You're not really here because you deserve to be here: How Latinx college students experience imposter syndrome

By

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my sister, Nancy. You are the real deal. I could not have done this without you, thank you for your support my mojo. I love you. To my parents, you worked so hard and sacrificed so much to provide my sister and I the best opportunities. I am eternally grateful for everything you have done for us. Mi mami y papi, esto es para ustedes, los quiero mucho.

I also dedicate this dissertation to all my students and mentees over the years. Thank you so much for allowing me to be part of your lives and thank you for inspiring me every day.

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Abstract

This study explored how Latinx college students experience imposter syndrome while facing the COVID-19 global pandemic. The 2020 global pandemic was a time where a disease (i.e., coronavirus) spread across many countries and affected a large number of people. Despite increased literature on Latinx college students as they navigate their education journey, relatively little is known about how underrepresented students understand and cope with imposter syndrome in general and specifically during a time of crisis. Scholarship attends to some of these educational and systemic issues; however particular attention as to how imposter syndrome plays out in the lives of Latinx students is missing from this greater discussion. This study used LatCrit theory which explores multi-dimensional identities and supplements to the work on race and identity. The data collection process consisted of 14 students being interviewed 3 times each for a total of 42 interviews. All participants were attending a large research-intensive university. Data results in the development of four themes, they are: (1) "It Wasn't 100% Because of My Hard Work:" Not Claiming Success, (2) A Temporary Break? The Impacts and Changes of Imposter Syndrome During the COVID-19 Global Pandemic, (3) Opening up to Folks: Mechanisms Used to Cope (or not) with Imposter Syndrome, with two subthemes, they are: (3a) Relationships, (3b) Places, (4) Specific Institutional Changes to Address the Latinx College Student needs. The fourth theme had two subthemes, they are: (4a) Funding, (4b) Mental Health Services. Conclusions from this study provide implication for research, theory, and practice.

Keywords: imposter syndrome, Latinx college students, COVID-19 global pandemic

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Education is a significant vehicle for gaining economic and social mobility in society. Educational opportunities provide avenues of upward social mobility for groups otherwise removed from educational opportunities (Kasarda et al., 2013), and understanding the context of the higher educational system is essential. Education was not created to be equal, and the current trend demonstrates the long history of inequality. The historical inequality in educational institutions means there are disparate outcomes relative to race, class, or gender. For instance, scholars have examined why Latino youth seem to have lower participation in higher education (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Astin, 1982; Bowser et al., 1995). All too often, research assumes a deficit approach assuming Latinx[1] students may not want or value education.

As of 2017, an estimated 60 million Latinx individuals reside in the United States, accounting for 18% of the total U.S. population (Noe-Bustamante & Flores, 2019). Ample scholarship has demonstrated the Latinx population continues to be the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States (Calderón Galdeano et al., 2012; Nuñez et al., 2011; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Although Latinx students may have attained some modest gains in population, educational inequality gains have not kept pace with these population increases. The educational disparities between Latinx and White students persist. For instance, from 1975 to 2008, there was no significant narrowing of the achievement gap between White and Latinx 17-year-olds based on test data generated by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Data collected in 2009 from the U.S. Department of Education indicated a substantial proportion of

[1] The use of the term "Latinx" is a more inclusive of the individual's gender identity. "Latino" is used when referring to males, "Latina" is used when referring to females. Generally, I used "Latinx" when referring to the general population. I used "Hispanic" when it is used to reflect past scholarship.

Hispanic [Latinx] students in grades 4 (37%) and 8 (21%) are English language learners. These two factors—the growing size of the Hispanic [Latinx] population in the United States and the percentage of 4th- and 8th-grade Hispanic [Latinx] students that are English language learners—underlie the so-called "achievement gap" (Cadelle-Hemphill et al., 2011) between Hispanic [Latinx] and White 4th- and 8th-graders. The higher education system in America continues to be a vehicle of social stratification and inequality (Kromydas, 2017) and attention to it is necessary as the Latinx population demographics are changing.

As the Latinx population growth numbers are estimated to increase, the number of Latinx students participating at colleges and universities is also starting to grow (Medina & Posadas, 2012). Pérez Huber et al. (2015) shared out of every 100 Latina elementary students, 63 graduated from high school, 13 received an undergraduate degree, four graduated with a master's or a professional degree, and less than one (0.3) graduated with a doctorate. As for their Latino male counterparts, similar scholarship suggests a "vanishing" number of Latino males in the educational pipeline (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009), causing even more significant concerns. Nationally, less than 20% of men of color, Black, Latino, and Asian Pacific Islanders possessed a 4-year college degree in 2012 (Pérez Huber et al., 2015). Since these numbers were shared close to 10 years ago, they have not improved (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020). As higher education institutions help expand students' viewpoints, an inclusive culture on campus is necessary to ensure all students can grow and learn successfully, especially Latinx students who are often left out of the narrative (Tefera et al., 2019).

Latinx students likely understand the steep odds they must endure to be successful in higher education, yet little research has been done to understand how Latinx students perceive their college experiences relative to the larger educational disparities not favorable for them. This

research study aimed to understand the experiences of Latinx college students who may experience imposter syndrome. *Imposter syndrome* is a pervasive feeling of self-doubt, insecurity, or fraudulence despite often overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Additionally, it is an internal experience of believing one is not as competent as others perceive (Clance, 1985; Clance & Imes, 1978; Sakulku & Alexander, 2011). Details on imposter syndrome are shared in Chapter 2.

Educational Context

History of educational disparities before Latinx individuals have influenced the achievement gap for students, for example, the Coleman Report (Coleman, 1966), the Supreme Court ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education* (Warren, 1954), the 1986 East Los Angeles Blowouts (Delgado Bernal, 1997), and subtractive schooling in the United States. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 asked the U.S. Office of Education to describe education and the inequality of educational opportunities in elementary and secondary education across the nation because, at the time, little was known about education and schools in the United States. The Coleman Report, also known as the equality of educational opportunity report, was a 2-year research project that collected data from schools across the country to publish a 737-page report assessing educational opportunity for students based on race, color, religion, and national origin. Information about funding, resource distribution, and test scores among children was not examined, and the national data included individual observations, teacher-administered standardized academic tests, and self-enumerated questionnaires. Coleman (1966) examined how well children learned and what influenced a child's capacity to learn (i.e., teachers, peers, families). The results were later known as the achievement gap among students.

The Coleman report shared multiple disparities in school resources where the South lagged far behind the Northeast. After analyzing 600,000 students and 60,000 teachers from 4,000 schools nationwide, Coleman's results highlighted the learning differences among students. Parents were critical to the student's educational performance and shared American schooling segregation even after the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision. These reports were framed between Black and White students, which is essential and necessary, yet Latinx students do not receive the same benefits and privileges as White students nor are Latinx students receiving the same support as some of their Black students. Fifty-five years after the Coleman Report, educational disparities persist (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; O'Day & Smith, 2020).

Brown v. Board of Education (Warren, 1954) was a landmark decision of the U. S. Supreme Court, where the court ruled racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. The idea "separate by equal" was, in fact, not equal and unconstitutional. In the 1950s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People filed lawsuits around the country on behalf of the plaintiff to challenge segregation laws. At the time, these laws allowed for discrimination in schools based on the color of the skin. The original case out of Kansas argued segregation violated the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment. On May 17, 1954, the court stripped away constitutional sanctions for segregation by race and made equal opportunity in education the law. However, the legal victory did not transform the country overnight and much work remains. The lack of integration and policies has left America's schools increasingly segregated, especially for Black and Latinx students.

The narrative was framed between Black and White individuals, yet segregation in educational experiences also has a significant impact on Latinx students. Black and Latinx

individuals have a long history of struggles for equal, educational opportunity. Mexican Americans' efforts have had the most extended history in the United States, and amplification and representation across the whole Latinx population (i.e., Central American and South American individuals) are just as important. Several cases have defined moments of the struggle for Mexican Americans in cases like *Independent School District v. Salvatierra* (1930)[2] in *Texas, Roberto Alvarez v. Lemon Grove* (1931)[3] in *California, and Méndez v. Westminster* (1945)[4] in Orange County, California. In cases related to segregation, the central focus was often on race. The *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision impacted Latinx individuals and led to establishing a ground-root organization. Secondly, it is clear race is a social construct, and Latinx have neither suffered nor benefited from different racial classification (Nieto, 2004). After more than 50 years, the debate continues on how to fight racial inequalities across the nation.

For instance, the East Los Angeles Blowouts of 1968 were an example of a series of protests by the Chicano[x] students against unequal conditions, particularly in the Los Angeles school district (Delgado Bernal, 1997, 1998). This social movement were students who organized and carried out the protests. They were primarily concerned with the quality (and inequality) of education that Mexican Americans' first mass mobilization in Southern California. The demands were for social justice, educational opportunities, called attention to systemic inequalities, and ultimately led to improvements in city schools. The story and narrative for

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[2] Independent School District v. Salvatierra (1930) determined whether or not segregated schools for Hispanics [Latinx] were necessary for the state of Texas.
[3] In Roberto Alvarez v. Lemon Grove (1931), the local school board attempted to build a separate school for children of Mexican origin and the first successful school desegregation case.
[4] Méndez v. Westminster (1945), a federal court case that challenged Mexican remedial schools in Orange County, California, held that the forced segregation of Mexican American students into separate "Mexican schools" was unconstitutional and unlawful.

Students of Color in the education system in the United States continues to warrant attention. As of 2013, the details from the Coleman Report on educational disparities continue to hold.

Barriers in Higher Education

As we think about the history of education, we recognize the consequences and tension between different policies and expectations. Understanding some of the educational histories, like the Coleman Report and East Los Angeles Blowouts, helps to think about the current educational barriers for students. While there are changes in college enrollment for Latinx students, these enrollment increases have not mirrored graduation rates (Pérez Huber et al., 2015; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001); these disparities continue to exist. Latinx students face multiple barriers as they move through the educational pipeline. Chang et al. (2020) discussed the cultural mismatch between independent (i.e., individualistic culture) university settings and the interdependent family environment (i.e., collectivistic culture). One reason might be institutions are usually set up in a way that does not respond culturally to these students. For example, Arevalo et al. (2015) indicated Latino American college students were significantly more collectivistic toward non-kin groups than their non-Latino American counterparts. This "miscommunication" creates specific barriers that impact Latinx students' overall achievement gaps in higher education.

Scholars indicated intragroup marginalization, cultural incongruity, and negative perceptions of the university environment as potential risk factors associated with poor academic and psychological outcomes among Latinx college students (Cano et al., 2012; Gloria et al., 2005a; Gloria et al., 2009; Llamas & Ramos-Sánchez, 2013; Rischall & Meyers, 2019). There is a need for different types of mentorships (i.e., peer mentor, graduate mentor, faculty mentor) to assist in navigating their educational journey (Delgado-Guerrero, 2016). Another barrier Latinx

college students face in education is college readiness (i.e., lower scores on SAT/ACT that serve as predictors for college entrance; Allensworth & Clark, 2020), financial challenges (i.e., coming from low-income socioeconomic background and not having the financial needs to pay for college; Bers & Schuetz, 2014), and lack of self-esteem and college adjustment (Rivas-Drake, 2011). These factors are embedded in the cultural double-bind Latinx college students often find themselves in when negotiating conflicting cultural pressures from their academic institutions and their families.

As the demographic makeup of students on college and university campuses across the United States is becoming more diverse (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), understanding the educational experience students face as they persist at an institution often not made for them is crucial. Scholars who examine experiences of Latinx students in higher education (Corral et al., 2015; Dueñas & Gloria; 2017, 2020; Luedke, 2017; Nuñez et al., 2013) often provide deficit-based and asset-based models for understanding the collegiate experience (Santiago et al., 2019). Deficit-based approaches are focused (i.e., focus on the problem, often framing groups of people as the main problem), attend to the individual and/or community, and lead to ways of thinking about people such as being at-risk, minorities, or lacking in their achievement (Green & Haines, 2011).

Conversely, asset-based approaches are strength-driven, opportunity-focused, and lead to a new and unexpected response to the community's wishes (Green & Haines, 2011). As students enter and persist through White-dominated spaces in higher education, they may feel they do not belong or do not have the appropriate support to perform to the best of their abilities. In particular, topics such as imposter phenomenon have grown in popularity (Bernard et al., 2018; Bothello & Roulet, 2019; Cokley et al., 2013, Dancy & Brown, 2011; Feenstra et al., 2020;

Hoang, 2013), but these approaches are often deficit in that students are often seen as lacking in their achievements because of their own personal motivation rather than considering structural challenges students might face.

As a way to begin to solve the puzzle of Latinx students struggling in higher education, I examined imposter syndrome through an assets-focused, qualitative approach. I examine how Latinx students think about themselves and their experiences at a predominantly white institution (PWI) and think about the structural challenges these students face. The chapter begins with an introduction of Latinx individuals in the United States, followed by the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and an additional section on the Latinx student achievement gap in higher education. I conclude with key terms and concepts of the current research study.

Problem Statement

Latinx students have experienced significant gains in terms of access to educational opportunities (Cavazos et al., 2010; Luedke, 2017; Rios-Aguilar & Marquez-Kiyama, 2012) and overall educational outcomes, including increased participation in head start, improved math and reading scores, decreased dropout rates, and increased college enrollment (Schanzenbach & Bauer, 2016; Schhneider et al., 2006). Imposter syndrome is another likely barrier for Latinx students as they begin to understand the other ways in which their postsecondary goals are threatened. As Latinx college students attend higher education systems, the collectivist culture does not align often with the individualist culture (Castellanos & Gloria, 2008) of the university, and this incongruity creates tension among Latinx college students (Gloria et al., 2005b; Gloria & Robinson Kurpius, 1996).

Educational researchers are interested in predicting college students' academic success and adjustment, but the systems in place continue to fail and prevent them from persisting in

higher education. A group of students who need continuous support is first-generation college Latinx students, where disparities in their educational performance are different compared to other racial/ethnic groups (Reyes & Nora, 2012). First-generation college students are less likely to persist through college (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005), more likely to have stressful college experiences (Phinney & Hass, 2003), more likely to work while attending college to assist their parents and families financially, come from lower socioeconomic homes, and remain closer to home for school (Reyes & Nora, 2012; Saenz et al., 2007).

