 2012).

Interestingly, another influential factor on our participants’ self-concept and academic identity was the type of academic encouragement and motivation their parents provided. Previous research has reported that Latinx students are often motivated by their parents’ high expectations and familial obligation (Easley et al, 2012; Perez, 2017). Neimeyer, Wong, and Westerhaus (2009) surveyed Latinx middle school students to understand the role of *familismo* and parental involvement on academic performance and reported that parents often encouraged their students through non-academic support at home rather than at school. In my current study, most of the participants were motivated and encouraged by their parents through stories and testimonies, that were cautionary tales warning them of the consequences of not getting an

education, namely having to work physically intensive jobs for low pay. Previous research has reported that Latinx families often teach cultural values and life lessons by using stories and testimonies or *cuentos y testimonios* (Comas-Diaz, 2006). Through these stories and testimonies their parents' expressed their dreams that they would accomplish more than they had and their faith that their sons were meant to have a 'better' life.

In addition, most of the students in this present study were distinguished as the ones that had the potential to succeed within their immediate family, or pave the way for their younger siblings if they were the eldest. Some participants described being seen as having more potential than their cousins, which filled them with pride, but also represented that their parents' were 'doing something right.' The comparisons and status that their parents assigned these students encouraged them to see themselves as having the potential to make something of themselves, it also disrupted the hierarchal power dynamics common in Latinx family structure (Arredondo et al., 2014). One can imagine that it would take some level of humility for these parents to tell their sons, 'you will be better than me.' These familial messages bolstered our participants' confidence and potential for success in college.

Finally, participants who were developing their academic identities were strongly influenced by early academic experiences that affirmed their confidence and belief that they possessed the potential to succeed. Prior research often depicts first-generation Latino college students as working-class and coming from diverse under-resourced high schools in low-income communities, in which their teachers undermined their success by providing little support and having low expectations (Cerezo et al, 2012; Hill & Torres, 2010; Schwartz, Donovan, & Guido-DiBrito, 2009). While most of the students in our study came from working-class families and communities, they were regarded highly and distinguished early for their academic performance.

Like Julian and Domingo, the students in our study were considered the ‘smart’ or ‘gifted kids’ and were tracked into more selective and rigorous academic settings (i.e. advanced placement, magnet program). More importantly, these participants recalled their teachers taking notice of their potential and nurturing it which further increased their belief that they had ‘what it takes’ to succeed in college.

Perez and Taylor (2017) reported in their study, that high achieving first-generation Latino college students that attend selective universities were often distinguished early in academic settings and received high levels of support from their parents, teachers, mentors, and peers who believed in their potential. Furthermore, they were often selected into academic TRiO programs that helped them navigate their road to college and fund their college education (Grier-Reed & Ganuza, 2012; Perez & McDonough, 2008). Similarly, most of the students in this present study were associated with college bound programs and recipients of prestigious academic scholarships that funded their education. Although first-generation Latinx college students are commonly described as being isolated from White peers who differ in socioeconomic status in high school (Orbe, 2004; Perez & Saenz, 2017), the participants in this current study were comfortable interacting with White peers in selective academic settings in high school with whom they felt comfortable and fostered close relationships. My participants’ relationships with their White peers in White spaces in high school were early signs of their ability to adapt to unfamiliar contexts, challenging the notion that Latinx students in college cannot connect with White students because they lack the social capital to do so.

Prior research has reported that Latino students are disproportionately underprepared for the rigors of the university (Hernandez, 2002), however, the students in this study performed as well or better than their peers in rigorous advanced courses which proved their academic

legitimacy at school. Our participants drew upon their cultural values to navigate the structural barriers that working-class students encounter in their academic settings. In addition, their work-ethic, dedication, and upbringing provided a foundation for their determination and ability to adapt to unfamiliar contexts in their academic setting before and during college, which is common in first-generation Latinx students (Cerezo et al, 2012; Hernandez, 2002; Ojeda, Navarro, & Morales, 2011; Yosso, 2005). The students in this study developed strong student identities in high school, bolstered by highly competitive merit-based academic scholarships which confirmed their potential. In addition, they were nourished by their family and community and distinguished to be the ‘intelligent son that will make something of himself.’ These students were well prepared and had all the characteristics that made them excellent candidates to navigate the university environment successfully.

5.2 Institutional Disregard

Institutional disregard refers to the unwelcome and lack of care the students in my study reported experiencing at the university. For the students in this study, this disregard was communicated through racial bias, which included microaggressions, exclusion, and rejection, from their White peers and professors; they perceived their treatment as a representation of their value and status at the university. Previous research has reported that Latinx students, as well as other students of color (SOC), often feel unwelcomed at PWIs due to the incidents of racial bias they endure which includes discrimination, stereotyping, and microaggressions (Fisk, 1988; Turner, 1994; Hernandez, 2002; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). Furthermore, Hurtado and her colleagues (1997) asserted that when Latinx students experience several incidents of racial bias in college they often perceive their campus climate as racially hostile which can curtail their sense of belonging, undermine their confidence,

and make their transition to college more difficult (Hurtado, 1994; Hurtado & Carter, 1996). Similarly, although the students in this present study experienced high regard and encouragement in high school, they described difficult transitions to college due to incidents of racial bias that made them question their belonging and whether or not they would stay at the university.

Unfortunately, there is a high prevalence of Latinx students as well as other SOC enduring racial microaggressions at PWIs which has been extensively reported on in prior research (Levin, van Laar, & Foote, 2006; Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff, & Sriken, 2014; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso et al., 2009). One notable study analyzed the existing literature on racial bias and classified microaggressions into three categories: *microassaults* (overt racism); *microinsults* (subtle racially demeaning remarks), or *microinvalidations* (comments that nullify the experiences of people of color). Yosso and her colleagues (2009) extended Sue and his colleague's (2007) work by conducting focus groups with Latinx students about their experience at three elite PWIs and reported them experiencing three types of microaggressions: *interpersonal microaggressions* (verbal put downs from White students and professors); *institutional microaggressions* (invalidations of their experience as Latinx students by the university); and *racial jokes* (jokes meant to demean based on race); all of which coincided within the categories Sue identified.

Although many of the microaggressions reported in prior research were endorsed in my study, the participants also described microaggressions that extend the work of Yosso (2009) and Sue (2007) on how microaggressions are enacted. Like Julian, who perceived his White counterparts as uninterested in connecting with him, most of the students in our study described similar incidents in which their White peers ignored and overlooked them in a variety of social and academic settings. For example, many of the students in my study recalled their White peers

excluding them from social gatherings and rejecting their bids for connection in their first-year dorms, while they readily connected with each other. In academic spaces several of the participants described being physically avoided and ignored as well as being left out and treated like they were irrelevant in study groups. Finally, students also described being over-looked by professors who neglected requests for support and who maintained low expectations.

For many of the participants in my study, being excluded, ignored, and overlooked gave them the sense that they were irrelevant at their university. Previous research (Yosso et al., 2009) conceptualized microaggressions as verbal and kinetic, in that they are actions meant to remind individuals from non-dominant cultures of their lack of power and relevance. In this study, participants sensed their unwelcome through a lack of engagement and action from their White peers, which made them believe that their White counterparts viewed their presence at the university as unimportant and inconsequential. This study considers the lack of engagement and inaction a *microerasure* which communicated to the students in the study that they were non-viable social options and imperceptible to their White peers because of their ethnicity. Through these *microerasures*, the indifference with which these students were treated contributed to a reported diminished sense of belonging and mattering at the university, and raised doubts to whether the social aspects of college were accessible to them.

Previous studies have reported that among the types of microaggressions SOC experience in college, institutional microinvalidations are one of the most difficult to observe or prove (Sue et al., 2007; Yosso et al., 2009) Yosso and her colleagues (2009) described institutional microaggressions as “marginalizing actions and inertia of the university evidenced in [its] structures, practices, and discourses that endorse campus racial hostility (p.673).” Many of the students in this study described institutional microaggressions in which White students implicitly

and explicitly conveyed their belief that study participants only gained admission to their university due to special considerations related to their 'minority' status. Furthermore, several students in our study also described the assumption White students and professors made that they were at school via a scholarship they were awarded because of being a 'minority.' These institutional microaggressions reported in the results add to Yosso's and her colleagues (2009) work because it provides further understanding of how institutional microaggression are enacted.