Latinx students are more likely than other students to be the first in their family to attend college (i.e., a first-generation college student; Terenzini et al., 1996; Zalaquett, 1999). Despite a lack of specific research on Latinx first-generation college students, a significant amount of research exists on the general experiences of first-generation students. First-generation college students tend to work more hours, expect to take longer to complete their degrees, have "inadequate" social capital, and lack access to college counseling (Engle, 2007; Kimura-Walsh et al., 2009; Perna et al., 2008; Reid & Moore, 2008; Terenzini et al., 1996). Previous literature indicated first-generation college students might be less equipped for college due to poor academic preparation from high school (Zalaquett, 1999), lower critical thinking scores before college (Terenzini et al., 1996), and a feeling of not belonging or beliefs they cannot perform their best; and this calls for necessary attention.

Latinx first-generation college students are also likely to have unrealistic expectations about college (Reyes & Nora, 2012), lack knowledge of the university system (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991), and encounter a myriad of systemic oppressions and institutional barriers in higher education (Kohli et al., 2017; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). When Latinx first-generation college students face these particular challenges (i.e., financial, academic, personal; Chang et al.,

2020), added feelings of self-doubt, fraud, and feelings of inadequacy can have academic, psychological, and perhaps, social consequences. Given that students may not see many others who look like them, and institutions may not be culturally responsive to their needs, some students may begin to doubt their abilities.

Imposter syndrome, sometimes call imposter phenomenon, is experienced internally as chronic self-doubt and feelings of intellectual fraudulence. Underrepresented students, including Latinx, generally face more academic (Arum & Roksa, 2011; Loo & Rolison, 1986; Massey & Probasco, 2010; Smedley et al., 1993), financial (Turley & Wodtke, 2010; Massey & Probasco, 2010), and social challenges (Chavous, 2002; Fischer, 2007; Massey & Probasco, 2010; Nagasawa & Wong, 1999; Smedley et al., 1993) than their White counterparts. Even as Latinx college students bring in a wealth of capital (Yosso, 2005), they experience sensitivity and vulnerability when attending PWIs. A multitude of studies document the significance of imposter phenomenon for both undergraduate and graduate students. At the graduate level, there is research on imposter phenomenon for students in a wide variety of academic programs, including physician assistant studies (Mattie et al., 2008; Prata & Gietzen, 2007), psychology (Bernard et al., 2002; Castro et al., 2004), nurse practitioner (Huffstutler & Varnell, 2006; Sutliff, 1998), medical residency (Legassie et al., 2008; Oriel et al., 2004), molecular biology (Pinker, 2009), females in doctoral programs (Gibson-Beverly & Schwartz, 2008) and women in academia (Long et al., 2000). At the undergraduate level, the research attending to these particular students' needs additional attention (Cokley et al., 2013; Kolligian & Sternberg, 2011; Le, 2019).

Individuals who suffer from the imposter phenomenon may not grasp or believe in their successes; even if they are high achieving individuals, they are led to feel like they are frauds. A

seminal study that attends to the specific phenomenon was first examined among high-achieving women (Clance & Imes, 1978). Particularly, Cokley et al. (2013) discussed the influence of imposter syndrome on Students of Color. Survey results for 240 undergraduate Students of Color attending a Southwestern university indicated imposter syndrome could impact students' overall well-being and collegial experiences. Cokley et al. (2013) noted additional research was needed to determine the differences in these feelings among Students of Color.

Imposter fears can become multifold in an environment where one feels threatened, such as a PWI. Often accompanied by faltering self-confidence and over-focus mistakes, imposter phenomenon can become debilitating for Latinx college students. Imposter syndrome manifested mainly among Latinx college students can lead to differential academic and social outcomes that could shape the overall collegial experience. At the college level, the imposter phenomenon has been documented across several academic majors: psychology (Ferrari & Thompson, 2006); engineering (Felder, 1988); and medical, dental, nursing, and pharmacy students (Henning et al., 1998). However, Cokley et al. (2013) shared very little is known by race and ethnicity (i.e., Latinx undergraduates) related to the imposter phenomenon, and these feelings are not unique. However, they said imposter syndrome hits Students of Color differently (Cokley et al., 2013). Dancy and Brown (2011) shared research studies on the imposter phenomenon in people's lives and Scholars of Color are slow to emerge. Additional research about imposter syndrome can create pathways for administrators, student affairs professionals, faculty, and perhaps students to identify how to support individuals experiencing feelings like an imposter.

Purpose Statement

This study's purpose was three-fold. First, I inquired as to how, if at all, imposter syndrome may manifest in the experiences of Latinx college students attending a predominantly

White institution. Second, I was curious about where and when do these particular experiences occur. Lastly, I addressed how Latinx undergraduates address and cope with imposter syndrome during college. Additional knowledge of how and when imposter syndrome is activated can help inform better Latinx student engagement strategies for university staff and personnel (i.e., institutional leadership, professors/instructors/staff, and academic advisors). In recognition of this possibility, I asked: 1) How, when, and where do Latinx college students experience imposter syndrome at a predominantly White university, if they do? 2) How do Latinx students cope with imposter syndrome during college?

As Latinx college students may start to understand the different ways in which they may not belong or succeed, it can lead to feelings that one is an imposter or does not belong leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy. The self-fulfilling prophecy can lead to unrealistic expectations of their identity and who they are as individuals. The idea of a self-fulfilling prophecy could invoke the notion students are at fault for their own circumstances, therefore; I used LatCrit theory to help me contemplate how structural forces (e.g., institutional structures, policies, programs, and existing structural issues like racism) relate to students' experiences. Focus on structures helps to identify the design that builds to withstand the forces it will face. Understanding forces helps to design and build a better structure.

Educational Context and LatCrit Theory

I used LatCrit theory to elevate social and structural issues that may influence Latinx students' experiences, and ultimately, may relate to why students experience imposter syndrome. LatCrit shares similar tenets as critical race theory (CRT), and I explain these central tenets in Chapter 2. LatCrit theory studies how race, class, gender, sexuality, and other forms of oppression can intersect with the lives of people and how those intersections can mediate, or

influence, the educational experiences (Pérez Huber, 2010). Additionally, it helps to analyze language, ethnicity, immigration, culture, identity, and sexuality (Arreguín-Anderson, 2018; Davila & de Bradley, 2010; Delgado Bernal, 2002). In particular, the use of critical theory, in particular LatCrit, helped to understand the history of racism in higher education and helped explain the experiences of Students of Color in higher education (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

LatCrit theory in education is a framework that theorizes and examines how race and racism explicitly and implicitly impacts educational structures, processes, and discourses that influence Latinx individuals. The utilization of Latinx individual experiences in education can also theorize and examine how racism intersects with other forms of subordination, such as sexism, classism, and generational differences. Additionally, LatCrit challenged the dominant discourses on race and how it continues to lead to subordination and marginalization of the Latinx population in the United States.

For this research, using LatCrit theory enabled me to better capture and communicate Latinx populations' experiences, specifically through a focused examination of the unique forms of oppression this group encounters. LatCrit allowed for Latinx students to be holders and creators of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Roberts & Cantu, 2012) who can transform schools into places where the experiences of all individuals are acknowledged, taught, and cherished. LatCrit theory addressed the intersectionality of characters (i.e., racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). LatCrit theory in education is a social justice project that links theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the community's academy. Additionally, LatCrit challenges the dominant ideologies and creates a new narrative for Latinx college students' identification, so imposter syndrome does not interfere with their college experience.

Brief Overview of the Methods

I used a critical qualitative approach (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2018), for this study. Qualitative research allows for an "interpretive, naturalistic approach of the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Qualitative research approach answers questions about experience, meaning, and perspective, most often from the participant's standpoint, and it is usually conducted in natural settings to make sense, interpret, and make meaning of their experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This research study explained the experiences of Latinx college students who may experience imposter syndrome. Those who identified experiences with imposter syndrome understood and shared where and when these experiences and feelings happen for the Latinx college student. Additionally, I identified coping strategies Latinx students use to navigate imposter syndrome within higher education.

A critical approach was most helpful and useful for this topic because I considered race at the center of a dominant narrative. Critical approaches address inequity in the economy, labor, health, housing, and education—critical inquiry matters in the lives of those who experience social injustice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2015). Additionally, critical inquiry can have many methods and disciplines that can be blended (e.g., anthropology and sociology). The act of coding was systemized, and oppressed voices are placed at the center (Denzin & Lincoln, 2015).

I used critical life story as the design for this research project because it allowed Latinx college student voices to be heard, analyzed, and theorized as emphasizing the telling of their narratives (Atkinson, 1998). A life story allows participants to share what has the most impact on them. Life stories are told in a personal construction and share a cultural and historical context (Goodson, 2016). I interviewed 14 self-identified Latinx college students in a three-part, in-depth, semi-structured interview that each lasted between 30 to 40 minutes (a total of 90 to 120

minutes per participant). The interviews were conducted over a 2-week period. This allowed for the data collected to be relatively consistent through predetermined questions while still providing flexibility of a conversation.

A thorough analysis at every step of the research process was critical to modifying data analysis. I wrote notes after each interview to safeguard from equipment failure. Taking notes after each interview helped me to ask follow-up questions for each participant. This practice also helped me identify emergent themes that appeared relevant to the research questions. After the interviews were conducted, the recordings were transcribed, and the narratives were analyzed and coded.

Summary of the Findings and Significance of the Study

The findings of this study indicated four major themes and two subthemes. The themes were: (1) "It Wasn't 100% Because of My Hard Work:" Not Claiming Success, (2) A Temporary Break? The Impacts and Changes of Imposter Syndrome During the COVID-19 Global Pandemic, (3) Opening up to Folks: Mechanisms Used to Cope (or not) with Imposter Syndrome, with two subthemes (3a) Relationships and (3b) Places. (4) Specific Institutional Changes to Address the Latinx College Student needs. The fourth theme had two subthemes, they are: (4a) Funding, (4b) Mental Health Services.

This research study contributes to the field of higher education by providing a helpful perspective of an underrepresented group in higher education by focusing on the lived experiences of Latinx college students attending a PWI. The intention was that throughout the research process, the lived experiences of Latinx college students were at the center of the research. There is evidence on the various ways Latinx students' degree program might be threatened (i.e., experiences with macro-and micro-aggressions). Imposter syndrome is an

essential source of knowledge for university personal, faculty, academic staff, and potentially other Latinx college students to create a different educational experience for students. Previous studies addressed groups of underrepresented students' college experiences related to imposter syndrome; however, to date, no research study centers on the narrative of Latinx college students.

This research study contributes to the current literature in different ways. Empirically, I specified whether and how imposter syndrome was a factor in students' success that could alter how we think about supporting students. I challenged the notion of imposter phenomenon/imposter syndrome to be less individualistic and consider imposter syndrome in more structural ways to point out how policies, social structures, practices, and programs may be implicated in students' experiences of imposter syndrome. Secondly, I used LatCrit and took the concept imposter syndrome, which is often characterized as individualistic, toward a more structural approach. There is often pressure on the individual student to persist in higher education and shifting the institution's response and figure out ways to not to activate these imposter feelings is necessary.

Key Concepts and Terminology

This critical life story study explored how first-generation Latinx college students describe and cope in college and whether they experienced imposter syndrome attending a Midwestern 4-year research institution. The term Latinx was used in this research study to include the students' culture, geographic, and language origins, unless otherwise specified. Latino was used in instances when describing men, and Latina was used in cases representing women. Using Latinx was a more reflective and more inclusive term for gender-inclusive students (Armus, 2015). Torres (2018) indicated there are various iterations of terminology

circulating—Latinx, Latino, Latina, Latina/o, Latin@, Latin, Latin American, and Hispanic—and scholars could use any of the terms but be consistent in writing and provide a definition in a footnote for the reader who may not be familiar with the terminology.

For the purpose of this study, the term "Latinx/Latino/Latina" was used instead of the term "Hispanic." Scholarship by Comas-Diaz (2001) suggested the use of the term "Hispanic" is "inaccurate, incorrect, and often offensive" (p. 116). More recent literature shared a new perspective in using Latin* to encompass the fluidity of social identities (Salinas, 2020). It is essential to distinguish between and provide a definition of these specific terms. I used the term participants used to identify themselves (e.g., Latinx, Latina, and/or Hispanic). As I entered the field, I used the following terms:

College Student. A college student is any individual enrolled in a bachelor's degree at a college or university. Being a college student means attending an institution of higher education with the intent of receiving credentials. For this research study, the use of college student represented students working towards obtaining their bachelor's degree (King, 2016).

First-Generation College Student: The term *first-generation college student* is applied to students whose parent (in single parent families), or parents did not complete either a 2-year or 4-year credential or degree. In other words, the individual is the first person in their immediate family to attend college (Reyes & Nora, 2012).

Hispanic. *Hispanic* refers to people who speak Spanish or are descended from Spanish-speaking populations. It is often used interchangeably with "Latinx" as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race (Krogstad, 2014). The term Hispanic was created by the U. S. Bureau of Census under the Nixon administration. There have been debates on if the word "Hispanic" is inclusive of all

ethnicities. In the literature, scholars like Comas-Diaz (2001) contended the term Hispanic is, in fact, an example of "identity imperialism…[one] that is inaccurate, incorrect, and often offensive as a collective name for all Spanish speakers or Latino[x]" (p. 116).

Imposter Phenomenon (Imposter Syndrome). The *imposter phenomenon*, often called *imposter syndrome*, is defined as a collection of feelings of inadequacy even in the face of information that indicates the opposite is true. Despite the external evidence of their competence, those with the syndrome remain convinced they are frauds and do not deserve the success they have achieved (Clance & Imes, 1978; Sakulku & Alexander, 2011). The two terms are used interchangeably and for this study, I used the term imposter syndrome.

Latinx. The term *Latinx* has a complex history (Salinas, 2020) refers to people who are from or descended from people from Latin America. However, it is important to take a regional, generation, ethnic, and gender dimension. Specifically, *Latina* is a self-identifying female person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin. *Latino* is a self-identifying male person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin. When appropriate, the following terms were used to identify gender. However, the term Latinx is a gender-neutral neologism sometimes used instead of Latino or Latina to refer to people of Latin American cultural or ethnic identity in the United States. For this research study, I used Latinx colleges students to represent all students. I referred to women as Latina and referred to men as Latino.

Predominantly White Institution (PWI). There are often distinctions made between *predominantly White institutions* (PWIs) and *minority-serving institutions* (MSIs). Higher learning institutions are regularly identified in scholarship and conversation by their racial composition (Bourke, 2016). Unlike MSIs, PWI status is not an official federal designation.

Commonly, the term PWI means White students account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (Dancy & Brown, 2011).

Students of Color. The terms "Students of Color, Communities of Color, People of Color" are capitalized to uplift, center, and reaffirm the voices of the individuals. Similar to how White and Black are capitalized in education literature, capitalizing the phrase attend to individuals of color experiences. Scholars in higher education encourage and intentionally capitalize the term (McCoy & Winkle-Wagner, 2015; McCoy et al., 2017).

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

With the increase in Latinx people in the United States, attending to the needs and experiences of these students is needed to serve better and address their particular needs. Although there may be an increase in Hispanics-serving intuitions (HSI's; where 25% of the student population self-identify as Latinx students) across the country, I argue examining the underrepresented community in the contours of White spaces is notably different and critical. Furthermore, it is a social responsibility for higher education institutions to consider the needs of underrepresented students and, in particular, Latinx college students as they move within and through these educational structures because of the increasing numbers in higher education.

The purpose of this research study was to understand the experiences of Latinx students who may experience imposter syndrome while attending a predominately White institution (PWI). This study identified coping strategies Latinx undergraduates used to navigate a higher education setting for those who shared imposter syndrome experiences. This chapter begins with a review of the literature on scholarly work related to the imposter phenomenon. In my review, I identified the origin of the imposter phenomenon term, its connection to students, and highlighted the particular methods used for the research studies. Additionally, to understand the imposter phenomenon, I examined previous research on Latinx college students in higher education literature and shared a more detailed review of the first-generation college experiences. Finally, the chapter concludes with the use of LatCrit as the framework for this research study—the origin, tenets, and application to the educational context are discussed.

Imposter Phenomenon

Imposter phenomenon (IP) or *imposter syndrome* (IS) was first described by Clance (1985) from her observations in a clinical setting and states that IS interferes with the well-being

of a person. It was described as individuals who experience imposter phenomenon experience intense feelings their achievements are undeserved and worry they are likely to be exposed as a fraud (Sakulku & Alexander, 2011). Imposter phenomenon refers to an "internal experience of intellectual phoniness" (Clance, 1985, p. 71) in individuals who are highly successful but unable to internalize their success (Bernard et al., 2002; Clance & Imes, 1978). It can be defined as a collection of feelings of inadequacy that persistent even in the face of information that indicates the opposite is true. The imposter phenomenon is a pervasive under-appreciation of oneself that arises when someone does not recognize, appreciate, and value their talents and skills. Clance (1985) believed imposter phenomenon is not "a pathological disease that is inherently self-damaging or self-destructive" (p. 23). Instead, it interferes with the psychological well-being of a person (Sakulku & Alexander, 2011).

Measuring the Imposter Phenomenon

Clance and Imes (1978) defined the term imposter phenomenon (now commonly used referred to as imposter syndrome) as a condition of feeling like a fraud because of an inability to internalize success and a feeling of incompetence. The original experimental study identified an internal experience of intellectual phoniness in a select sample of 150 high achieving women. Despite numerous achievements, the women did not experience an inner sense of success. These highly successful women had all earn a degree, high scores on standardized tests, or professional recognition from colleagues or organizations, yet these women still felt an inherent lack of success. These women persisted believing they were not bright and had merely fooled anyone who thought otherwise.

Clance (1985) created the Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale (CIP) to measure and determine whether or not people have IP characteristics and, if so, to what extent they suffer.

According to Chrisman et al. (1995), since its formulation, two other separate scales have been developed to measure IP, including the Harvey Imposter Phenomenon Scale ([HIP]; Harvey, 1981) and the perceived fraudulence scale ([PFS]; Kolligian & Sternberg, 1991). HIP was the first imposter phenomenon measure developed for undergraduate and graduate students. PFS measures levels of depression, self-esteem, social anxiety, and self-monitoring. CIP measures fear of evaluation, fear of not being able to repeat success, and fear of being less capable than others. Of the three scales, the validity of the CIP scale and PFS were more accurate and reliable (i.e., high internal consistency) when compared to the HIP scale. The CIP scale is the most common and widely used quantitative measure related to imposter syndrome.

According to Clance and Imes (1978), those that experienced imposter phenomenon often felt emotions or thoughts of being discovered as incompetent. They attributed their success to hard work, luck, knowing the right people, being in the right place at the right time, or through interpersonal assets such as charm and adaptability. Individuals with IP tendencies had difficulty accepting praise or recognition for accomplishments or positive feedback (Clance & Imes, 1978); they continuously dwelled or focused on negative feedback as a reason for their deficits, mistakes, or failures. Fixated on their flaws, individuals with IP were afraid of shame and humiliation associated with failure and feelings of foolishness. Finally, those with IP tendencies overestimated others' intellect and competence while comparing their weaknesses with the strengths of others. Nearly 40 years later, the phenomenon, which is also known as a syndrome, is still relevant and prevalent (Holmes et al., 1993; Parkman 2016; Ramsey & Brown, 2017).

Imposter Phenomenon Among Students

Multiple research studies documented the prevalence of imposter phenomenon among numerous student populations. Ramsey and Brown (2017) examined how college students who

suffered from imposter syndrome can take a number of steps to better integrate themselves into the academic and social college lifestyle. They shared that sense of belonging is an essential part to college success, but in the presence of experiencing imposter syndrome, students are less likely to connect with people and ask for help (Ramsey & Brown, 2017). Sense of belonging are the social connections and interactions students engage with others (i.e., peers, academic counselors, instructors, etc.). Whereas imposter syndrome, are individualized experiences students engage with about themselves within the context of the university. Authors highlighted seeking positive role models and mentors and reminding students they are not alone in these particular feelings as ways to minimize those feelings (Megginson, 2016; Ramsey & Brown, 2017) are critical for feeling integrated into the university. However, further attention to how Latinx students attend to these experience needs consideration.

In an empirical study, Cozzarelli and Major (1990) found students who reported feelings of imposter syndrome were less satisfied, felt worse, and reported lower levels of self-esteem. In this research study, Cozzarelli and Major assessed the cognitive and affective experiences of 59 individuals with imposter syndrome and 47 individuals who did not have imposter syndrome and found the first group of individuals felt a decreased sense of self-esteem than those who did not experience imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome is about an inability to accurately self-assess concerning performance (Kets de Vries, 2005; Want & Kleitman, 2006). The imposter individuals often overestimate the abilities of others and underestimate the amount of work those individuals put into their success.

Furthermore, the majority of research studies that examine the imposter phenomenon or imposter syndrome are quantitative studies. Authors often measure correlations between different variables that influence imposter syndrome. Ross et al. (2001) investigated imposter

phenomenon in relation to general achievement dispositions using a five-factor model. With 129 college students attending a midwestern liberal arts university, results from their regression analysis indicated imposter phenomenon was positively related to neuroticism, negatively related both to extraversion and conscientiousness. The current findings expand our understanding of IP in achievement and confirm results for using the five-factor model (Chae et al., 1995; Ross et al., 2001); however, there is little research that describes students' experiences at PWI.

Specifically, more scholarship is needed to understand students' subjective experiences of imposter syndrome that could be captured through observations, interviews, or other qualitative approaches. There is a need to examine the experiences of particular groups with imposter syndrome, such as Latinx college students, for whom there is little analysis on how imposter syndrome can impact their group differently. Particularly the sharing and telling of narratives for Latinx undergraduate students is important to extend the quantitative research of imposter syndrome among Students of Color. Additionally, a narrative provides a day-to-day experience of how imposter syndrome manifests in the lives of Latinx college students.

Imposter Phenomenon Among Different Groups

Several quantitative studies address imposter syndrome in and among different groups of students. For instance, in psychology, the authors used psychometric scales and experimental conditions to examine the relationship between imposter fears and perfectionistic self-presentation. Authors found both studies stressed the links between imposter fear, perfectionism, and self-handicapping (Ferrari & Thompson, 2006). Authors suggested fears are associated when there is a situation that involves the self-worth of an individual. In a similar study, Bernard et al. (2002) highlighted among the 190 psychology undergraduate students (4%; 8 Latinx students), imposter syndrome was correlated with high neuroticism and low conscientiousness.

Distinctively, in a group of 477 medical, dental, nursing, and pharmacy students, results indicated they were at high risk for clinical levels of psychological distress (i.e., imposter syndrome; Henning et al., 1998). Furthermore, after completing a class survey, results from a regression analysis indicated only Students of Color (minority[5]) medical students reported less medical distress compared to the White students. The need to understand how academic institutions may exacerbate or counter students' perfectionistic attitudes and imposter feelings is desirable (Henning et al., 1998), especially for Latinx college students. To directly address feelings of being an imposter, Felder (1988) suggested talking about imposter syndrome in classes, seminars, or conferences as a way to normalize the experience.

Additionally, reminding students abilities have "sustained" them over the years and their class performance is not critical of their future well-being (Felder, 1988, p. 169). Talking about it and normalizing such experiences is a productive strategy; however, having a narrative understanding of how imposter syndrome manifests can inform educational leaders, administrators, and faculty on how these experiences show up at their university. Knowing how IS shows up for Latinx undergraduate students allows for those who hold positions of power to recognize when it is happening to students and attend to their needs differently.

Research looking at the relationship between imposter phenomenon and mental health is the student population has found imposter phenomenon to be a predictor of mental health. Some scholars discussed imposter phenomenon at the graduate level and among physician assistant (PA) studies (Mattie et al., 2008; Prata & Gietzen, 2007) to identify the prevalence and

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[5] Language and terminology changes over time and in some cases, terms (i.e., minority) are no longer demographically accurate and can be considered less respectful. Terminology like *students of color* is considered a more acceptable term. The term "minority" is used only when author(s) use it in their writing.

correlation of three constructs (i.e., imposter phenomenon, depression, and anxiety) and indicated levels of depression and anxiety were statistically correlated with high imposter syndrome. Results from the 269 self-assessments from a majority female population around the ages of 34 years old, highlighted about one-third of professionals' experience imposter phenomenon. These findings suggested a negative relationship between the number of years they were in practice, and the incidence of imposter systems. Mattie and colleagues (2008) studied how physician assistants acquired greater self-confidence as their professional experience accumulated. In Castro et al. (2004) indicated in a clinical and counseling psychology program, results from 213 graduate students (less than 2% identified as Latinx graduate students) confirmed a significant, positive relationship exists between childhood parentification (i.e., the process of across generation of unmet needs) and imposter feelings.

Even though there is an increase in Latinx student excellence, there is limited research that expresses the potential narrative of this particular growing population. Results from a survey analysis included five scales indicating for 170 female graduate students, where 3.6% were Hispanic from a midsize Southern university, attachment and entitlement were significantly related to imposter phenomenon (Gibson-Beverly & Schwartz, 2008). In particular, anxious attachment and entitlement were positively predictive of imposter phenomenon and project implications for individuals working with graduate women.

The imposter phenomenon and factors that contribute to its development are important areas of continued study. In particular, additional research needs to examine other possible contributors to the development of imposter phenomenon in women (Gibson-Beverly & Schwartz, 2008). The generalizability based on sample size, lack of Latinx individuals who participated in this study, and self-reported assessment warrant attention. Additionally, literature

attends to imposter syndrome and medical students' resident in an ethnographic study. In an anonymous, cross-sectional postal survey, 77 female residents in a 3-year internal medical program reported higher levels on imposter syndrome scale (i.e., Clance Imposter Scale; Clance & Imes, 1978) compared to their male counterparts (Legassi et al., 2008). Specifically, in the Midwest, the 185 family medicine residents (41% woman and 24% men) reported as "imposters" (Oriel et al., 2004, p. 248). Their critical approach in the ethnographic narrative explored issues of power, class, and agency in their experiences as working-class women in the academy (Oriel et al., 2004).

In an ethno-autobiographical study, two tenure-track Latina professors expressed their feelings of isolation and loneliness despite their success as assistant faculty (Machado-Casas et al., 2013). The imposter phenomenon impacts those who move through college and post-graduate work and attending to the ways individuals process and create coping strategies need more considerable attention. A few newer studies found imposter syndrome is prevalent in Students of Color, particularly Latinx college students, and is often a factor in the relationship between discrimination, depression, and anxiety (Cokley et al., 2013; Mullangi & Jagsi, 2019). For instance, Cokley et al., (2013) found higher imposter feelings among African American and Latino students and was significantly correlated with psychological distress. Attention to the how imposter syndrome affects Latinx college students needs attention. The students' awareness of racial prejudices induced imposter syndrome and made them feel anxious and depressed about it—even when they had achieved impressive accomplishments. Precisely for this study, African Americans students reported significantly more group stress, race-related stress, and environmental stress than Latino/a and Asian Americans students (Cokley et al., 2013).

In the same study, there was no difference in imposter syndrome among gender, and Asian Americans reported significantly higher imposter feelings than African or Latino/a Americans individuals (Cokley et al., 2013). Additionally, there were no differences found in imposter phenomena by African American and Latino/a American persons. Imposter feelings were significantly positively correlated with underrepresented status stress and negatively correlated with psychological well-being. The imposter phenomenon was a stronger predictor of mental health than ethnic status stress (Cokley et al., 2013). Furthermore, the authors suggested, "it is probably the case that ethnic students on a predominantly White campus share an ethnic experience that can be stressful" (Cokley et al., 2013, p. 93).

Solórzano et al. (2000), Acevedo-Gil (2017), and others have made recommendations for counselors working with Students of Color to address the everyday stressors experienced by individuals who are not a part of the dominant group on campus in programming. Solórzano et al. (2000) posited Students of Color at PWIs believe they have to prove themselves by working harder. Acevedo-Gil (2017) shared the pathway of college-conocimiento entails a cyclical process that drives students to develop a reflective college awareness (consciousness) through self-advocacy and peers with the college. Additionally, Luedke (2017) analyzed how 17 Latinx college students accessed and persisted through higher education by examining familiar funds of knowledge and capital related to higher education in Latinx families. Students used both cultural (knowledge, skills, and assets) and social (relationships built on trust) capital when they needed support or guidance (Luedke, 2017).