These incidents, perpetrated by White individuals trivialized the work the study participants put in during high school to earn prestigious academic scholarships and admissions to an elite university. Moreover, these assumptions communicated an institutional cultural belief that SOC cannot be rightful members of the institution because they were admitted to the university using lower standards than for White students and to fulfill diversity quotas. Thus, many of my participants concealed their scholarship status from their White peers to avoid these assumptions. Concealment was a strategy many of the students in this study commonly used to navigate the biased assumptions made by White faculty and peers and will be discussed further in the next section. Most of the students in my study eagerly described the pride they and their family felt when they were awarded these prestigious merit based scholarships, yet they felt like they had to hide this to be perceived with the same legitimacy as their White peers. To the authors' knowledge, no previous study has observed students concealing their scholarship status, yet it merits investigation because it represents an institutional inequity in which Latino students were burdened by and needed to conceal a part of their student identity which was an asset, one which White students would most likely never feel they need to hide. The impulse for the study participants to hide something they are proud of also speaks to the mixed messages students receive about the terms on which they are allowed to belong in academic institutions.

Prior research has reported that Latinx students' sense of belonging is often influenced by a perception of a cultural incongruence between their heritage culture and the culture of college, which diminishes their sense of connection to the college environment as well as negatively affects their ability to cope with perceived barriers (Cano, Vaughn, de Dios, Castro, Roncacion, & Ojeda, 2015; Gloria & Kurpius, 1996; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005). In addition, previous studies have reported that Latinx students experience a 'cultural starvation' (Gonzalez, 2002) due to a lack of cultural representation and connections across several domains of students life which decreases their connection to the college environment (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Loo & Rolison, 1986). Due to the lack of representation, Latinx students as well as other SOC, often feel like the university caters to White students which leaves them out from benefiting from the resources universities have to offer (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hernandez, 2002).

Most of the students in this study reported a lack of cultural congruity due to a lack of diversity as well as an antagonizing cultural environment which threatened their sense of comfort and belonging. These findings add to the understanding of how Latinx students perceive institutional messages of being incompatible with the university. Many of the students described experiencing moments of being overwhelmed by the lack of diversity because it communicated that the university was not for them. Despite multiple attempts to connect with their White peers, many of the students were perplexed by their difficulties to connect with them since they were accustomed to having several White friends in previous academic settings. Gonzales (2002), described these deficits in diversity and interpersonal connections as a 'cultural starvation' of Latinx undergraduates' 'social worlds.' Current research often depicts Latinx students as singularly avoidant of their White counterparts but in this study there were cultural barriers that complicated these connections. Gonzales (2002) also asserted that cultural deficits in Latinx

students' 'physical world,' which are physical markers of culture on university campuses can diminish their sense of belonging. In this study, many of the participants avoided predominately White spaces because they perceived these spaces as threatening and 'not for them' because they sensed they were being watched by their White peers. Harper and Hurtado (2007) reported that the discomfort that Latinx students experience entering White spaces is because of a lack of 'cultural ownership,' which is communicated not being more fully represented in these spaces.

The students in this study described being treated like second-class citizens who were unable to access the social aspects of the university, had their legitimacy questioned, and did not feel comfortable in predominately White spaces. Turner (1994) characterized the difficulty SOC have accessing the full benefits and resources of the university as 'being guests in someone else's house (p. 356).' This metaphor is apt because even though participants have been invited to the academy, they have not been made to feel at home in it. Previous studies have reported that minoritized students often feel like second class citizens or foreigners in a new land (Fisk, 1988; Nadal et al., 2014; Orbe, 2004) and need to learn how to adapt to the culture of college. Furthermore, rejection was not only expressed in subtle ways but also as physical threats by White students during racially charged exchanges. Gloria and her colleagues (2016) reported that one way Latino males cope with racial hostility was by 'walking tough' to ward off the attacks mentioned before. Although previous research has not reported how Latino students manage threats of physical violence on campus, one can imagine that these threats add to the sense that they are not welcome. Many of these students expressed being resigned to the idea that part of going to a prestigious university meant putting up with racial hostility and feeling unwelcome; which Givens (2020) described as the *invisible tax*.

The multiple forms of unwarranted disregard that the students in this study experienced was related to a cultural environment that was hostile to these students due non-academic factors (i.e. race). Prior to college, in more nurturing environments these students thrived as they received encouragement both at home and at school. Thus, the college environment that lacked the nourishing elements that the students needed to thrive became another barrier for their success. The discrepancy between what the students expected in college and what occurred calls into question the resources the college environment had for these students (i.e. cultural starvation). Person-environment fit (P.E. Fit) theory indicates that when an environment cannot support an individual psychologically, socially, nor culturally it diminishes an individual ability to thrive. To ameliorate the disregard hostility, and malnourishment of the environment the students in this study felt the needed change the way they interacted socially and culturally to better fit-in with what the environment expected through *cultural performance* (described in the next section); in addition, they sought psychological, social, and culturally nurturing spaces, known as *counterspace* (discussed ahead).

5.2.1 Cultural Performance

“We had to assert our dignity in small ways [...] Little details that tell the world, we are not invisible.” (Abuela Claudia, In The Heights)

It is well established that Latinx students at PWIs are often confronted with the pressure to assimilate to the White middle class cultural values that dominate the college environment (Cervantes, 1988; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Lopez, 2005; Quintana, Vogel, & Ibarra, 1991). Similarly, the participants in this current study felt pressure to assimilate or at least change the way they interacted, behaved, and expressed themselves at school among White peers. Previous research has reported that Latinx students often feel incentivized to assimilate in order to cope

with a campus environment that is culturally incongruent (Gloria & Kurpius, 1996) and racially inhospitable (Hurtado et al., 1997). The cultural conflict Latinx students experience in university environments is often propagated by the racial hostility they routinely encounter (Solorzano, 1998; Yosso et al., 2009) as well as the fear of being delegitimized if they confirm negative racial stereotypes that are commonly held by White students and faculty in higher education (Steele, 1997; 1999; 2011).

Another aspect of the university environment at PWIs that makes them inhospitable for Latinx students are the cultural deficiencies (i.e. low student diversity, racially segregated campus spaces) that create an impoverished cultural ambiance that often fail to provide support for Latinx students and that excludes students who are unfamiliar with White cultural values and preferences (Gloria & Pope-Davis, 1997; Gonzalez, 2002). Recent studies have reported that these institutional shortcomings diminish Latinx students' sense of belonging (Hurtado, 1996) and mattering, and is deleterious to Latinx students' likelihood of graduating (Dueñas & Gloria, 2017; 2020). In order to persist Latinx students are burdened with having to juggle getting acclimated to the culture of college to access the benefits of higher education, while trying to manage their own cultural heritage (Fisk, 1988; Gloria, 1999). For Latinx students, the cultural discrepancy between the culture of college and their culture back home has been associated with higher levels of acculturative stress (Lopez, 2005; Navarro, Ojeda, Schwartz, Piña-Watson, & Luna, 2014; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). In response to these cultural impasses, Latinx students often feel pressure to alter their cultural orientation, find different ways to cope with barriers, or conceal their culture in hopes of ameliorating the disregard they experience (Gloria, 1999; Torres, 1999; Lopez 2005).

Prior research has tried to better understand how Latinx students' cultural orientations influence their experience, outcomes, and well-being at PWIs. A few studies on Latinx college persistence have reported that when Latinx students are more acculturated and adhere to White cultural values they tend to have positive attitudes towards the university, less psychological distress, better academic outcomes, and a higher likelihood of persistence (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Castillo, Conoley, & Brossart, 2004; Lopez, 2005; Quintana et al., 1991). Moreover, Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco (2005) reported that when Latina college students in their study endorsed high levels of cultural congruence with their university environment they also endorsed higher levels of psychological well-being and perceived fewer barriers to persistence. Similarly, A broader study on Latinx adults (N=669) in the Midwest reported that when Latinx individuals endorsed preference for White culture as well as higher levels of acculturation, they also endorse lower levels of acculturative stress, psychological distress, and were less likely to perceive discrimination (Torres, Driscoll, & Voell, 2012). Taken together, these studies demonstrate the advantages that Latinx individuals get from relinquishing their cultural heritage and assimilating instead of preserving their culture.

In contrast, a recent study comparing the influence of acculturation status on persistence among Latinx students at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) reported that persistence was positively influenced for students who identified with White culture as well as for those who identified more with Mexican culture. (Ojeda, Castillo, Meza, & Piña-Watson, 2014). Furthermore, this same study reported that Latinx students who endorsed discomfort with White American values and beliefs also reported higher intentions to stay in college and graduate. This study provided a glimpse of how Latinx students could fare in a culturally congruent environment such as the HSI the study was conducted in, in which Latinx students made up of

91% of the total enrollment. The findings in this study further evinces the negative influence the culture of college at PWIs has on Latinx students.