Latinx individuals often experience the added pressure of immigration status and aforementioned environmental and social factors (Arana et al., 2011) and this may exacerbate imposter feelings. Further knowledge about their coping strategies is therefore needed to inform

college retention efforts, which benefit universities and college students. Scholars explore the development of imposter syndrome specifically in ethnic students and address this gap. For example, in an online survey, Peteet et al. (2015) examined the extent to which measures of the first-generation status, psychological well-being, and ethnic identity predict imposter phenomenon scores among high-achieving African American, Black and Hispanic, and Latinx undergraduates. Results suggested generation status (i.e., first-generation college student) was related, but not significant, to the imposter phenomenon, indicating there may be other mediating factors (Peteet et al., 2015). Even though types of institutions (i.e., HBCU and MSI) continue to increase, the IS experience by high achieving students continue across underrepresented racial/ethnic minorities. Intense feelings can affect the educational development of high-achieving, underrepresented racial or ethnic minorities (i.e., Latinx) that causes them to disengage from academic activities, such as campus involvement and attending class in person (Chipchase et al., 2017).

Although there was evidence of studies focused on academic achievement among underrepresented Students of Color, many studies explored the welfare of college students. A survey conducted by September et al. (2001) found high levels of environmental mastery were associated with lower imposter feelings. Researchers also found environmental mastery is a crucial component for success in higher education. It is predictive of one's ability to advance in the world (Ryff, 1989) among a group of college students. Lastly, when identifying other variables that contribute to the ethnic identity, it was not predictive of the imposter phenomenon; instead, it was a cyclical process (Peteet et al., 2015). This study makes several contributions to the literature, particularly as it relates to underrepresented Students of Color, and increasing attention to student representation in higher education is necessary (Peteet et al., 2015).

There is growing literature on Black students in particular. There remains a gap in focusing on how imposter syndrome influences Latinx students' college experiences. There are some studies that included Latinx students (Cokley et al., 2013, 2017; Peteet et al., 2015), but they were often a very low percentage of the sample, so it is not useful to generalize from these studies. As evidenced below, imposter syndrome can influence students' mental health.

Imposter Phenomenon Related to Mental Health

Researchers looking at the relationship between imposter phenomenon and mental health in the student population have found IP to be a predictor of poor mental health (Cokley et al., 2013). More specifically, the imposter phenomenon has been positively correlated with anxiety (Clance & O'Toole, 1988; Cokley et al., 2013; Cusak et al., 2013; Oriel et al., 2004; Thompson et al., 1998), depression (Bernard et al., 2002; Clance & Imes, 1978; Harvey & Katz, 1985; Thompson et al., 1998), psychological distress (Henning et al., 1998), and "minority" status stress (Cokley et al., 2013).

Research indicated imposter phenomenon scores are higher for Students of Color as a group. Scholars have shown Students of Color (Murphy et al., 2010), economically disadvantaged (Alon, 2007), Latina/o college students (Castellanos & Gloria, 2008), first-generation students (Espino, 2020; Pascarella et al., 2004), and women (e.g., Latina undergraduates; Gloria et al., 2005b; Gloria & Castellanos 2012) in certain academic programs (Cech et al., 2011) have lower rates of academic persistence and retention. This research indicated myriad factors influencing the lower overall retention rates for these groups, and imposter syndrome may account for some of the lower retention rates of Latinx students.

These adverse effects of imposter syndrome are many and vary. Peteet et al. (2015) indicated low psychological well-being and low ethnic identity were predictors of imposter

phenomenon for a group of Hispanic [Latinx] students entering college/university. They specifically looked at first-generation status, psychological well-being, and ethnic identity were examined. For example, in a recent study, Sánchez-Connally (2018) used critical race theory and community cultural wealth frameworks to examine how 21 Latinx first-generation college students coped at a PWI and found they experienced microaggressions from faculty and peers that shaped both their sense of belonging and how they evaluated a specific type of capital.

In higher education, literature attends to two theoretical models of coping: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Carver et al., 1989). Carver and colleagues (1989) explain problem-based coping solves the problem or change the source of distress; whereas emotion-focused coping manages (or decreases) associated with the distress. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) highlight achieve coping strategies and responses to manage difficulties. One of the first studies addressing coping strategies were Mena and colleagues (1987) and found that unlike other groups, late immigrant students experience greater acculturative stress. Recent scholarship addresses Latinx college student and coping process within higher education.

In a multi-perspective approach, Gloria et al. (2012) examined coping strategies for Latina first-generation college students and found they sought out family involvement and connection with family, peers, and academic staff to be crucial. In particular, consejos (advice-giving) among and between Latina first-generation colleges was importance and an active-coping response. For a group of Mexican American colleges students, Vázquez & García-Vázquez (1995) shared talking to other folks about issues and staying positive were the two most frequent coping responses. In a different study that examined 15 self-identified Latina first-generation college students, the students drew in from mestiza consciousness to develop coping strategies navigating their multiple worlds (i.e., family, community, and higher education;

Espino, 2020). Additionally, in the midst of the struggle, first-generation Latina women frame their academic experiences different through self-talk.

On the other hand, there are a few studies that specifically attend to the Latino male college student coping experience. For instance, in Gloria et al. (2016), spirituality was the significant cultural coping mechanism for a group of Latino males attending a 4-year university. The study heightened the elements important for these students and drew specific implications to gender and cultural-specific support for Latino males (Gloria et al., 2016). Sanchez et al. (2018) addressed reasons for why students cope in their study, examined the link between racial-ethnic microaggressions and psychological distress, and found racial-ethnic microaggressions was positively associated with psychological distress for 308 Asian American (n = 164) and Latinx American (n = 144) college students (54% female). Perhaps an explanation for this incongruity is the cultural mismatch (Chang et al., 2020) or cultural congruity (Gloria et al., 2005b) happening between the Latinx collectivistic culture and the universities' independent culture.

Students can feel mediocre, unqualified, and perhaps incompetent. However, these feelings will often transcend their academic work, professional jobs, leadership roles, and even their lies (Hoang, 2013). Related to the idea of imposter syndrome, *stereotype threat* is being at risk of confirming a negative stereotype for a group you belong to. Stereotype threat is a situational predicament in which people are or feel at risk of conforming to stereotypes about their social group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). The experimental design work by Steele and Aronson (1995) examined stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African American individuals by conducting a factor analysis across four different studies. The first two design results indicated Black individuals underperformed in relation to White individuals in the ability-diagnostic condition but not in a nondiagnostic condition, with scholastic aptitude tests

controlled. The study supported the assumption intellectual test as diagnostic of ability would arouse a sense of stereotype threat in Black participants and showed racial stereotype was enough to depress Black participants' intellectual performance (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Stereotype threat can become significant when Students of Color enter an environment with threatening cues, and the feelings of impostorism might occur alongside being stereotyped.

In an environment where one feels threatened in confirming a negative stereotype about oneself, imposter fears can become multifold. Imposters believe their successes are not due to their ability, but because of either luck or the notion they must work harder than others. The relationship between imposter tendencies and different behavioral and affective variables were examined. The feelings of impostorism can cause rewards and recognition to become associated with anxiety (Cowman & Ferrari, 2002), associated with self-reported imposter tendencies and self-handicapping tendencies, and shame and guilt effects. Based on regression analyses for 429 participants, results indicated self-handicapping and shame proneness were the best predictors of imposter tendencies. Results show strong imposter tendencies are related to, and best predicted by, self-handicapping behaviors and shame prone effect (Cowman & Ferrari, 2002). The sense of being a fraud was only one part of the imposter phenomenon as "victims of imposter phenomenon are caught up in a cycle of emotions, thoughts, and actions that can virtually control their lives" (Harvey & Katz, 1984, p. 2). These feelings can be influenced by different factors, such as racial microaggressions, that can exacerbate the feeling of being an imposter.

It is crucial to note imposter syndrome stems not just from the mismatch between the representation of academic institutions and one's identity, but also from the daily experiences in which students convey they do not belong or do not have what it takes. Universities need to address not only the emotional and psychological realities, but also the campus climate. Research

suggested faculty and Scholars of Color potentially reproduce imposter syndrome among school administrators, educational leaders, and faculty they train (Dancy & Brown, 2011). Empirical research is necessary to fully understand the imposter phenomenon, specifically among Latinx college students, and there is little documentation to support the reflection of the experience and coping among Latinx undergraduate students. Thus, a need for examining these particular experiences through a qualitative approach allows for more nuanced attention and contribution to the literature.

The discussion of culture and imposter phenomenon can lead to policy, programming, and campus morale changes. These changes have the potential to positively impact the retention of students, staff, and faculty. However, providing the stories and examining the narratives of underrepresented individuals will add to the discussion. There is general acceptance higher education is rapidly changing due to the tremendous pressures being put upon it to transform to survive (Howard, 2015; Potter, 2011). A healthy debate can be constructed about the pressures and change initiatives aligned with Latinx culture and values and retaining the best and brightest in higher education is worth attention. Examining the imposter phenomenon and its impact is a place to start.

Latinx College Students

Latinx people now constitute the largest ethnic group in the United States and the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. school-age population (Flores-González, 2017; Reyes & Nora, 2012) and can inextricably bound up with the nation's future. The Latinx public school population nearly doubled between 1987 and 2007, increasing from 11% to 21% of all U.S. students (NCES, 2009). Notably, the U.S. Census Bureau predicts by 2021, one of four U.S. college students will be Latinx persons. The largest percentage of Latinx individuals are enrolled

in the higher education degrees but that does not produce the most significant returns of college graduates (Contreras, 2005; Gándara & Bial, 2001). Perhaps one reason for this disparity is Latinx students face steep inequalities in earlier levels of education.

In critical states in the Southwest, such as California and Texas, the Latinx school-age population is already approaching one-half of all students. According to Flores-González (2017), California continues to have the largest Latinx community among other states, but Texas sees a faster growth rate. In 2015, 15.2 million Latinx people lived in California, a 39% increase from 10.9 million in 2000, yet Texas has had even faster growth with its Latinx population increasing 60% over the same period, from 6.7 million in 2000 to 10.7 million in 2015. Meanwhile, Georgia's Latinx population has more than doubled since 2000, the fastest growth among the 10 states with the largest Latinx populations (Flores-González, 2017). For these states, the future is already here, and for other states, there is a lot of work to be done.

From their first day of kindergarten to their last day of school, Latinx students, on average, experienced deep disparities as compared to their peers (Gándara, 2009; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado et al., 1996). Access to preschool education, of which Latinx children have less than any other major group (NCES, 2009), contributes to some of this new gap, but it cannot account for all of it. Latinx students were likely to come from homes where parents do not speak English, and parental education was low (Gándara, 2009). In particular, more than 40% of Latina mothers lack even a high school diploma, compared with only 6% of White mothers (NCES, 2008), and only about 10% of Latina mothers have a college degree or higher, compared with almost one-third of White mothers (Gandara, 2015).

Although Latinx students may come from loving homes with parents invested in their success, limited educational attainment in their families and resources do affect their educational

outcomes. For instance, results from a regression analysis found there is no better predictor of how well children will fare in school than parents' education attainment (Murnane et al., 1981). Furthermore, in a chapter book on increasing college access (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010), authors reported White people with a college-educated parent are three times as likely to earn a bachelor's degree as African Americans and Hispanics [Latinx] with a parent who dropped out of college or earned an associate degree. In this postsecondary system, increasing access tends to benefit all groups; however, it also tends to sustain or even increase distances between them. Since its growing strength as the arbiter of economic opportunity, postsecondary education has become the preferred and most effective economic leveler, serving as an engine for mobility. Attending to these needs and experiences of Latinx students as they continue their higher education is a continued need.

Latinx people may be the largest and most rapidly growing ethnic and cultural group in the country, but academically, they are behind their non-Hispanic [Latinx] peers. According to Gándara (2009), upon entering kindergarten, 42% of Latinx children are found in the lowest quartile of performance on reading readiness compared to just 18% of White children (Nichols et al., 2012). By fourth grade, 16% of Latino students are proficient in reading according to the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress compared to 41% of White students (Nichols et al., 2012). A similar pattern is notable in the eighth grade, where only 15% of Latinx students are proficient in reading compared to 39% of Whites (Gándara, 2009). They have the highest high school dropout rates (or "pushout"; Mireles-Rios et al., 2020) of any major ethnic group in the country. Concerning college completion, only 11% of Latinx 25 to 29 years of age had a bachelor's degree or higher as compared to 34% of Whites individuals (Reyes and Nora, 2009).

Attending the growing share of Latinx people who have gone to college, almost 40% of Hispanics ages 25 and older had any college experience in 2015, which is up from 30% in 2000. Among U.S. born Hispanics, 52% reported they had gone to college, an increase from 41% in 2000. By comparison, 27% of foreign-born Hispanics reported some college experience, up from 22% in 2000; however, amid this enrollment growth, Hispanics [Latinx] continue to graduate at a rate significantly lower (15.5%) than Asians (53.9%), Whites (36.2%), and Blacks (22.5%; Bustamante et al., 2020).

Latinx people are the largest group of Californians admitted to the University of California (UC) System (Smith & Márquez-Rosales, 2020), and the increased growth and presence of Latinx/Hispanic students in higher education calls for a deeper understanding of their overall academic, social, and cultural experience in higher education. Although a large gap exists between the college completion rates of Whites and Blacks, both groups show steady growth; however, the growth in college degrees for Latinx/Hispanic people is almost flat (Baker et al., 2018). The failure over more than three decades to make any progress in moving more Latinx/Hispanic students successfully through college suggests what we have been doing to close achievement gap is not working. This fact has enormous consequences for the United States. The job market continues to demand more education and Latinx/Hispanic people continue to make up a larger portion of the workforce.