Previous research on how Latinx students cope with the obstacles they face in college is limited, however, it has been reported that Latino men often cope with distress in college differently than their female counterparts (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Gloria et al., 2005; 2016). Barajas and Pierce (2001) reported that Latina students often cope with racial hostility in college through connecting with mentors that serve as cultural translators while Latino men tried to bare the racial hostility, pretended to be unfazed, and tried to integrate into the culture of college even though they felt rejected and othered. Similarly, a study that focused on how Latina college students cope reported that the women in their study coped with the barriers they encountered in college by talking with others about their problems, most often Latina peers, and taking positive planned action (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005). As for Latino men in college, previous studies have reported that they mainly cope with racial hostility and other social challenges through avoidance, minimizing their feelings, trying to stay positive, and at times reaching out for support from peers (Gloria et al., 2009; 2016; Rodriguez, 2016).

The current study extends the understanding of how Latino students navigate their cultural heritage within the culture of college. Prior research has provided important insights about how different cultural orientations influence Latinx students, how they engage with the college environment and how Latinx students use their internal resources to cope with the social barriers in college, however, little has been reported on how Latinx students manage their interpersonal exchanges with students that questions their legitimacy and an environment that is inhospitable. Most of the participants in this study reported engaging in a *cultural performance* that helped them disrupt, ward off, and manage the racial bias they routinely experienced at the

university. *Cultural performance* refers to the behavioral adaptations many of the participants made to ‘fit-in’ to the culture of college, this performance entailed concealing their cultural heritage and performing what participants viewed as ‘White mannerisms.’

Previously described in the results, most of the students in this present study experienced interpersonal exchanges with their White peers and professors in which their diction was scrutinized. Many of the participants viewed these interactions with White peers as legitimacy tests, in which they had to prove their belonging at the university by demonstrating their knowledge of the norms and preferences of White culture. Thus, these students monitored their diction in front of White peers using more formal language because they believed it made them more accessible and aligned with what they perceived their White peers and professors expected, as Walter stated, “I’ve learned to you know, give people what they want... if I don’t do that they are not gonna understand me and I won’t get my point across, so I’ve kinda learned how people understand me here.”

The students in this study performed what they perceived as White cultural patterns in hopes that it would be easier for their White counterparts and professors to overlook their differences and acknowledge their intelligence, professionalism, and legitimacy as another student stated, an important aspect of our participants’ *cultural performance* was not only that they performed what they perceived to be Whiteness but also that they felt like they had to conceal their way of being which they developed over a lifetime informed by their own culture, family, and community. One recent study on how first-generation minoritized students navigate White spaces reported that minoritized students often feel like they need to override their culturally ingrained responses to blend in and avoid being relegated to a lower status by their peers in the dominant group (Gray, Johnson, Kish-Gephart & Tilton, 2018).

Cultural performance was a strategy the students in this study used to navigate the judgement they perceived from their White peers and sometimes professors which the participants perceived as representatives of their university's hegemony. For these students, being in the presence of White peers and faculty felt like being on stage which raised the stakes of their interactions with them. Thus, these students felt compelled to conceal parts of themselves that they believed would be seen as unacceptable and accentuated behavior to which they believed their White counterparts would respond positively. A recent study asserted that in general people of color (POC) are often socialized by White supremacy, via racism, to become 'racially innocuous' and accommodate the needs, status, and emotions of White individuals in hopes of being afforded the opportunities and status of being White (Liu et al., 2019).

For POC, assuming the behavioral patterns of Whiteness to blend-in has been historically used to navigate White spaces, avoid racial hostility, and claim the rights and benefits that have been withheld; this has been described as 'acting White' (Fordham, 2008; Ogbu, 2004). Fordham (2008) asserted that 'acting White' is a tool used to avoid domination and gain access to power by concealing part of oneself, thus 'acting White' is a paradox in which one seeks to be accepted by being erased. Although research on 'Acting White' has predominately been with Black college students (Fordham, 2008; Ogbu, 2004), a few studies have alluded to similar concepts among Latinx college students (Cervantes, 1988; Rendon, 1992; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). One notable article that describes this paradox is Laura Rendon's testimony of her experience in college in which she elucidates the pressure she felt to exchange her allegiance from her cultural heritage to the culture of the academy in order to succeed. She goes on to describe the high cost of success which included enduring humiliation, rejecting her values, and disconnecting from her past which she believed ironic since the academy "preaches freedom of thought and expression

but demands submission and loyalty (Rendon, 1992).” Rendon’s reflection, which is over 25 years old, speaks to the pressure Latinxs students feel to conceal part of themselves in order to succeed, and is relevant today as most of the students in this present study felt like they needed to pay the same price for inclusion and success.

Most of the students in my study, tried be racially innocuous or blend-in by concealing and minimizing their presence at the university in different ways. Discussed earlier, some of the students concealed their scholarship status in order to avoid being seen as illegitimate benefactors of diversity initiatives, while others felt the need to withdraw to the physical margins of the university as White spaces were experienced as places in which they could expect pervasive judgement. The perceived external messages of control these students were attuned to can be seen as ‘surveillance’ which influenced their cultural performance in the presence of White peers. Thus, cultural performance was a survival strategy to avoid reprimand and be granted legitimacy from the institution through its representatives; reminiscent of Michael Foucault’s inspecting gaze, a theoretical concept that describes how institutions maintain compliance (Marshall, 1989). The inspecting gaze is institutional surveillance carried out by actors of the dominant group who watch individuals from subordinate groups and either validate or repress their behavior depending on whether or not it conforms to the standard rules, knowledge, and discourse of the system (Cheong & Miller, 2000). Like the students in this study, prior research has reported that minoritized college students may internalize institutional surveillance and monitor their own behaviors to go unnoticed and avoid being reprimanded by the system (Brayboy, 2004; Lin & Cranton, 2005).

Although the students in this study did not engage in cultural performance against their will, the perceived surveillance created an ultimatum that manipulated their behavior, and several

students described being resentful that they had to engage in it. As one participant described passionately, “I don’t like it...I feel [dehumanized]... because I have to cater to somebody else... I’m not providing a service, I’m literally doing this so [White individuals] can have a conversation with me, be happy in a space, and feel secure.” The difficulty they had with the performance was that an integral part of who they were was not welcome at the university, and needed to be hidden in order for them to be considered a rightful member of their university. The message that one needs to ‘tone down’ one’s culture in exchange for Whiteness can feel as if one is betraying one’s culture, because it elicits the cultural taboo of being a *vendido* or *selling out*, which is when one adopts White culture for benefit at the cost of one’s own culture (Ogbu, 2004; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009).

Prior research perhaps has captured the psychological difficulty Latinx students experience when trying to fit in, as they have reported that although Anglo-orientated Latinx college students show better persistence and perceive less discrimination they also score lower on self-esteem, well-being, and life satisfaction (Navarro, Ojeda, Schwartz, Piña-Watson, & Luna, 2014; Ojeda, Piña-Watson, & Gonzalez, 2016). Tierney (1999) notably asserted that the cultural norms on which PWIs are constructed on unfairly demand that working-class, first generation, SOC undergo a *cultural suicide* in order to ‘make it’ in college. For Latinx students the message that they need to leave their culture behind is propagated through subtractive schooling practices that encourages them to divest from their cultural values and strengths in exchange for White European culture (Valenzuela, 2002). In college, Latinx students’ cultural strengths are often framed as deficiencies and barriers to success (Yosso, 2005).

5.2.2 Finding Counterspaces

Previous research has reported that one of the ways Latinx students respond to the incidents of institutional disregard is by creating counterspaces (Perez-Huber & Cueva, 2012; Yosso et al, 2009). *Counterspaces* are formal and informal spaces within PWIs in which minoritized students come together and create a sense of community that often provides them a sense of safety within hostile campus climates (Carter, 2007). *Counterspaces* allow students to be themselves and behave more authentically than they can in White spaces because they are not under the same cultural scrutiny in which they can be delegitimized (Case & Hunter, 2012; Tatum, 2007). The sociocultural makeup of *counterspaces* undermines the power dynamics at PWIs and challenges deficit-based cultural narratives of SOC commonly held by White students and faculty. Thus, *counterspaces* are spaces of resistance in which SOC do not have to manage or tone-down their culture (Carter, 2007; Tatum, 2007) but can feel connected along cultural similarities. Similarly, the students in my study used counterspaces (i.e. cultural centers, Latinx fraternity gatherings) as a way to cope with the racial hostility in the campus climate, and found spaces in which they mattered, received emotional support, and learned to navigate their university.

Like Julian and Domingo, for the students in this study, making connections with Latinx students as well as other SOC was a ‘survival’ strategy which helped them establish relationships that improved their sense of belonging and mattering. For most of the students in this study, these relationships provided familiarity and safety which allowed them to regain the stability they had prior to college which allowed them to grow and thrive. In addition, within these *counterspaces* the participants could be their full-selves away from the judgement they experienced from most of their White counterparts when they used informal diction, spoke Spanish, or expressed themselves in ways that were unfamiliar. Unlike predominately White

spaces in which cultural performance negated an intrinsic part of our participants' cultural identity, within *counterspaces* (i.e., Latinx fraternity spaces and Multicultural Student Center) they were affirmed and made whole; *counterspaces* restored their sense of identity and provided healing for the relational harm they sustained in several campus settings. Mattering was further influenced by the care the students in this study received in these *counterspaces* from Latinx peers, other SOC, as well as Latinx and other non-White student mentors and administrative staff within support programs that served SOC.

Foundational literature in student development reported that one of the most important factors in retention is the degree to which students feel connected to the university through relationships with peers and faculty (Pascarella, 1988). Castellanos and Gloria (2007) further asserted that Latinx students' well-being and persistence is critically connected to them establishing supportive relationships that attend to their psychological, social, and cultural needs. In my study, the relationships the participants established provided social and cultural support, but also created a cultural resource that was essential for them to enact their cultural heritage within a system that commonly required them to conceal it. In addition, the connections the students made with Latinx peers were familial and interdependent which provided emotional support as well as guidance in negotiating the systemic barriers of the university. Previous research on the relationships African American students establish in *counterspaces* reported that these relationships are *fictive kinships*, a cultural practice in which individuals with whom one is socially and culturally bound are considered family (Carter, 2007). Similarly, in Latinx culture *familia* often extends to individuals bound by struggle or pursuing similar dreams (Arredondo et al, 2014). Prior research described the importance for Latinx students to form academic families

that help recreate the systems of care of *familismo* as well as relational bonds that are culturally inculcated (Delgado, Cherniak, & Gloria, 2014).

Furthermore, the familiarity the students in this study established in their peer relationships facilitated them to be more vulnerable and forthcoming about academic and emotional struggles than they were with family back home. Previous research has reported the importance of Latino men having emotional support to cope with their struggles in college (Gloria et al, 2016). Although previous research has reported that emotional support Latino men is not essential, my finding align with Gloria and her colleagues (2016) findings that Latino men benefit from emotional support in college. The participants in my study relied on the close bonds they formed with Latinx students, SOC, and fraternity brothers to process their concerns and obstacles because they could understand the cultural and familial pressures they were managing. In addition, the ability to be vulnerable solidified the *confianza* (trust) they had in these relationship, which allowed them to ask for support without it being considered a weakness or threatening their masculinity or legitimacy as college students.

Previous studies have reported that Latinx college students often hesitate or refrain from asking for help from advisors, counselors, or faculty because they are either intimidated or fear that by asking for help they will reveal or confirm inadequacy (Hernandez, 2002; Torres et al, 2006; Turner, 1994). Instead, they seek out SOC who are classmates or a little older to help them navigate obstacles they encounter in the university; this has been referred to as horizontal mentorship (Torres et al, 2006; Turner, 1994) and cultural translators among Latina college students (Lesley & Barajas, 2001). This current study adds to this phenomenon in that the Latino men also relied on emotionally supportive relationships to cope with the challenges they faced. Several students in this study also described support and guidance from graduate SOC who

served as mentors, as well as from non-White administrators from diversity programs they belonged to, that bolstered their confidence to make it through academic and personal struggles. Prior research has reported that these mentors take on the role of academic *padrinos* (godfathers) and *madrinas* (godmothers), roles that are extensions of the Latinx family that usually provide nurture and support (Castellanos & Gloria, 2009).

Finally, previous studies have reported that the culturally affirming *counterspaces* Latinx students create in response to rejection and marginalization, gradually start to resemble environments back home (Gonzalez, 2002; Yosso et al., 2009). Similarly, many of the students in this present study sensed the importance of recreating some semblance of their communities back home and took pride in having developed a network of relationships in which they belonged and mattered. Within these culturally affirming spaces, the participants experienced an elevated sense of mattering which increased their confidence and worth, Alberto described “my girlfriend hates walking with me, cuz we’ll [run into or see] at least like five or six people and [have short conversations]. [She asks why] I always have to talk to everyone, and I’m just like, I just want to say hi.” Through interpersonal exchanges like these, study participants felt like they were cared for, connected, and valued; these exchanges that ranged from friendly nods to warm greetings all acknowledged and affirmed the participants’ presence in academic as well as social spaces and made them feel like they were not alone. Solórzano, Perez-Huber, and Huber-Verjan (2020) asserted that acknowledgement and connection between Latinx students and other SOC serve as micro-affirmations that communicated to their participants that they belonged. Although participants in the present study found a sense of community amongst other SOC in the margins of the university, at cultural centers or cultural gatherings, these spaces quickly became the center of their college world. For most of the participants, two worlds existed simultaneously at

the university: the PWI in which they were expected to prove their legitimacy; and the world they co-created in which they were accepted by students who were managing many of the same pressures and challenges.

5.3 Difficulty Managing Relationships Back Home

One of the key purposes of this present study was to better understand how Latinx students manage their familial expectations and relationships given that family plays a highly influential role in the academic determination, decision making, and college going experience for Latinx college students (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; ; Gloria et al, 2016, Guardian & Evans, 2008; Torres, 2004). Mentioned previously, for Latinx individuals, the importance of serving and attending to family is enculturated at an early age and persists through the life course (Arredondo et al, 2014). Previous research has reported Latino men in college often believe that performing well in college demonstrates their prioritization of family values and honors their parents' sacrifices that have allowed them to access higher education (Cerezo et al., 2012; Easley, Bianco, & Leech, 2012; Perez; 2017). Thus, first-generation Latino men are often highly invested in how their parents perceive their academic performance and decisions while in college (Easley, Bianco, & Leech, 2012; Perez; 2017). One recent study reported that for first-generation Latinx students, the pressure to fulfill perceived parental expectations can develop into familial perfectionism which has been associated with anxiety and depression (Ortega, Wang, Slaney, Hayes, & Morales, 2014). Latinx students reasonably feel like they have an obligation to attend to their parents expectations while they are trying to attend to the demands and expectations of college. Similarly, the participants in this study had to balance fulfilling their culturally infused roles of son in their family who attends to his family's needs and expectations, as well as the role of students who attends to academic and social demands of the university.

Emerging research has reported that the difficulty Latinx students experience bridging their lives in college and their lives back home is influenced by the competing demands and values of each context. In college, Latinx students need to exercise independence to succeed and back home they need to demonstrate interdependence to remain in good standing with their family and peers (Pappano, 2018, Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012; Vasquez-Salgado, Greenfield, Burgos-Cienfuegos, 2015). The conflicting value system between the university and back home posed a dilemma for the participants in this present study to either choose their academics or family. Thus, most of them went back home for important events, to help family in times of need, and to reassure their parents and siblings of their commitment to them, despite that when they returned to school they had to catch up on academic obligations as well as extracurricular commitments.

Prior research has reported that the pressure that Latinx students feel to demonstrate their dedication by taking time to attend to familial needs back home, or provide emotional and financial support, often results in viewing family as an additional source of stress and a barrier to persistence (Baker & Robnett, 2012; Covarrubias, Valle, Laiduc, & Azmita, 2019; Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015). For Latinx students, balancing family and school means “being caught between managing two conflicting definitions of family obligation (p.273):” first, honoring their parents’ effort and sacrifice by doing well in school to potentially repay them in the future; and second fulfilling the cultural-expectations to put family first and attend to their families’ needs in the present (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015). Although research on the conflicting values between school-home has reported the cultural forces and dilemmas that Latinx students have to manage, current studies have not elucidated how Latinx students interpersonally manage their relationships back home.

For most of the students in this present study, the transition from school to home required a shift in social roles from student to son, and from relative independence to familial obligation. During visits back home many of the participants were unable to fully be themselves around their family and friends back home often putting their needs on hold and attending to their families' needs concerned that would cause a cultural collision with the expectations of back home. Thus, they held back sharing their experiences in college because they feared they would be misunderstood, disrupt their parents' perception of them, or challenge the relational dynamics to which people back home were accustomed.