Family plays an essential role in Latinx individual's life, and the level of its importance does not diminish across generations; it is nearly as important for the third generation as it is for the first generation (Hayes-Bautista et al., 1992). Data from three sample surveys suggested Spanish to English shift does occur from one generation of Latinx people to another (Hayes-Bautista et al., 1992). More recent literature suggests, often, these among first-generation college

students—defined as students who are the first in their family to obtain a bachelor's degree (Boden, 2011)—does not comprehensively attend to the unique experiences of Latino students. More specifically, existing research has not examined the educational process in terms of how first-generation Latinx college students make the decision to attend college and what factors contribute to their successful enrollment and persistence (Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Reyes & Nora, 2012). Universities operate from an individualistic culture that often does not align with the collectivist culture of the Latinx culture. For example, Tate et al. (2015) indicated families are social support systems that influence first-generation college students' persistence and are critical to consider for their adjustment and success in college/university (Boehmer, 2014).

Latinx First-Generation College Students' Educational Experiences

In high school, first-generation students report limited access to enrollment in rigorous courses and discouragement from enrolling in these courses by school staff (Klopfenstein, 2004; Solórzano & Ornelas, 2004). Hudley et al. (2009) examined college freshmen's perceptions of support in high school and found help from high school teachers and counselors were strongly related to social and academic adjustment in college for first-generation and non–first-generation students. Additionally, the rigor of students' high school curriculum is strongly associated with overall performance in college (Garza et al., 2014). Therefore, school support and access to advanced classes can prepare students to successfully enroll in college (Hill, 2008).

Upon enrollment in college, first-generation college students are likely to leave within the first four semesters (Ishitani, 2003). These students also tend to work full-time and attend college part-time. Consequently, students were less academically and socially integrated into the college community (Kuh et al., 2008). With this in mind, it is necessary to focus not only on college enrollment but also on retention and persistence through degree completion (Engle & Tinto,

2008). In a multi-institutional survey, Stebleton and Soria (2014) investigated perceptions of academic obstacles and found, compared to non-first-generation students, first-generation college students more frequently encountered challenges potentially detrimental to their academic success.

More specifically, the first-generation college students in the study experienced competing work and family responsibilities, poor study skills, feelings of depression and sadness, and weak English and mathematics skills. Latinx students are overrepresented among first-generation college students (27%) and make up only 9% of continuing-generation college students (NCES, 2017). Being a first-generation college student is considered a "risk" marker as students have less access to information and preparation, and research calls for universities to take an action-focus to engage Latinx students in the classroom and on campus (Murphy & Murphy, 2018; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Saunders & Serna, 2004). Indeed, knowing one has a place and is part of the university is an essential process for first-generation Latinx students, particularly as their experience is often informed by racism and lower academic expectations (Gloria et al., 2016; Reynolds et al., 2010; Strayhorn, 2012). Quantitative studies (i.e., survey methodology) are essential to explain and demonstrate gaps in existing literature. However, little is known about the students' day-to-day experiences and processes as they navigate higher education.

College students' generational status also impacts students' adjustment to the college environment (Hertel, 2002). This study explored similarities and differences between 130 1st-year college students who identified as first- or second-generation college. Multiple regression analyses found first-generation students reported significantly less parental income and social adjustment than their counterparts. On-campus friend support predicted overall better change for

second-generation students, whereas better intellectualism was predicted for first-generation college students. Self-esteem and on-campus support consistently predict adjustment and this attends to the ways in which the university holds responsibility to ensure students persist at colleges/universities.

Scholars have observed first-generation college student navigation in educational systems differs from students who are not the first in their families to attend college. Cooper et al. (1999) and Kirshner et al. (2011) indicated youth navigate these systems as "educational brokers" that helps them bridge cultural or linguistics difference between their cultural self and their school-self.

For Latinx college students, a cultural factor related to enrollment and persistence challenges is familial obligations. The Latinx culture is often collectivistic and identifies with the core value of *familismo*, where group needs are prioritized over individual needs (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Accordingly, Latino college students may face pressure from their family to live at home and work to assist the family, which can potentially lead to a decline in academic performance (Telzer & Fuligni, 2009). Vasquez-Salgado et al. (2015) qualitatively explored home–school value conflict among 14 first-generation Hispanic [Latinx] college students, where results highlighted participants felt conflicted because if they attended to family functions and compromised studying, their grades could suffer. However, if they prioritized school demands over family, then they experienced guilt and stress (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015). The relationship between family and academic responsibilities may often create tension when thinking about success for Latinx college students.

As Latinx undergraduates are more likely the first in their family to attend college/university (Murphy & Murphy, 2018; Reyes & Nora, 2012), less access to educational

resources (Hurtado et al., 1996), and less likely to be STEM majors (Moller et al., 2015), they continue to have higher dropout rates than their White and Black peers ages 16 to 24 (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). There is a rise in first-generation college students in higher education, and attention to second-generation college peers is underexplored. The current research study tried to attend to this generation difference.

Compared to their continuing-generation peers, first-generation college students have more difficulties adjusting to college or university, are more likely to work, and have higher attrition rates (Reyes & Nora, 2012). These educational outcomes are associated with the resources available (or not) to students upon entering college: economic (e.g., financial resources), cultural (e.g., college knowledge), social (e.g., networks used to locate resources), and academic (e.g., college readiness) capital. Specific to Latinx students, Reyes and Nora's (2012) review of the literature found few studies focus exclusively on the experiences of first-generation Latinx students, and existing research tends to emphasize the transition from high school to college (Boden, 2011; Pérez & McDonough, 2008). Once in, first-generation Latinx college students describe feelings of alienation and isolation (Nuñez et al., 2011) and utilize a variety of strategies to navigate these unfamiliar and unwelcoming spaces: develop support networks (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012), enroll in ethnic studies courses (Nuñez et al., 2011), and leverage their families as a source of support and inspiration (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Researchers found first-generation Latinx students in engineering utilize similar strategies when navigating STEM (Cole & Espinoza, 2008; Espinoza, 2013).

College generational status impact students' adjustment to college (Hertel, 2002). First-generation college student's navigation in an educational system differs from non-first-generation students (Kirshner et al., 2011; Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013) and results in diverse,

educational outcomes among the two groups (Bodovski & Benavot, 2006). What remains to be known is how imposter syndrome perhaps shows up among high-achieving first-generation college students. Prior studies generalize all Latinx students, and additional research in group studies demonstrate there may be different types of people among Latinx students. Using a theory that attends to the variation and complexities among the group is necessary. Additionally, prior literature focuses on individual achievement and not so much on structural issues that might influence Latinx students' experience and the use of LatCrit, for instance, offers the focus on structure. In the next section, I describe the theoretical framework that relates prior literature on Latinx students and offer a perspective that emphasizes Latinx students' background, history, and experiences.

Critical Race Theory and the Subtractive Schooling Origins of LatCrit Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) emerged in the 1970s following the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Although various advancements in the area of civil rights and social justice occurred in the 1960s, multiple legal scholars such as Bell, Freedman, and Delgado found progress came to a halt and covert forms of racism were on the rise (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT originated from legal studies concerned with issues of social justice and racial oppression (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefanic, 2017; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). As a theoretical perspective and analytical instrument, CRT evaluates the "unequal and unjust distribution of power and resources along political, economic, racial and gendered lines" (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Taylor & Clark, 2009, p.1).

CRT emphasizes racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American story and places the conversation of race and inequalities at the center. It provides researchers with the ability to example multiple forms of oppression in the lives of marginalized persons. The

analytical lens of CRT examines existing power structures and identifies them as White privilege and White supremacy which perpetuates the marginalization of People of Color. CRT in higher education has developed over time into a conceptual and theoretical framework and methodology to examine People of Color experiences (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). CRT asserts racism is a permanent component of American life, it challenges the claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy in society and asserts understanding the experiences of People of Color is a legitimate and integral part to analyzing and understanding racial inequality.

Understanding and explaining the experiences of Latinx populations in the United States is complicated, and LatCrit theory provides a unique perspective that allows these nuances to emerge. The Latinx population is diverse and includes diverse histories and countries of origin—in particular issues of migration and immigration has complicated the narrative of Latinx individuals in the United States (Massey & Pren, 2012; Rhodes et al., 2015). Furthermore, the conversation between race and ethnicity becomes complicated for the Latinx population as they are not considered a race and it is often considered an ethnicity.

The U.S. Census uses the term “Latino” or “Hispanic” to refer to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central America, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race (NCES, 2009). Latinx people in the United States are immigrants or descend from Latin Americans coming from 20 countries with their own, often complex, racial histories. Latinos or Latin Americans span a wide range of phenotypes comprising varying degrees of European, indigenous, and African ancestries, and many—perhaps most—are racially mixed. Despite the United States’ tendency to lump all of Latin America together, the different regions have quite diverse racial histories, understandings of race, racial terminology, and patterns of racial classification or identification.

Similar to CRT, LatCrit theory provides an interpretive framework developed by legal Scholars of Color to address issues of social justice and racial oppression. The use of LatCrit theory allows for an in-depth response to the long, historical presence and enduring invisibility of Latinx people. Using LatCrit as a data analysis approach addresses issues such as "immigration, language rights, and multi-identity" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 166). LatCrit is complementary to CRT having derived from CRT partly out of a need to address issues broader than race for Latinx individuals. It encompasses all of the assumptions and underpinnings of CRT, but LatCrit helps to analyze issues CRT cannot or does not address. Like CRT, LatCrit recognizes the intersectionality of race and racism with "other forms of subordination" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 472) such as sexism and classism. At the same time, it also acknowledges the complexity of intersectional identities in the Latinx community which includes issues with language, immigration, ethnicity, and phenotype (Delgado Bernal, 2002) and how these experiences are not always recognized in the Black-White racial discourse. Latinx people often do not identify with racial categories stemming from the Black-White paradigm (Lawrence, 1995; Perea, 1998; Ramirez, 1995; Trucios-Haynes, 2000).

Before the term LatCrit became a recognized critical theory, the concepts that eventually became the LatCrit tradition began with a 3-year ethnographic study conducted at Seguín High School in Houston, Texas by Valenzuela (1999). She conducted informal interviews with stakeholders regarding their perspectives of both undocumented Mexican and Mexican American youth with respect to their education in the United States. She also spent time engaged in participant-observation and reviewing data from schools and district documents. Valenzuela (1999) concluded students who were from Mexico and Mexican Americans students were victims of *subtractive schooling* at this high school because the educational culture of the school

devalued their language and culture where the school was often a place of loss for these students. Valenzuela (1999) used the term subtractive schooling to describe the educational experience for Latin@ youth. LatCrit addresses this issue by recognizing for many Latinx people, racial identity is entwined with cultural or ethnic identity (Rodriguez, 1994; Trucios-Haynes, 2000).

Subtractive schooling provided a framework for understanding the patterns of immigrant achievement and U.S.-born students' underachievement. Valenzuela (1999) described this as a form of schooling that systematically strips students from underrepresented groups of their language, culture, and academic well-being with intentions of assimilation to the marginalized group. It created a fundamental disjunction between how learning and academic achievement are traditionally conceived in Mexican immigrant communities, and how these goals are ideologically framed in U.S. schools (Valenzuela, 1999). Valenzuela said by stripping them of their cultural identity and having them adopt a more American model, students lost their social and cultural resources and were set up for failure.

Valenzuela (1999) argued youth born in the United States were seen as more radical, and while they do not oppose education, they do oppose the concept of schooling—which is the content of education and how and what is being taught. Furthermore, individuals in Mexico are used to home visits and the American teachers cared more about the context rather than the people they are teaching. For undocumented Mexicans and Mexican American students in Valenzuela's (1999) study, the student–teacher relationship was most important. Students were blamed for the lack of their achievement based upon their ethnicity. Mexican American youth born in the United States were blamed more harshly because they were less deferential than their undocumented counterparts. The concepts of subtractive schooling highlighted the ideas of what later became known as LatCrit.

LatCrit Tenets

LatCrit shares some of the same tenets as CRT such as: centrality of race and racism (racism is a permanent component of American history/life), the challenge to dominant ideology (domains of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy in society), a commitment to social justice and praxis (eliminating all forms of subordination of people), the centrality of experiential knowledge (knowledge of People of Color is an integral part of analyzing and understanding racial inequality), and an interdisciplinary perspective (challenges the history to provide a contemporary context). According to LatCrit theory, Latinx students might experience varying degrees of oppression at all points of their education (Solórzano et al., 2000; Villalpando, 2003). LatCrit theory helps to analyze issues CRT cannot such as language, ethnicity, immigration, culture, identity, sexuality (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Additionally, scholars like Aoki and Johnson (2008) encouraged the use of LatCrit among other scholars, and they argue while not as popular at CRT, LatCrit offers a roadmap and a potential to supplement work on race and identity. LatCrit intentionally focuses on explicating Latinx voices.

LatCrit theory attends to how institutional discrimination affects Latinx individuals (Gonzalez & Portillos, 2007). LatCrit can be used to theorize and examine the ways in which race and racism explicitly and implicitly impact the educational structures, processes, and discourses that influence Latinx individuals in educational contexts. Utilization of Latinx individual experiences in education can also theorize and examine the place where racism intersects with other forms of subordination such as sexism, classism, and generational differences. LatCrit theory specifically explores multidimensional identities and can address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, immigration status, and other forms of oppression.

It challenges the dominant discourses on race relating to education leading to subordination and marginalization of Latinx population in the United States.

The use of LatCrit theory enables research to better capture and communicate the experiences of Latinx populations specifically through a focused examination of the unique forms of oppression this group encounters. Although subtractive schooling provided a framework for understanding the patterns of immigrant's achievement and U.S.-born underachievement, the use of LatCrit theory allows for Latinx students to be seen as holders and creators of knowledge who have the potential to transform schools into places where the experiences of all individuals are acknowledged, taught, and cherished (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Roberts & Cantu, 2012). LatCrit theory is a more valid and reliable lens to analyze Latinx multidimensional identities and can address the intersectionality of identities (i.e., racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression; Delgado Bernal, 2002). LatCrit theory in education is a social justice project that links theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community.