Mentioned previously, growing up, most of the participants in this study were seen as the 'intelligent son who will make something of himself' and, to maintain this image, most of the participants sensed they needed to give the impression of being in control and self-sufficient which led to concealing academic, financial, and social struggles. Part of the desire to appear in control and self-sufficient can be attributed to social class as most of the participants were attuned to their parents financial struggles and family concerns and did not want to worry them; which is a common trait in individuals from working class families (Lareau, 2011; Piff et al, 2010). In addition, the desire to appear in control could have also been influenced by cultural expectations of their gender, as Latinx men are often expected work hard and be emotionally restrained (Arredondo et al., 2014; Rodriguez, 2016), thus these students represented themselves as confident and minimized their difficulties.

Previous research has reported that Latino college students often want to be seen as self-sufficient and capable of making their own way so they filter information which would signal to their parents that they need guidance or hand-holding (Rodriguez, 2016; Rodriguez, Vasquez, Salinas, 2017). The participants in this current study filtered what they reported to their parents

by negotiating the impact of what they shared to avoid engendering doubt that they were capable of managing their education and taking advantage of their educational opportunities. First-generation Latinx students often manage their own academic journey beginning in elementary school because their parents are often unfamiliar with the rules of the educational system in the U.S. and because schools often fail to create a culture of inclusivity which pushes immigrant Latinx parents to the margins of participation (Hill & Torres, 2010; Valenzuela, 2002). Similarly, parents of first-generation Latinx students are often unfamiliar with the college going process because they have not attended college in the U.S. themselves. In addition, Latinx parents often believe the purpose of college is to get specialized training that will result in well-paying jobs and hold more static preconceived notions regarding academic success. Most of the students in this present study described that during visits back home their parents would make time for customary check-in, during which these students were expected to report well-articulated linear academic plans as well as justify the benefits their extracurricular involvements, majors, and internships had on their future careers. Thus, many of the participants viewed going back home as restrictive because they were unable to share everything that was going on in college because their parents often did not have a point of reference for what they were experiencing. Prior research has reported that first-generation Latinx students often feel like when they are at school they have more freedom to explore new interests, make mistakes and express themselves, than they do when they are back home (Covarrubias et al., 2019; Torres, 2004).

For the participants in this current study, returning home meant reprising culturally bound familial roles they had outgrown. Although the participants were relatively independent and had changed several aspects of their lives, their familial roles were not renegotiated. Thus, when they went home they performed tasks that were expected of them if they left for college; they ran errands with

their parents, helped their siblings with school, went to work with their parents, and respected curfew. For these students going home required a cultural performance of a previous version of themselves that adhered to the cultural norms (i.e. respeto), parent-child relational dynamics (i.e. deference), and family commitment to belong in the family system. This cultural performance entailed concealing and restricting parts of themselves that developed during college which added to the alienation they experienced in college.

For Latino students in this study, engaging in cultural performance appeared to be influenced by their fear that the cultures of college and back home would collide, as well as the belief that their parents could not truly comprehend their college going experience because of their inexperience and unfamiliarity with college. The cultural incongruence between these settings made it so that most of these students were comfortable sharing academic achievement and personal triumphs because it coincided with the image their parents had of them, but uncomfortable sharing the struggles and obstacles they navigated to persist because it would challenge the image they believed their parents held. In addition, perhaps these students felt it dire to maintain the image of, the self-sufficient child that will make something of himself, because they were recreating similar conditions of worth as in school, in which one only deserves to be affirmed or nourished when they are fulfilling expectation. Although these students were concerned and trepidatious that they would dispel the positive image their parents held of them when these students revealed they were really struggling, performing poorly, or in some kind of trouble, they were surprised that their parents usually met them with care and encouragement.

The gap of information, (i.e. struggles) that the parents of these students experienced may result in the distance students feel in their relationship with their parents. Parents of Latino

college students may be limited in seeing their students in their entirety and hold in their minds two images that are disconnected due to a lack of information. First, parents see their students as promising, hardworking sons who will make something of themselves, and next the image of their son as the college graduate he is destined to become, bringing their hopes and dreams to fruition. Although both of these images can be true, they only attend the exceptional aspects of this journey, the triumphs, and neglects the struggles, difficulties, and marginalization their sons experience during their educational process. One can imagine that without being able to see the full picture, the success and struggle, which can make it difficult for parents to get a full picture of what their student is experiencing in college.

In addition, many of the students in the present study expressed difficulty managing their relationship with peers back home that did not go to college and felt like they had outgrown them. Prior research has reported that prior to college Latino students benefit from peer relationships that value and promote academic achievement (Cerezo et al., 2014), but studies have not investigated how Latinx students manage peer relationships back home. Most of the participants in this study were reluctant to spend time with friends back home that did not attend college because they believed that their interests, preferences, goals, and experiences no longer aligned with these friends. The participants described being torn between being loyal to friends they grew up with and seeing them as less evolved and a barrier to their own growth. Interestingly, the participants were not misaligned with friends back home that did attend college and depicted reunions with these friends as bonding experiences in which they commiserated about their experiences at their respective universities. The relational dynamics between the participants and their friends back home that did not attend college were similar to the dynamics the participants experienced with their White peers in college. The participants' friends back

home did not have access to the cultural capital the participants gained through being socialized into the culture of college; which resulted in viewing the culture of their peers back home as incongruent from their own realities.

Many of the participants in this study described feeling out of place back home among the peers they grew up that were not in college. They described their peers as having “real life” problems and demands, and were concerned that if they shared the challenges they encountered in college they would be seen as privileged or out of touch. Thus, they often kept check-ins and conversation focused on the lives of their peers back home and shared omitted details about their own experiences in college. For many of the students in the study, going back home and engaging with former peers required an additional cultural performance in which they wanted to keep these relationships out of respect and obligation, but without nurturing or deepening them. It appears that by adjusting to the culture of college in order to succeed, many of the participants had to relinquish or unlearn aspects of themselves that connected them to the people and places they were from.

5.4 Summary

Most of the participants in this present study developed strong cultural and academic identities prior to college influenced by their cultural socialization as well as by their early academic experiences. At home, most of these students were seen as the ‘intelligent son who will make something of himself’ and overcome their obstacles. At school, they distinguished themselves as gifted students and placed in advanced courses comprised of predominately White middle class peers. Despite the racial and social class differences the participants had with their peers they established friendships with their White peers and performed well which strengthened their sense of belonging . For most of the participants, being the prized son and student bolstered

their confidence in their academic capabilities and affirmed their ability to navigate the expectations of these roles. When these participants arrived to college, their identities and roles were challenged through incidents of racial bias and exclusion by White peers. These incidents diminished their confidence and sense of belonging as well as made the social aspects of college seem inaccessible. For many of the students in the study, difficulty connecting with peers or belonging in their academic and social environments was an unfamiliar; which made them fearful that they would not live up to the image their families held of them.

For many of the participants, incidents of racial bias and exclusion became synonymous with the culture of college. To avoid these incidents and blend in with the culture of college, the participants changed the interaction styles which were common in their home communities, and engaged in a cultural performance which meant performing White mannerisms, formalizing their diction, denying their scholarship statuses, and concealing their cultural heritage. Although this performance made these students feel inauthentic, they did not feel like they could be accepted as they were, thus they engaged in the performance to prove their legitimacy to their White peers. For some participants, concealing a salient aspect of themselves engendered shame and resentment. Most of the students in this present study could only be their authentic selves in *counterspaces*, spaces predominately made up of Latinx students and other SOC that could understand their experience. These men learned to blend-in to the culture of college to legitimize their belonging and sought spaces and relationships that affirmed their cultural heritage and identity from back home and provided respite from the cultural rejection they experienced in most spaces in college.

When these participants went home they were expected to fall back into relational patterns and dynamics they performed prior to college. By performing the roles they had

outgrown they reassured their parents that they were still the son that was on the right path and dedicated to realizing their families' hopes and dreams. To reassure these roles these students concealed their struggles and the changes that had to make in college to reintegrate into the family; which meant once again not being able to be their full selves. These students were caught in the middle between the cultures of back home and college, and felt like they had to leave out a part of themselves in each context, in order to fit in which alienated them from each context and made it difficult to manage their cultural identity..