Solórzano (1998) adopted five tenets from CRT to education research and subsequently Delgado Bernal (2002) explained these elements to the use of LatCrit theory. The elements include: (1) importance of transdisciplinary approaches, (2) emphasis on experiential knowledge, (3) challenge to dominant ideologies, (4) centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination, and (5) a commitment to social justice. I offered examples of how these tenets might relate to Latinx college students as a possible participant group in a qualitative study.

The first LatCrit tenet attends to the strengths of People of Color and draws from different disciplines to better understand their educational experiences. For example, the

academic and social value of ethnic studies programs (Sleeter, 2011) reflects the narratives and perspectives of People of Color. Milner and Howard (2013) explored how to disrupt narratives that have important implications on race—indicating the use of ethnic studies is an interdisciplinary prospect that allows for a more complete consideration of race, racism, and racial (in)equity manifestations.

The second tenet is an emphasis on experiential knowledge and is a proactive approach that centers on the life experiences as strengths among People of Color. Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model asserts students possess and use six forms (i.e., aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant) of capital is an example of experiential knowledge. For instance, Rincón et al. (2020) indicated students who enter college used community cultural weather to navigate higher education spaces and their "moves" were a way to resist postsecondary environments.

The third tenet is challenging the dominant ideologies centered in the cultural and linguistic ways People of Color (i.e., Latinx/Hispanic) create knowledge at the home. Guzman-Martinez (2012) argued the importance of a Chicano father assisting his children in their pursuit of higher education through *cuentos* (stories) and *consejos* (advice) as funds of knowledge. This comment or "funds of knowledge" (González et al., 2006; Guzman-Martinez, 2012) challenged the status quo on dominant ideologies. For instance, experiences like the *Puente* (Bridge) Program provide an alternative college-like experience for Latino communities—the program validates student's identities by placing it at the center and creating knowledge for future learning (González & Moll, 2002).

The fourth tenet highlights oppression is multi-layered, and research needs to adapt. Matsuda (1996) attended to a collection of experiences on different forms of oppression (i.e.,

race, gender, class) to inform the understanding of how law, for instance, shapes our vision of a more just society. For instance, the work by Avalos (2013) highlighted the internalized oppression Latinx college students experience in mainstream educational settings and demonstrated participants experienced an identity formation and racial microaggressions.

The fifth tenet attends to a social justice commitment that not only seeks critical change for Communities of Color, but also highlights the legacy of resistance to racism and sexism. Urrieta and Villenas (2013) highlighted the use of Chicana feminist epistemology to understand how race and racism influence the lives of graduate students, educators, and emerging scholars. For example, the use of *testimonios* (testimonies) engages the complexity of racism in academia, and centers a collective narrative on the how race, indigeneity, class, citizenship, language, gender, and sexuality is all part of the scholarship.

LatCrit theory is a relatively new discourse evolved from CRT. It concerns Latinx people in legal discourses and social policy. CRT and LatCrit theory form an interpretive framework to address issues of social justice and racial oppression in society (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Uniquely, LatCrit theory is concerned with a progressive sense of a coalitional Latinx pan-ethnicity, and, in turn, addresses issues often ignored by critical race theorists such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality. LatCrit theory challenges the dominant discourses on race relating to education and how that leads to subornation and marginalization of Latinx people. LatCrit theory enables research to better articulate the experiences of Latinx students specifically through a more focused examination of the unique forms of oppression this group encounters (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

LatCrit places emphasis on the use of counter-story approaches that view the community and family knowledge of Communities of Color as sources of strength (Villapando, 2003).

Counter storytelling is a method of telling the stories of those experiences not often told by and about those who are marginalized by society (Delgado, 1989). It is a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the dominant stories of racial privilege, and it can challenge the dominant discourse on race, and can be used in the struggle for racial reform (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). LatCrit challenges dominant discourses on race relating to education and how that leads to subornation and marginalization of Chicana/os. The research findings presented through LatCrit are typically expressed in counter storytelling, chronicles, scenarios, narratives, and testimonio (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Storytelling or story-sharing is a critical form of healing and showing compassion (Rodriguez, 2010). LatCrit theory drives for diversity and ideally helps to create a community with intellectual and social culture.

At the conceptual level, LatCrit is unique in theorizing the underpinnings of LatCrit individuals. Applying LatCrit as a method of analysis is just as important. Currently, there is no real mapping or methods with respect to this approach. Far more attention should be given to LatCrit theory especially within the educational context.

Applying LatCrit to Educational Contexts

In education, LatCrit theoretical approaches are critical race-gendered frameworks that challenge traditional Eurocentric interpretations of Students of Color as lacking the knowledge, skills, and abilities to succeed in higher education (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Privileging the Eurocentric values is problematic because they differ from those Latinx students often experience at home and in their communities. They stress “adherence to Eurocentric perspectives that are founded on the cover and overt assumptions regarding White superiority, territorial expansion, and ‘American’ democratic ideals such as meritocracy, objectivity, and individuality” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 11). The prioritization of Eurocentric perspectives over Latinx

perspectives reinforces the inferiority paradigm where Latinx cultural capital (i.e., the social assets of a person promote social mobility in a stratified society; Bourdieu, 2011) and viewpoints are characterized as less than those of the dominant White majority in higher education.

A methodological underpinning of LatCrit is providing a new or different narrative. Counter-storytelling has been a method of telling the stories of experiences not often told by and about those marginalized by society (Delgado, 1989; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). In the education context, qualitative research uses counter-storytelling as to analyze data. It is a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the dominant stories of racial privilege; can challenge the dominant discourse on race; and can be used in the struggle for racial reform (Solórzano, 2000). Counter-storytelling seeks to document the persistence of racism from the perspectives of those injured and victimized by its legacy. Qualitative data are appropriate to use with counter-storytelling which can be in forms of dialogues, scenarios, and testimonios (testimonials). Counter-stories offer Latinx people the ability to tell a different story, one that is different from the dominant discourse. These counter-stories are a form of telling stories not often communicated, these narratives become a way to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas often left out of the dominant narrative.

Often, inequitable environments result in Latinx immigrant students facing issues of self-doubt, survivor guilt, imposter syndrome, invisibility, and hopelessness regardless of if they find success or not and may contribute to feelings of being “less than” their peers (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Marrero, 2016). The characterization of students as “foreign” or “other” and the mismatches between the values of students’ home culture (e.g., interpersonal connectedness, collaboration) and the values of university culture (e.g., individualism, competition) further enforces the inferiority paradigm. These mismatches (Chaing et al., 2004) create a barrier in

Latinx students' support systems, increase stress, and lead students to struggle to see themselves as full members of the university community. Students find it hard to access opportunities in higher education settings, and this can be attributed to the fact universities and other institutions of higher education reward the culture of the dominant White middle class (Horvat & Lewis, 2003).

Racism along with other forms of oppression are still a major impediment to the academic underperformance of many Students of Color and poor students in our country (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). One issue that hinders closing the access and opportunity gap is the inability to name issues of power as fundamental to the issues of the racial and cultural divide in this country. When power is examined as part of the equation, there is a better understanding of how racism, oppression, and issues of cultural bias work to undermine the academic performance of Students of Color and low-income students.

CRT and LatCrit literature emphasize dominant ideologies in higher education policy and practice create environments unfavorable for Latinx students. The laws and policies that regulate higher education do not exist in an environment free of outside influence. It makes sense CRT and LatCrit scholars analyzing the educational inequities and racialized barriers Latinx students face in higher education consider variables that affect the underachievement and underrepresentation of Latinx individuals in higher education. However, very little is known on the specific techniques for analysis of data when using LatCrit. Previous studies use LatCrit theory to locate tenets on peer-reviewed articles funded through the National Science Foundation have used counter-storytelling to give a voice to the experiences of individuals positioned or positioning themselves as members of oppressed groups (Salinas et al., 2016; Solórzano &

Yosso, 2001). Furthermore, the use of testimonials is another form of centering and valuing Latinx experiential knowledge (Pérez Huber, 2010; Macías, 2017).

There are multiple benefits for this theoretical and methodological underpinning of counter-storytelling as it challenges the intersections of racism with other forms of subordination and exposes deficit-informed research that silences and distorts epistemologies of People of Color. Another benefit is it offers space to conduct and present research grounded in the experiences and knowledge of People of Color (Delgado, 1989). Furthermore, LatCrit's use of counter-storytelling provides an understanding of students' experiences with which concepts of imposter syndrome, self-doubt, survivor guilt, and indivisible are often common (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), yet for someone attempting to apply the theory to a qualitative study, there is not a clear pathway to applying LatCrit in research.

LatCrit influenced my study in a few important ways. First, the use of LatCrit encouraged me to focus on structural forces that might influence Latinx college students. By considering earlier educational inequalities, ways students feel unsupported by institutions, financial inequalities, or other types of structural issues, I was able to push away from deficit thinking about Latinx students. That is, some earlier work on Latinx students highlighted all the ways students were not achieving at the same level as their peers without much regard for structural issues that may have influenced these disparities. Secondly, LatCrit theory guided my research questions by framing questions and placing the Latinx student at the center but also thinking about ways it challenges institutional practices in a college setting.

Summary

In the next few chapters, I describe the methods, share findings, and provide a conclusion for this research study. Chapter 3 outlines the strategies and methodology used to complete this

research study. I share the research design, the data collection process, and the data analysis process for the data. Chapter 4 describes the findings based on the 14 self-identifying Latinx undergraduate participants attending Lakeshore University (a pseudonym). Lastly in Chapter 5, I share a summary of the findings, attend to the literature, and provide implications for research, theory, and practice. I end the chapter with recommendations for future research and a student-center approach to increase access and retention for Latinx college students pursuing a post-secondary degree.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

I examined the educational stories associated with Latinx college students; the purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Latinx college students attending a predominately White institution (PWI) who may experience imposter syndrome. For those who do identify with imposter syndrome, this research study explained how Latinx college students experience imposter syndrome and identified how they manage this particular experience.

The imposter phenomenon occurs among high achievers who are unable to internalize and accept their success. When Clance and Imes (1978) described imposter phenomenon (also called imposter syndrome), they thought it was unique to women. For People of Color, or Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), feelings of inadequacy result from facing racism, sexism, stereotype threat, and lack of congruity between university culture and student culture. The imposter phenomenon is an internal experience of intellectual and professional incapability despite objective experience to the contrary (Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016). The effects of imposter phenomenon on an individual level vary case-by-case and can have implications on the student's overall educational experience, health, and well-being. Understanding the experiences among Latinx college students requires a particular attention since there is yet a research study attending to this particular racial/ethnic group.

This chapter describes my research methods. First, I share my rationale for the qualitative approach. Second, I provide my main research questions and explain the research site for the study. I also describe recruitment strategies and outline the methods. Then, I share details on the 3-part interview and how the qualitative data were analyzed. I address the coding, data validation, trustworthiness, and ethical consideration related to the study. Lastly, I conclude with

my role as the researcher as part of this project, my personal reactions, and my interest in exploring the imposter phenomenon.

Rationale for the Qualitative Approach

Critical qualitative inquiry connects to critical theories where the research process becomes a humanizing experience for all the participants, including the researcher (Paris & Winn, 2013). Critical theory (i.e., LatCrit) investigates the inequities and injustices that exist and shares them in an authentic and important perspective. Furthermore, critical theory requires action so marginalized student groups (e.g., self-identified Latinx undergraduates) can have voices and have equity brought to them (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2018).

Critical qualitative inquiry is different from traditional qualitative research because critical researchers are called to change the world and change it in ways that resist injustices while celebrating freedom (Denzin, 2015). Winkle-Wagner and colleagues (2018) noted critical qualitative researchers insist people, their lives, and histories are put at the center of the research study. Additionally, they highlighted the need to connect critical theory with critical inquiry (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2018). The four considerations needed between the two theories that shape my role as a researcher and the participants are: 1) critical orientation is humanizing and there is care for participants (Paris & Winn, 2013); 2) the researcher may take on multiple roles (i.e., facilitators of experiences, mentors, or teachers; Winkle-Wagner et al., 2018); 3) the demonstration of data were reported to as "counter-storytelling"—a way in which the data can be culturally responsive (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001); and 4) the "reflexibility" of the research study is dependent on the researcher's relationship or experience with participants (Carspecken, 1996; Dennis et al., 2013).

Critical qualitative inquiry is different from traditional qualitative research because critical researchers are called to change the world and change it in ways that resist injustices while celebrating freedom (Denzin, 2015). Consistent with a critical approach, I was interested in the current inequities of Latinx undergraduate students attending a research one instruction. I highlighted their experiences because Latinx college students are traditionally underrepresented and underserved (Carspecken, 1996; Pasque et al., 2012) at PWI, despite the increase in their population growth. Additionally, critical inquiry can be seen as ethically responsible research that uses inquiry and activism to help people (Denzin, 2015) and think about larger social inequalities and structures. The goal with the research study was understanding the lived experiences of Latinx undergraduates and to hear their authentic voices. This connects to the empowering component of the critical life story method (Carspecken, 1996), which was well suited for this research study.

I used a qualitative, critical life story methodological approach for this study. Qualitative research answers questions about experience, meaning, and perspective, most often from the participant's standpoint, and it was generally conducted in natural and virtual settings for the participant's narrative. For this research study, I was interested on how Latinx college students may potentially experience imposter syndrome, identifying how they navigated these potential feelings, and how they make sense of the concept and find concrete solutions. I used critical life story as the design for this research project because it allowed for Latinx college student voices to be heard, analyzed, and theorized because it tells of their stories (Atkinson, 1998) and allowed them to be at the center of the research study (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2018). A critical life story allowed for participants to speak for themselves (Goodson, 2016), and as a researcher, my responsibility was helping Latinx undergraduate students tell their stories. This approach also

allowed me to capture how people make meaning of their experience and offer a unique understanding of a particular issue (Carspecken, 1996).

A life story allowed participants to share what has the most impact on them. Life story allows for individuals, in this case Latinx college students, to tell their stories in a manner that has the most impact on them. Additionally, Goodson (2016) shared life stories allow people to "story" their own lives and experiences in a manner that has the most impact on them and these stories are not only personal, but they also have a historical and cultural aspect to it. The term "life story' and "life history'' are used interchangeably depending on the context. For instance, the term life story was used to describe or emphasize a particular story or phase in their story.