The students in this present study underwent several transitions between home and school throughout their academic journey, which required them to recalibrate their cultural performance each time they moved between contexts. At home they attended to the working class and gendered cultural norms of their families and their heritage culture, and at school they attended the White middle class norms that prompted them to change their diction and interaction styles. In essence, moving between these cultures required them to be a different version of themselves, thus they existed on the border of each context with one foot in each culturally bound world. In trying to keep these distinct worlds separate, they grew and developed on the border of each which made it difficult to bring any whole version of themselves fully into either context.

5.5 In-Between Two Worlds

Several studies have reported that first-generation Latinx college students are often tasked with navigating the culture incongruence between college and back home (Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 1996). Research has indicated that first-generation Latinx college students navigate these two cultures through assimilation-- taking on the values, preferences, and behaviors of the majority culture to gain acceptance-- or by developing a bicultural orientation which means they try to live in both cultures, simultaneously attending to the cultural demands

of college and their ancestral culture (Fiske, 1988, Orbe, 2004, Rendon 1992, Torres, 1999 & 2004). The students in this present study developed a bicultural orientation in which they attended to the cultural demands of each context by altering their expectations, preferences, and cultural performance (i.e. diction) to demonstrate their affiliation to each, while managing the perceptions and expectations of the people in each context. At home, the participants stepped into the outgrown role of the “son, who would making something of himself,” who upheld and fulfilled their families’ cultural values and expectations. In college, these Latino men altered their diction, style of dress, preferences, values, and expectations to prove they belonged after their White peers questioned their legitimacy and scrutinized their cultural differences.

These Latino men wanted to feel accepted by the people in each context but found their acceptance contingent on how well they performed the culture of each context or hid aspects of themselves that were incompatible. These students were caught in-between two cultures, on the margins, and unable to bring themselves fully into either. Individuals living in the margins of two cultures often internalize the conflict between the cultures (LaFramboise, Coleman, Gerton, 1993). It is well documented that first-generation Latinx college students often feel conflicted between trying to fit into the culture of college, based on White middle-class values, and preserving their cultural heritage by demonstrating their dedication to their families’ values and expectations (Castillo, Conoley, & Brossart, 2004; Torres, 1999). The students in this present study negotiated how much they needed to conceal in each context to be accepted by others.

The students in this present study navigated the cultural differences between college and back home through what could be considered alternation. Alternation is a strategy of biculturalism in which an individual alters their cultural performance to demonstrate their affiliation to two different cultural contexts, thus mitigating the stress and anxiety of engaging in

two separate cultures (LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Similarly, the students in this present study moved back and forth between cultural contexts while they accentuated and minimized parts of their cultural performance. In each context, the students learned to calibrate what they needed to leave behind to be accepted; at home, they relinquished some of the control and independence they enjoyed at school, while at school they left behind the comfort of their home culture, heritage language, as well as the role of the dedicated son. One student illustrated the ebb and flow of his cultural performance in college as “volume” knobs in which he turned down his “Latino-ness” and turned up his performance of Whiteness; which meant calibrating the formality of his diction, his appearance, and navigating his White peers’ expectations. While another Latino student described putting on “an act” in front of White peers and faculty to avoid being negatively stereotyped for his ethnicity. Although alternation offers insight on the process of demonstrating cultural alignment in culturally incongruent contexts it does not capture the emotional toll these transitions had on the students in the study.

Borderlands can help conceptualize the internal conflict the students in this present study reported moving back and forth between the cultures of college and back home. The *Borderlands* has been described as a theoretical place of being in-between the physical and cultural borders of two cultures elucidated by centering the conflict Latinx people experience in the U.S. navigating the demanding conditions of U.S. culture while trying to adhere to norms of their heritage culture (Anzaldua, 1987). Anzaldua (1987) delineates the White cultural norms in the U.S. to which *borderlands* people must conform to avoid the oppressive forces of racism and classism; while affirming the cultural values and expectations to prioritize family, demonstrate loyalty, and preserve their culture in a foreign land. Through the recognition of these competing cultural demands, Anzaldua illuminates how *borderlands* individuals are either embraced or rejected

while maintaining their fidelity to their heritage cultural and demonstrating their belonging to U.S. culture, through a series of concessions and performances to be accepted in both (Anzaldua, 1987; Keating, 2006). Thus, each cultural context only experiences the version of the individual that has been deemed acceptable and worthy of membership. For *borderlands* people negotiating their cultural performance to be accepted can result in rejection, isolation, confusion, anxiety, and cognitive dissonance from the emotional ebb and flow of feeling *a part* of both cultures and *apart* from them (Keating, 2006).

The students in this present study expressed similar emotion states as *borderlands* individuals trying to establish and maintain their belonging at school and back home. These students described rejection, anger, sadness, and confusion that they had to prove their legitimacy in each culture and context by performing incomplete versions of themselves that felt inauthentic after working hard to earn their place in each. Performing an inauthentic version of the self as a means to gain acceptance, validation, or be assigned worth, is one way psychology explains emotional injury. Person-centered psychology conceptualizes emotional injury stemming from an individual perceiving that their worth is conditional on fulfilling expectations held by their family, culture, or context. Fulfilling these expectations to be accepted often comes at the cost one's needs and ability to make authentic connections. For the students in this study the risk of bringing their whole authentic-self into each context contributed to them feeling disconnected and excluded from their college environment, White classmates and faculty as well as the benefits of higher education; at home they felt relational distance with their family, friends, and community. Thus, these students' desire to be authentic and share their whole led them to form relationships with individuals, connection with groups, and seek spaces that

accepted them without testing their legitimacy and could appreciate the challenges they were navigating.

The similarities between how the Latino men in this present study and *borderlands* individuals negotiate the two adjacent cultures suggests that borderlands could be a bicultural orientation that can be utilized to describe the cultural dilemma some first-generation Latino students feel in college. A previous study observed that some Latinx college students managed the cultural tension between college and their heritage culture through ambivalence, which was referred to as a marginal bicultural orientation (Torres, 1999). Torres observed that these students who were in this marginal orientation were uncomfortable in both the culture of college as well as in their heritage culture, and expressed little interest to identify with either. Torres (1999) explained that the marginal bicultural orientation was an unprecedented finding because it is an unexplored means of managing two cultures that had not been identified in the traditional models of acculturation. Furthermore, she encouraged further investigation because it might offer new insight as to how some Latinx students feel caught in the middle between the cultures of home and college.

Taken together, while in college the participants in this present study navigated barriers that threatened their membership and belonging on two cultural fronts, college and back home. In college these students negotiated the White cultural norms of the academy to gain access to the benefits they anticipated from pursuing a college education while social norms reminded them they did not belong. At home, they were expected to grow without changing and each time they went home they had to prove that they had not lost touch, forgotten their culture, or familial commitment. The competing demands of these contexts contributed to ambivalence as to which context could accept them in their entirety. Determined to keep their place in both contexts

without losing their place in either or themselves they performed the cultural norms of each, while they surrounded themselves with community and relationships and expressed their full selves in *counterspaces* with individuals that ‘got’ them on the *borderlands*.

5.6 Contextual foundations of the findings

‘Contextual foundations of the findings’ is an intentional pivot from categorizing similarities in the sample or contextual specifics as ‘limitations,’ because so called ‘limitations’ can silo the phenomena that has been observed instead of letting it emerge, allowing it to be heard and seen (Salamon, 2018). Instead acknowledging the contextual forces in which the observed phenomena occurred affirms the experiences of the participants in the study, amplifies their collective perspective, and honors the demands that influenced their relationship to the context in which the study was conducted (polanco et al., 2020). Thus, the contextual foundations of the findings highlights the richness of the stories the participants shared and connects the phenomena to the circumstances the students in the study were managing. The contextual aspects of their college going experience could give insight to other Latino men at school in which similar context foundations are present, especially at PWIs.

One of the contextual foundations of the study was that seven of the ten participants were affiliated with a Latinx or multicultural Greek letter organization (i.e., fraternity). Previous research has reported that Latinx and multicultural interest fraternities and sororities are important sources of social, cultural, and psychological support for Latinx students, because they act as surrogate families that give students a sense of home. For Latinx males, these organizations facilitate emotional connections and support as well as provide models of college going that are often scarce for Latino men (Delgado et al., 2014). In addition to many of the participant being affiliated to Latinx and multicultural fraternities, all but one of the students in

the study were connected to other Latinx affinity groups related to their career or to create social connections. This commonality amongst the participants in this study speaks to the disconnection that Latino men often experience in college and the strategies they use to feel like they belong and affirm their cultural heritage (Guardia & Evans, 2008). This contextual foundation is encouraging as it provides insight for Latino men that are connected in college yet still feel like their belonging and acceptance at their campus is conditional.

Another contextual foundation to consider for these findings was that nine of the ten participants were recipients of merit-based scholarships. This was a salient contextual factor of the sample because despite being recognized for their academic merits they often encountered messages that they were undeserving of their recognition and place in the university by their White peers; who relegated their achievements to receiving special treatment because of their race. These messages were communicated several times and in several spaces indicating an institutional cultural belief that these men were incapable of possessing their intellectual gifts. This contextual factor needs to be considered at PWIs because although there is an assumption that scholarships affirm academic merits; for Latino men it can also be a part of their academic identity that they feel they need to consistently prove to their White counterparts they deserved.

Most of the participants in this study (8 of 10) grew up in the Midwest, which meant that attending as well as being associated with the University of the Midwest meant a lot to them, their family, and their community. Despite being able to appreciate how much it meant for them to attend this well regarded university for their people back home, their experiences of exclusion and rejection made their affinity for this institution waiver. The complex relationship between these participants and the nearby prestigious PWI, could have been an important facet of the confusion the students expressed being excluded and rejected from a place that could be

considered to have been considered in their own back yard. It is important to considered how the proximity and status of PWIs play a role in the college going experiences of Latino students as well as their affinity to the university and how it plays a role to what they report back home.

Finally, in the recruitment process snowball sampling emerged as the primary method of student joining the study which revealed an interesting relationship dynamic between students and the study. Informal conversations with the participants after their initial interviews revealed that they saw the advertisement for the study, were interested, but did not reach out until a friend that had participated recommended they participate. This process is worth mentioning since Latino men are often under represented in research among Latinx students compared to their female counterparts (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). One potential explanation for the participants' hesitation to participate could have been related to the salient role peer relationships have on how SOC navigate their academic environment (Hernandez, 2002). Their hesitation to participate could also be related to culture, given that Latinx culture is collectivistic and communitarian many students may have waited until there was a consensus in the community that it was safe to participate. Finally, due to the gender dynamics at play for Latino males in college concern that their participation in the study would leave them feeling overexposed could have been a barrier. The ebb and flow of the recruitment process in this present study could offer helpful insight for scholars to recruit Latin men into qualitative research through building rapport with participants and utilize snowball sampling to increase their participation.

5.7 Implications

5.7.1 Implications for supporting Latino men at PWIs

One of the major findings in this present study was that the Latino men experienced a lack of social and cultural nourishment in their college environment which was influenced by

several experiences of institutional disregard from their White peers which made them question their sense of belonging and mattering. Nourishment in college can be conceptualized as how much affirmation a student receives in their college environment. Prior research with Latinx college students has reported that PWIs often fail to provide psychological, social, and culturally affirming environments which diminishes Latinx students' confidence, sense of belonging, and mattering (Dueñas & Gloria, 2017; 2020; Hurtado et al., 1997; 2005; Yosso et al., 2009). Similarly, Gonzalez (2002) reported that at PWIs, Latinx students often lack cultural nourishment and experience a 'cultural starvation,' because the university environment lacks culturally affirming spaces, relationships, and sources of knowledge. For the students in this present study, the lack of cultural nourishment contributed to feeling excluded, insignificant, and isolated; but when they were able to access culturally affirming spaces, also known as *counterspaces*, they found connection, support, and comfort to be themselves.

Universities can best support Latino students by creating culturally nourishing spaces that are affirming, and in which these students can find support as well as build community with other Latino men and other SOC. Previous research on *counterspaces* (Carter, 2007; Tatum, 2007) has reported that SOC benefit from being able to gather with other SOC at PWIs, because it provide a safe space for them to express themselves authentically because they share a tacit understanding of their shared experience. In addition, prior research has reported that Latino males who often conceal struggles and infrequently engage in help seeking behavior benefit from emotionally supportive relationships (Gloria et al., 2014; Rodriguez, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2017); Latino men could use these spaces to process cultural and familial demands, emotional states, masculinity, their sense of belonging and mattering, as well as the racial dynamics of college.

Given that the students in this present study described feeling most disconnected and invisible during their first year of college, intentional efforts should be made to create and offer culturally nourishing spaces to Latino men as freshman to help them transition from high school. These spaces could be offered in residence halls as ongoing programming on Latinx interest floors as well as for multicultural living communities. They can also be offered as first year seminars to help incoming Latino males acclimate to the university and to campus life. Embedding culturally nourishing spaces into the curriculum, like the previous two examples, could be welcoming for Latino men and communicate the importance an institution places on engaging them. Previous research on male-centered Latino organizations has reported that Latino men often develop *hermandad* (brotherhood) in student led spaces which makes them feel connected and cared for (Estrada, Mejia, & Hufana, 2017). Universities could demonstrate their dedication to the well-being and persistence of Latino men by forming partnerships with these male-centered Latino organizations; they could incentivize Latino faculty to get involved, provide monetary support for programming, and create mentorship infrastructure to keep Latino men interested in pursuing post-graduate degrees.

Moreover, another important finding that emerged from the interviews was the participants' experience of what I called *microerasures*, which was the careless manner with which the Latino men in this study were treated by White peers and faculty, that made them feel overlooked, excluded, and insignificant. In contrast, to traditional racial microaggressions which have been described as verbal and kinetic or action based (Yosso et al., 2009), *microerasures* were subtle exclusions communicated through a lack of engagement or action from White peers that makes SOC sense that they are insignificant or being overlooked due to race or ethnicity. Thus, universities need to implement practices that help orientate White students to engage in

interracial dialogues and create comfortable academic and living environments for SOC. These dialogues could be offered as residence hall orientation activities to acclimatize students to connect and build rapport with students who are racially different as of their first year. Prior research on stereotype threat has reported that within interracial dialogues White students have demonstrated discomfort interacting or engaged with students from different racial backgrounds on topics that are high risk for them being label racist (Steele, 2011)

In *Whistling Vivaldi*, Claude Steele and his colleagues (2011) tested different scenarios which could elicit stereotype threat by having White students engage in a conversation with two Black students to either discuss love and relationships, or racial profiling. Before the conversation the White participant was shown pictures of his anticipated conversation partner instructed to arrange the chairs for the conversation. When White students anticipated discussing love and relationships he grouped the chairs close together, for racial profiling he arranged his chair further away from his anticipated partners. White participants arranged the chairs close together in anticipation of either for conversation when Steele and his colleagues ran the test again and switched the pictures from two Black students for two White students. Interracial dialogues creates a situation in which stereotypes can be confirmed of everyone involved. Thus, the proposed dialogues can be a series beginning with low stakes topics to acclimate all and build rapport and evolve into topics that require more risk taking from all. To be clear, starting with innocuous subject matter is not to appeal to the racial sensibilities of White students, but to engage all involved in community building in a way that can benefit each student. Too often White students benefit from “diversity,” but it can be mutually beneficial; innocuous subject matter does not mean frivolous, questions for the group can be about what they expect their college experience to be, what they have heard about college, and hopes for the culture of the

living community. This can provide an environment in which intentions are expressed and knowledge is exchanged, all students to pick up on aspects of college they did not exist or were possible.

Although most of the participants encountered a college environment that lacked the cultural nourishment they needed, interestingly what emerged was that prior to college most of the participants came from contexts in which they were socially, culturally, and academically nourished. One important factor that contributed to their nourishment back home was the faith and hope their parents had in them. Through their transition to college they lost some of their parental support because it became more difficult to translate their experiences, expectations, and their struggles with their parents who had not attended college. Prior research on first-generation Latinx college students reported that Latino men often experience a cultural incongruence between college and back home that contributes to distance with their family (Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996). Given that prior studies have reported that feeling distant from family is a common struggle for Latino students, support programs should prioritize developing parental liaisons who can help parents that are under-informed or just not familiar with the college going process to better understand the demands their students are struggling with and the obstacles they navigate. An initiative such as this could help students bridge the gap between college and back home as well as help Latinx parents feel more informed about college and have a better sense of how to support their students. In addition, this type of programming could also build literacy for parents and sons to discuss their college going experience as well as highlight parallel processes between first generation working class Latino students entering college and their parents who immigrated from the country of origin.

5.7.2 Clinical implications

The findings in this present study revealed the hefty demands that the Latino men in this study had to manage both in college and back home. While they were at college these students had to manage the cultural incongruence they felt between the cultures of college and back home as well as the racial hostility that made them feel pressured to change their cultural performance, diminished their sense of belonging, and made them question their legitimacy. At home they had to fulfill roles and expectations that were culturally socialized that they felt they had outgrown. Although the way they managed the cultural forces and expectations in each context seemed different, clinically these students were concealing aspects of themselves to gain acceptance and be prized. This concealment led to isolation, emotional pain, diminished confidence, and difficulty sharing their struggles and seeking support. In essence these students were caught in-between the demands and expectation of college and back home which made it difficult for them to their full selves.