The term life history was used when there was an emphasis on the history. A life story brings order and meaning to life being told, for both the teller and the listener. Through qualitative research, a greater depth of understanding of people, people's experiences, and the environment were explored (Berg, 2004). It is a way to better understand the past, present, and a way to leave a personal legacy for the future. A life story gives us the vantage point of seeing how one person's experiences and subjectively understands his or her own life over time. It enables us to see and identify the threads that connect one part of one's life to another, from childhood to adulthood. As a qualitative researcher, the goal was understanding how participants make sense of their environment and operate within a higher education institution.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research study was to understand the experiences for and provide rich narratives from Latinx college students who may experience imposter syndrome at a PWI. The research questions for this research study were: 1) How, when, and where do Latinx college

students experience imposter syndrome at a predominantly White university, if they do? 2) How do Latinx students cope with imposter syndrome during college?

Research Site

Lakeshore University (LU) is a predominantly White institution located in the United States' Midwest region. The institution is a flagship university, and it is geographically isolated from other major cities, but is situated in a relatively large college town. The institution offers both undergraduate and graduate programs across several disciplines. At the time of data collection, Lakeshore University had about 31,650 registered undergraduate students, where 17,618 were in state residences, 2,802 were considered residents, and 11,230 were non-residents. This number included 21,508 White students (15,241 male, 4,746 female). In terms of racial/ethnic breakdown, during the Fall semester of 2020, there were 2,736 Hispanic, 1,000 African American, 105 American Indian, 3,202 Asian, 32 Native Hawaiian, 29,604 White (only), 1,521 who were two or more races, and 1,436 were unknown. There were 5,904 international students and a total of 6,155 first-generation undergraduates (i.e., parent(s) who did not attain a bachelor's degree from a U.S. higher education institution).

Unfortunately, the Latinx population growth has not influenced or affected the diversity and inclusion issue in the university context. Lakeshore University has a rich student organization life where there a strong interest in U.S. Latinx issues. For example, after a long-term request, one of the Latinx student support programs will transition from offering an academic minor to now offering a 38-credit major. While this may bring new changes to the overall structure of the program, the need and commitment to Latinx student success continues to fall short. Student groups have asked the university multiple times for a student center, and while the request was granted, students do not feel contempt or satisfied with it. Furthermore,

Lakeshore University was an ideal location for this study because it is a common presentation of a predominantly White institution (institutions of higher education where White's account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment), particularly in the Midwest in the United States.

Recruitment and Participants

Participants for this research study were self-identified Latinx, full-time enrolled, college students attending Lakeshore University. I recruited 14 self-identified Latinx college students who completed at least one semester (one-term) on campus. The 14 participants engaged in three interviews each, and there were a total of 42 interviews conducted. There are additional details in the subsequent section.

The study utilized a purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002) of self-identified Latinx college students. Purposeful sampling identified a particular group, or a certain group of individuals, who provided information often difficult to identify and find. As the primary researcher, I created "channels" of the contacts of participants from institutional staff (i.e., directors, program coordinators, leaders of diverse academic support, scholarship programs executive team, and student organizations leaders) at the institution to initially assist in contacting students who met the study sample criteria. These institutional channels, which I also referred to as gatekeepers, or "institutional agents" (Museus & Neville, 2012), sent recruitment emails to Latinx college students on my behalf. I also asked participants if they knew of other students who met the sample criteria that might be interested in participating in the research study; this process is called snowball sampling.

Given that Latinx students only make up 5% of the student population at Lakeshore University, purposeful sampling was appropriate for this study. Through a purposeful sample, participants were contacted because they met one of the following four criteria: (a) self-identified

as Latinx college student attending Lakeshore University, (b) at least 18-years-old or older, (c) enrolled in full-time status, or (d) completed at least one semester (one-term) at Lakeshore University. The study was limited to students living in the United States to situate the research in the growing Latinx student population in the United States.

Participants' Profiles

Next, I share an overview of the 14 students who participated in my study—most of the participants identified as heterosexual, cis-gender, upper-division class standing, Mexican American females. Specifically, there were eight females, four males, one gender queer, and one no response. As for sexual orientation, seven identified as heterosexual, three students identified as bisexual, two were pansexual, one queer, and one participant did not respond. Six of the participants were seniors, three were juniors, four were sophomores, and one was first-year student. Additionally, seven students identified as Mexican American, five students identified as Mexican, one student identified as Mexican and Salvadorian American, and one student identified as Peruvian.

From the 14 participants, who ranged from 18- to 27-years old, only one student indicated they were a transfer student from a local community college; the others were "traditional" students. All of the participants were first-generation college students and were actively involved in student life and student organization programs. Participants had a range of majors including social work, international studies, communications arts, neurobiology, rehabilitation psychology, educational studies, textile and fashion design, community and nonprofit leadership, and human development. Lastly, data collection for this dissertation occurred during a global pandemic. There was a shift in students' living conditions to where all

but one student was now living off-campus with either friends/roommates or family. Participant demographics are shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Participant Demographics

Gender	Sexual orientation	Ethnicity	Class standing	Cumulative GPA	Active involved on campus
Female (8)	Heterosexual (7)	Mexican American (7)	Senior + (6)	3.50 - 4.0 (5)	Yes (13)
Male (4)	Bisexual (3)	Mexican (5)	Junior (3)	3.00 - 3.49 (7)	No (1)
Genderqueer (1)	Queer (1)	Mexican and Salvadorian American (1)	Sophomore (4)	2.5 - 2.99 (2)	
No Response (1)	No response (1)	Peruvian (1)	First-year (1)		

Data Collection and Procedures

The primary mode of data collection for this research study were one-on-one interviews. There was a total of 42 individual interviews and data saturation was reached. In qualitative data, interviews are the most common data collection that generally takes three forms: informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, or open-ended standardized interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Semi-structured interviews were the primary mode of data collection for this study. One-on-one, semi-structured interviews provide the greatest opportunity to collect participant's understanding of their personal experiences (Maxwell, 2005).

A series of in-depth critical life stories explored and understood the story of imposter phenomenon for self-identified Latinx students attending a higher education institution. This study utilized a three-interview protocol (Seidman, 2013) to allow for an in-depth exploration of

meaning-making through the experiences of Latinx students in higher education. Seidman (2013) said the use of a three-interview series delves deeply into the context and establish trust with the participants. In this approach, each data source contributes to a broader and more in-depth understanding of the story of Latinx students attending a predominantly White institution. Interview One (I) established the context of the participant's experience. Interview Two (II) allowed the participant to re-construct the details of their experience in the context it occurred. Lastly, Interview Three (III) encouraged the participant to reflect on the meaning of the experience and also served as a member check where participants could reflect on the early interview of the study. Greater details on these interviews are shared in a subsequent section.

In these interviews, the purpose was to understand the experiences of Latinx college students who may experience imposter syndrome. For those who identify experiences with imposter syndrome, *when* and *where* do these experiences and feelings happen for the student participant. Additionally, this research study identified coping strategies Latinx students use to navigate imposter syndrome. I explored Latinx undergraduate students lived, and personal experiences attending a predominantly White institution and explored how Latinx college students make sense of the imposter phenomenon (imposter syndrome) as they navigated higher education.

Research Procedure

Participants received a consent form (see Appendix A) to read and review prior to participating in the study. I clarified participating in this research study would not affect any grade(s) or participation in any academic or social activity. The participants were asked if they had any questions about the study. Once the participant signed the consent form, they were asked if they could be recorded for the purposes of data analysis. I shared how all information was kept

confidential, stored in a secured location (i.e., Box), and only the principal investigator and I had access to the interview data. I also shared with participants that if they wanted to stop the interview or recording at any time, they were more than welcome to let me know at any time. Interviews were recorded and each interview lasted 30–45 minutes for each interview, a total 90–135 minutes for all three interviews for each participant. Data collection was collected during a global pandemic and followed Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines. All interviews and interactions related to this project (i.e., connecting with university institutional agents, interviews) were virtual. The use of a university-support platform (i.e., Zoom) was used to conduct and record the interviews.

I created interview questions (see Appendix B) that guided and helped me focus on their collective educational life story as Latinx students at a predominantly White institution related to imposter syndrome. A demographic questionnaire (see Appendix C) was shared at the end of the interview, so it did not impact their interview question responses. The demographic questionnaire asked both personal and educational-focused questions. The personal information included gender, age, race/ethnicity, generation to the United States, and parental education level. The educational-focused information asked about the students' grade point average (GPA), class standing, living on- or off-campus, transfer status, college-generation status, and affiliation with student organizations. At the end of the interview, participants received two information resource sheets (see Appendix D) with contact information to on- and off-campus resources such as, financial aid services, counseling services, disability center, veteran center, etc.

Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share information they felt comfortable sharing while also asking additional questions through conversation. Listening to the

Latinx participants' stories provided a better understanding of their experiences and highlighted their experiences at a predominantly White institution. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, interviews were not in-person to honor state and federal public safety orders. Each of the consecutive interviews were completed between two weeks. I wanted interviews close enough so they could remember from one interview to the next. Additionally, I wrote a short memo following each interview to remember information and wrote follow up questions. Fourteen self-identified Latinx college students were interviewed as part of a three-step interview:

Interview I: Focused Life History

In the first interview, I asked about the participant's story related to the educational experiences. I avoided the use of "why" questions and used "how" questions instead. For example, "How would you describe your academic, social, and cultural experience at Lakeshore University?" By asking "how" questions, I led the participant to reconstruct the event and place it into the context of their family, school, and academic experience.

Interview II: The Detail of Experience

The second interview concentrated on the details of participant's current life in education and focused on the details about imposter syndrome. For example, I asked Latinx college students about times and places in which they experience imposter syndrome. Here, I tried getting a person to reconstruct the many details that create the experience. Thus, how do Latinx students redefine imposter phenomenon among and between students, and perhaps, how do feelings of being an imposter change over time in the collegiate experience? As the primary researcher, I asked and listened to stories about their experiences in classes or student organizations as a way to elicit details and have a greater understanding of their day-to-day life.

Interview III: Reflection on Meaning

In the third interview, the self-identified Latinx undergraduate participants were asked to reflect on the meaning of their experiences. It addressed intellectual and emotional connections between participants' college, work, social, and personal experiences. An example question with a participant was, "Can you talk about ways in which you've coped with this experience (i.e., imposter syndrome)?" Making sense or meaning required participants to look at how factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation. Reflection was an integral part of the learning process for how participants thought about themselves, but also about how they made sense of their institution. Reflection allowed participants to learn more about why and how they learn, but it also helped them improve their academic skills.

Data Analysis

Before completing ground-level coding, a complete reading of the transcript was necessary. First, I ensured all data were identified correctly, spell checks were clean, and data were ready for coding. Then, all transcripts were sent to participants to review accuracy of the transcripts. Participants were asked to return edits or changes within two weeks. Most of the participants returned the three transcripts without any modifications. Two participants made edits to their transcripts, and those edits and changes were honored. Additionally, member checking is a technique in which the data were returned to the participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experience (Carspecken, 1996). Member checking is also known as respondent validation.

After reading through the transcripts, I manually extracted interviewees' responses to answer the main research questions for the 14 self-identified Latinx college student participants' transcripts. To analyze this data, I used a data reduction technique (Neumann, 2009; 2016) that

yield around 60 pages of data as the core data for the analysis. I reduced the data based on larger categories from the data. I used the research questions to help me keep an open mind about identifying those larger themes. For instance, one question was, do you experience imposter syndrome? If you do experience imposter syndrome, how do you share it? Then, only data corresponding to this particular question from participants were part of the analysis.

After, I identified interviews sections that reflected the interview questions and grouped these sections by emergent themes. Then I identified "cluster relevant text" sections that were similar in content (Neumann, 2006). These more extensive categories of coding helped to have a greater picture of the issue. This step included pulling out more significant ideas and pulling them away from the data. In doing so, I continued member checks to make sure I stay at course with the data and made sure I was not mis interrupting the data. I made sure I revised the themes accordingly. In this process, counter-stories offer members of the Latinx community to tell a different story, one that is different from that of the dominant discourse. These counter-stories can be a form of telling stories often not communicated; these narratives become a way to express thoughts, feelings, and ideas often left out from the dominant narrative.

Counter-storytelling is a tool CRT scholars employ to contradict racist characterizations of social life. Counter-storytelling also aims to expose race-neutral discourse to reveal how white privilege operates in an ideological framework to reinforce and support unequal societal relations between White people and People of Color. When going through and analyzing the data, I interrupted and provided an interpretation of the alternative narratives. For example, I paid close attention to the stories not being shared and began writing memos. These memos brought attention and recentered the person and their experiences and considered this part of the counterstory analysis. It is understanding and recognizing the dynamic or alternative details the

participant shared with me. This required active listening skills and attending to details in asking follow-up questions to gain a greater insight into the story. For example, a counter story was when a participant did not experience imposter syndrome. In this instance, I listened to and analysis the difference in their narrative with those who did not experience imposter syndrome.

The intention of these counter-stories was providing alternative (i.e., a code-switch) stories not always told. Identifying a counter-story was to identify instances of positivity or moments uniquely different from the rest of their story. Counter-stories or narratives stand in opposition to narratives of dominance called majoritarian stories. Counter-stories can build community among those at the margins of society, can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center, can nurture community wealth, memory and resistance, and can facilitate transformation in education.

Trustworthiness and Limitations

Qualitative research may have a number of limitations (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and while those critiques may be true, the strengths of qualitative methods provide great insight. An important concept of critical qualitative research design is the incorporation of trustworthiness. There is a debate on the qualitative research to highlight validity and trustworthiness of the work. Trustworthiness was an intentional reflection and use of credibility, dependability, and transferability throughout the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study's trustworthiness was enhanced by transcribing all interviews from recordings and cross-referencing the data with notes I wrote.

As a Latina woman researcher, I am interested in understanding, listening, and studying Latinx college students' experiences and allowing them to develop a narrative of which they feel proud. The stories of Latinx college students are the center of my research, research process, data

collection, developing code themes, and codebook. To strengthen the study's trustworthiness, transparency, and accountability, I began all interviews by sharing this research study was not connected to an academic course, job employment, or social connection within the institution. I also shared as a mandatory reporter, I am required by the academic institution to report the following disclosures: sexual assault, abuse to a child or elder, or harm to self or others. Ultimately, the goal of trustworthiness was so results from this research study were credible, dependable, and transferable to other studies with similar or identical people or situations.