Borderlands provides a good heuristic for conceptualizing working-class Latino students' cultural orientation and identity as they enter and move through college. Because it helps us consider the intersection of the cultural forces that may be colliding for these students coming on to a PWI. According to Anzaldua (1987), being caught in the *borderlands* is characterized by psychological distress from moving back and forth across the border of two cultures. In order to provide clinical support for working-class Latino males, clinicians must assess and consider the cultural demands that these men are managing both back home and at school. Furthermore they need to assess which demand is causing the most distress and how it is impacting their functioning across several domains of well-being. Attending and processing each contextual demand is important because it helps provide the interpersonal connection between the client's assumptions of what is expected of them and the expectations that have actually been communicated; it also helps understand the client's perception of the 'consequences' they would incur if were unable to fulfill these expectations. The

back and forth between fulfilling the expectations of back home and college can cause considerable distress.

Counselors need to empathize how complex it is for these students to regularly manage relationships in two different cultural contexts, that operate on several identity dimensions (i.e., ethnicity, SES, gender) and their ability to reconcile the adaptations they need make to be accepted in both. In essence the Latino men in the present study were managing two set of ideal versions of who they had to be in each context and wrestled with trying to live up to each of these ideals while trying be self-compassionate when they were unable to. Providers would benefit from approaching these psychological dynamics by using humanistic approaches of psychotherapy to reduce the distress of internal incongruence between the ideal self and the real self. In addition, it is vital that clinicians understand that the intrapersonal and interpersonal adaptations the student in this present study made were related to intersecting systems oppression along several identities. Thus, Latino men would also benefit greatly from intersectional and anti-colonial therapeutic approaches based in liberation psychology such as the H.E.A.R.T. model (Adames, Chavez-Dueñas, Sharma, & Roche, 2018; Chavez-Dueñas, Adames, Perez-Chavez, Salas, 2019). Using these therapeutic approaches clinicians can help destigmatize the adaptations the students are making and help them find liberations by reclaiming their strategies to survive in college as important to their pursuit of their goals.

Finally, counselors need to attend to the racial hostility Latino men encounter in college. Research is robust about the negative mental health effects associated with consistent exposure to racism which include depression, anxiety, and trauma symptoms (Carter, 2007; Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2019; Harrell, 2000). In addition, continuous exposure to prejudice, racial microaggressions, and displays of racism results in exhaustion

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Appendix A
Demographic & Screening Questionnaire

- 1.) Age: _____ years old
- 2.) Academic class standing (check one):
 3rd year Sophomore
 3rd year Junior
 Senior
 2nd year Senior (5th Year)
 3rd year Senior (6th Year)
 Master's Student
- 3.) Are you a full time or part time student? _____ Full time _____ Part time
- 4.) Current Cumulative GPA: _____
- 5.) Major (if undeclared, state undeclared): _____
- 6.) Culturally, how do you self-identify? _____
- 6a.) What is your ethnic heritage ? (Check all that apply)
 Mexican Cuban
 Chicano Central American (Please Specify: _____)
 Puerto Rican South American (Please Specify: _____)
 Dominican
- 7.) While at UW-Madison, have you experienced any of the following events due to your race or ethnicity. (Please mark an "X" for all that apply)
- 7a.) Been the subject of an offensive comment or slur said to you directly or behind your back?
- 7b.) Felt like someone avoided either physical or social contact with you?
- 7c.) Had people make comments about your style of clothing or speaking patterns that made you feel uncomfortable?
- 7d.) Been physically threatened or attacked?
- 7e.) Been told that your perceived challenges or experiences are not real or imagined?
- 7f.) Had professors or peers tell you or imply that they have lower expectations of you?
- 7g.) Been told that you are confirming a stereotype of your race or ethnicity?
- 8.) Do you feel like you belong (included or represented) here at UW-Madison? ___ Yes ___ No
- 9.) Do you feel you have to change the way you speak, mannerisms, or conceal part of who you are in order to feel comfortable in some spaces at UW-Madison? _____ Yes _____ No
- 10.) Do you feel like you can fully share all the struggles and concerns you have at UW-Madison with your family back home? _____ Yes _____ No
- 11.) How do you identify your sexual orientation?
 Gay

Bisexual
 Queer
 Straight
 Other (Please Specify: _____)

12.) Are you currently in a relationship? Yes No

13.) Do you currently belong to any Latinx campus organizations? Yes No

13a.) If so, please

specify _____

14.) How is your college education financed? (Check all that apply):

Parents or Legal Guardians I pay for my own education
 Work Study program Student loans
 Scholarships (Please specify: _____) Savings
 Relatives GI Bill
 Other (Please list: _____)

15.) Are you currently employed? Yes No

15a.) Are you currently working for NO pay (e.g., volunteer work)? Yes No

15b.) On average, how many hours per week do you work? _____ hours

15c.) Could you afford college if you were not working? Yes No

16.) Do you have anyone either partially or fully depending on you financially? Yes No

16a.) If yes, how many individuals? _____

16b.) Please specify: _____

17.) Have you experienced not having a place to live, or feared that you wouldn't have a place to live? Yes No

18.) Have you experienced food insecurity or scarcity? Yes No

19.) Have you experienced not having clean clothes or clothes that fit? Yes No

20.) Have you thought about dropping out or stopping school? Yes No

20a.) If so,

why: _____

21.) Have you been enrolled at UW-Madison every semester since you started? Yes No

22.) How many generations has your family lived in the U.S.? _____

23.) Do you have siblings that went to college? Yes No

23a.) If so, please specify (i.e., older brother): _____

24.) Do you consider yourself a first-generation college student? ___ Yes ___ No
Please provide information regarding your primary caregivers' education.

24a.) Caregiver #1, relationship: _____

What is this person's highest level of
completed education?

- No formal schooling
 Some Elementary School
 Some Middle School
 8th grade
 High school or GED
 Some college
 2-year college
 College
 Graduate school

24b.) Caregiver #2, relationship: _____

What is this person's highest level of
completed education?

- No formal schooling
 Some Elementary school
 Some Middle School
 8th grade
 High school or GED
 Some college
 2-year college
 College
 Graduate school

25.) How do you describe your social class? _____

25a.)



Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in society. At the top are the people who are best off (most money, education, best jobs). At the bottom are the people who are worst off (least money, education, worst job or no job). Please place a large "X" on the rung where you think you stand.

Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself and about where you are from?
 - a. What does it mean to you to be from there?
 - b. What was it like for you growing up there?
2. What was it like for you to come here to UW-Madison and what has it been like for you to be here at UW-Madison?
 - a. What were some expectations about you coming to UW-Madison?
 - b. How do you feel about those expectations now?
 - c. What are some positive or negative feelings associated with being at UW-Madison?
 - d. Have you there been times that you were treated differently because of your race and ethnicity?
 - e. Overall, how do you feel about your place and position at UW-Madison? What makes you feel this way?
3. What would you say are some of the differences between UW-Madison and back home?
 - a. How have you managed those differences?
 - b. What have you had to do differently?
 - c. What has it been like for you to make those adjustments?
 - d. How does that feel for you?
4. How do you think you may be different between how you are back home, and how you are here?
 - a. Do you ever feel like you have to be a different “you” here at UW-Madison to fit in, then you are, with your friends and family back home?
 - b. How are you different? How does that make you feel?
 - c. When do you feel like you don’t have to be that different you when you are at UW-Madison?
5. What has it been like for you to transition back and forth between UW-Madison and back home?
 - a. What shifts do you think you make?
 - b. What do you think you leave behind at UW-Madison when you go back home?
 - c. How do you decide what you leave here at UW-Madison?
 - d. What about you stays back home when you come-back to UW-Madison?
6. What’s it like for you to be between these two worlds?
 - a. Do you feel fully accepted in both?
 - b. What are some of the differences between those two worlds?
 - c. How do you navigate them?
7. How do you think your relationships back home with your friends and family have changed while you’ve been here at UW-Madison?

- a. What do you think caused them to change?
 - b. How do you feel about those changes?

8. Since you have been here at UW-Madison do you think your family and friends back home have noticed a difference in you? If so, what would you say that difference is?
 - a. Why do you think these are the differences people see?
 - b. How do you feel about being seen different in that way?