Various terms are used to describe the idea of ensuring the validation of studies and one has created trustworthy analytical interpretations (Glesne, 2016). There were multiple ways I checked for reliability during this research process. One way was through member checking, or respondent validation, where I asked participants to review their transcripts so they could check for accuracy. This helped me rule out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants were saying in their interviews; it minimized any misunderstanding as conclusions were drawn (Maxwell, 1992; Shenton, 2004). A second form of member checks was in my third interview, allowing participants to reflect on early findings and offer feedback on their views. Third way to reaffirm member checking happen across the three interviews and completed member checks in the interviews. I also checked transcriptions to make sure they did not contain obvious mistakes made during transcription.

After the transcriptions, a copy of the interviews was sent to participants to provide edits, questions, or comments. If participants asked for changes on their transcripts, edits were honored and changed accordingly. Participants had about a 2-week window to check the accuracy of their responses. Additionally, I triangulated data by including multiple forms of data analysis (Carspecken, 1996) to enhance the credibility of the qualitative research study. I triangulated the

data with the three individual interviews. It was collected data from different generations of Latinx students who attended a predominantly White institution. I completed peer debriefing by analyzing sections of the data with a colleague (Carspecken, 1996). In addition, there were participants who had disconfirming evidence, where they expressed and shared that they did not experience imposter syndrome. To this end, analysis for these participants were carefully analyzed through multiple forms of checks (i.e., peer debriefing) and considered the ways they did not experience the imposter syndrome on their particular campus.

Ethical Considerations

When conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews, I was sensitive to ethical considerations when working with Latinx college students attending Lakeshore University. Before beginning the study, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was granted to conduct this research study. Consent for participation and the audio-recording of interviews were obtained in writing (see Appendix A) from each participant. To ensure protection and confidentiality, the participant and institution's names were replaced in this research study. Additionally, participants chose their own pseudonym, and the institution was described in terms of institution type or regional location rather than state or specific details about the institution. If participants did not choose a pseudonym name, then a name was assigned to them. Digital audio files and demographic forms were stored in a safe and secure location where only PI, and I had access to files. Files were removed once no further analysis was needed.

Ethical practices are essential in the process of conducting research with participants. I ensured all participants understood the study's purpose by sharing what they would expect during the semi-structured interview. I reminded participants their participation in this research study was entirely voluntary, and I could stop the interview and recording at any point during our

time together. Informing my participants about the researcher's role, the research process, what the data were used for, and how they can have access to the data were also shared with them. I allowed participants to ask questions at the end of the interview and mentioned they could email me afterwards if they had any questions. At the end of each interview, participants were also given two resource sheets (see Appendix D) with helpful resources on- and off-campus they could connect to if necessary.

To build trust with my participants, I introduced myself as the primary researcher and shared the name of the PI for this research study. I explained my role in the data collection process, data analysis, and writing a research project. I encouraged participants to ask questions and if they had any questions, comments, or concerns post-interview, they were able contact me at any point. I built and maintained trust by using culturally appropriate methods (i.e., non-verbal nodding) to interact with students genuinely and respectfully and create the opportunity to gain trust from the student population historically studied through a deficit model (Delgado Bernal, 2002). As a researcher who values Latinx students' experiences-based knowledge, sharing and reporting these experiences as data relevant to the study of higher education is a critical narrative in the scope of higher education. Furthermore, the goal was for them to see how their stories are shared and hope to empower the next generation of Latinx undergraduates.

Subjectivity Statement

Marshall and Rossman (2006) indicated for qualitative research, the researcher becomes an "instrument" in the scope of the researcher. Maxwell (2005) believed "separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insight, hypothesis, and validity checks" (p. 36). To reveal my relationship to this study, I shared my story as a Latina student and how the topic selection became an interest for my work. This exercise,

according to Skeggs (2002), is a “call for accountability and responsibility in research, no for self-formation and self-promotion” (p. 369). Maxwell (2005) suggested researchers include an “identity memo” describing their background, goals, and relevance to the research questions. I carefully examined my identities and experiences to offer the following inventory of personal and professional experiences that have shaped my worldview. In the following statement, I humbly share my own story about my identity and what led me to become interested in this research topic.

As a current doctoral student who is a U.S.-born, able-bodied, Central American, cis-gender woman raised in a low-income household by two loving family members, I acknowledge the multiple identities and privilege that shape how I interpreted and conveyed the data I was gather. As a self-identified Latina woman researcher, I am interested in studying and understanding the experiences of Latinx college attending 4-year institutions by allowing students to develop a narrative that empowers them and makes them proud. Research is a powerful tool to empower and mobilizes communities; it can recenter the stories often excluded.

To provide some geographical context of how I come into this research, I was born in Los Angeles and raised in Pasadena, California. After graduating high school, I moved to one of the nine University of California system schools and earned my bachelor’s degree. As a junior in college, I became aware of the graduate school process, and with the guidance of peers and mentors, I moved to the Midwest to pursue my graduate degree.

Taking a step back, my transition from high school to college was challenging navigating the educational processes and I realized making my parents proud required leaving home. Shortly after I moved to the Midwest, I experienced my first culture shock when I saw the people around me did not look like me. At this moment, I questioned my identity as a Latina student in

higher education. I realized I was different, which created feeling like an imposter even though I was confident in my skills and abilities both as a graduate student and an emerging young scholar. I recall similar thoughts and feelings as an undergraduate student, but nothing like my transition from one state to the other.

As a first-generation Latina college student, attending college and receiving a quality education was a dream come true to my parents and myself. For me, growing up in a diverse neighborhood and attending a diverse high school was my "normal." However, those thoughts and feelings shifted when attending an institution where demographics looked different from me. While this may be normal and part of the educational process, my reality and experience shifted both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. I realize as a first-generation student, I had a lot of "learning" to do. I also noticed my Central American culture was incongruent with that of the predominant culture. These differences were challenges I faced during my academic journey, but they were also a sense of resilience and perseverance. I switched and negotiated these processes on my own and I have endured difficulties and challenges on a weekly basis often with very little help and guidance.

As a researcher, I carefully examined my identities and experiences that offer the following inventory of personal and professional experiences that have shaped my worldview. I chose to study these students because some of my fondest memories of college were related to being in a community with other Latinx students—other students who looked like me. These experiences allowed me to feel like I belonged to a group of individuals who share their identities, cultures, and values. As I moved through the educational pipeline, the need to find a community or an academic family became salient. The need to connect in places that embraced my cultural values and beliefs has shaped who I am and how I interact and connect with others.

The experiences of the Latinx college students in my study was the center of my research process both as it informs the work with participants and how I make meaning from their stories. I chose to focus on Latinx college students at PWI because we are often underrepresented and forgotten from the literature regarding experiences at PWIs. Latinx individuals are a growing majority in the United States population but are often left out of both conversations and research. I chose Latinx college students because some of my memorable moments of college were related to my experiences with other Latinx students, and I wish I could tell my story.

As a doctoral student who has worked in different cultural offices across campus, I had the honor and privilege of sharing similar spaces with other Latinx undergraduates and witnessed as they navigated what can often be a hostile campus climate. I believe research should include taking action as necessary in the liberation struggle, and I hope my research agenda gives voice to underrepresented Latinx students where their voices are often silenced. I recognize as self-identified Latinx individuals, we may share a collective and shared identity, but there is also a depth and breadth of experiences that make Latinx students unique.

I share my researcher positionality because I am aware my experience as a Latina graduate student may influence how I conceptualize, interpret, and analyze the participants' lived experiences. Therefore, I made sure during the data collection and data analysis, I followed the interview protocol as close as possible to minimize my bias in interpreting participants' stories. Participating in this research experience, the data presented represents Latinx college students' educational experience. I wrote researcher notes after interviews as I continued to position myself with the research study. I also recognized that not all participants experienced imposter syndrome as college students. I kept an open-mind to truly listen and understand the depths of experiences for students who did not experience imposter syndrome. I listened and analyzed

carefully to their counterstory to make sure that I expressed their realities through my findings. Furthermore, member checking and utilizing core Latinx values of engaging with them through a three-step interview process, was an additional form to engage with nuances of experiences.

Chapter 4 - Findings

This chapter discusses themes collected through interviewing 14 self-identified Latinx college students attending Lakeshore University, a predominantly White institution (PWI). I set up this research study to understand the experiences of and provide rich narratives from Latinx college students who may experience imposter syndrome at a PWI research university. Additionally, I explored how Latinx college students coped and managed imposter syndrome during their time at Lakeshore University. Students reflected concrete solutions where academic institutions, and the like, can engage and support their academic growth.

The themes are based on the range of experiences participants shared with me. The first and second themes include data primarily from participants' second interviews. The third and fourth themes consist of data primarily from participants' third interviews. The fourth theme had two subthemes, which are shared below. The themes and subthemes revealed imposter syndrome as Latinx college students at a PWI during the COVID-19 global pandemic. Each theme referred to either individual ideas about imposter syndrome and how participants coped with it or referred to institutional obligations for creating an inclusive environment where students might not feel like imposters. The four themes in the data were:

- "Oh, it Wasn't 100% Because of My Hard Work:" Not Claiming Success. In this theme, participants described multiple reasons for their success, sharing reasons or excuses to why they were successful students, or deemphasizing their own hard work or accomplishments. This theme emphasized individual perceptions of imposter syndrome and implied individual students were left to work through these feelings. This theme also highlights institutional concerns that indicated the need for more inclusive environments for Latinx college students.

- A Temporary Break? The Impacts and Changes of Imposter Syndrome During the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. While the transition to virtual learning during the COVID-19 global pandemic was difficult for many people, there were some unintended triumphs for students who experienced imposter syndrome because they did not experience racially hostile campus environments. In this theme, participants shared surprising benefits of completing their coursework virtually. At the institutional level, the global pandemic became a temporary fix to structural harm. At the individual level, the COVID-19 global pandemic focused on how Latinx college students were more of themselves and felt less of the imposter syndrome.
- "Talking to People and Opening Up to Folks": The Mechanism Used to Cope (or not) With Imposter Syndrome. There were specific strategies and examples such as students surrounding themselves with Students of Color, or talking to other social groups when imposter syndrome showed up for Latinx college students. This theme focused on two subthemes, the first was relationship and the second was places. The relationships highlights the connections participants made with other individuals that helped them not feel like an imposter. Whereas places highlights particular areas where participants sought for support. This theme implied the institutions' obligation for creating inclusive spaces for Latinx college students.
- Specific Institutional Changes to Address the Latinx College Student Needs. Participants believed there must be a change at the institution's core and highlighted reconstruction and redistribution of resources for students. Participants provided tangible and concrete recommendations university leaders and personnel can take to create a more equitable and less imposter feeling for Latinx college students. This theme implied institutions

need to attend to the needs of Latinx college students through recognizing students' request. The fourth theme had two specific requests:

- Redistribution of Funding. In this first subtheme, one primary way to redistribute the institution's resources are by reallocating funding monies to on-campus resources (e.g., student programs, student centers)—this means to truly consider how and where the money is spent across the university.
- Need for Mental Health Services. A careful evaluation on the mental health services for students needs greater consideration for Latinx colleges students. Students identified these services are helpful, but the services and accessibility was critical. Some of the practices in place do not meet the current needs related to imposter syndrome.

The findings begin with a consideration of whether accomplishments were really owned by students as the participants contemplated their imposter syndrome experiences.

"Oh, It Wasn't 100% Because of My Hard Work:" Not Claiming Success.

This theme focused on how imposter syndrome points to the lack of inclusion at the institution. It highlighted the individual's perception of imposter syndrome and how Latinx college students managed and dealt with these experiences. Rather than recognizing and owning their accomplishments, the participants attributed their success to various circumstances, most of which were outside of their control. For example, Christina, a 20-year-old neurobiology major and prestigious scholarship award recipient, felt her success was less about her preparation and work ethic and more because of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Earlier in the interview, she reflected on how she did exceptionally well in many of her STEM courses in high school, but being in college was different. When asked if she ever experienced imposter syndrome, she said:

> I sometimes tend to—I don't know what the right word is. I guess maybe like diminish my own accomplishments. I definitely think like what I was saying with my advisors; they view me so that I don't view myself in a lot of times. Even if I get good grades that [college] semester, I guess this is imposter syndrome, but I'll be like, "It wasn't 100% because of my hard work. It was because of the curve." And attributing it to other things that are outside of my control.

Here, Christina's student success was attributed to a low classroom curve—feeling like her academic success was not because of her merit or hard work. Christina named imposter syndrome, and she quickly dismissed this by saying, "it wasn't 100% because of my hard work." Christina identified different reasons for her successes and did notice that faculty sometimes saw things in her that she did not see in herself.

The dialogue or "excuses" students shared include how they had lower expectations of themselves. Participants shared reasons they were not successful. Christina recalled how she never felt confident as a college student and always felt like she would not make it. As a Latina college student, she said:

> I always heard about how difficult the class [organic chemistry] was, [it is] notoriously known to be hard. Going into it, I was very scared about it, but I liked the subject in general, and I did well in it. It wasn't as hard as people made it out to be, honestly, but I sometimes think like, 'it just wasn't hard because maybe the professors weren't hard.

For Christina, she said the professors made it easier to get a good grade and explained how she felt outside factors made it easier. Instead of recognizing her strengths or being confident in herself, Christina did not think her work was enough to succeed academically. Christina also stated her success was not because her but because of the global pandemic. The environment and

realities of the global pandemic direct to institutional issues related to other academic experiences at the university. For example, she shared:

> It's that thing again if I did well, but I'm not saying that it's because of my work or because I understood it or how well I did and stuff, but it was because the professors made it easier, or the exams were easier. I know, especially with COVID. I was on a good track before the semester. Everything went virtual in terms of my grades and stuff. I had a conversation with one of my friends at the end of the semester that we both got 4.0s for that spring semester, but we were both like, "What if that was just because of COVID?" Professors were easier. Maybe. Not all are.

Christina attributed her success to something other than herself. It may be a possibility professors, and in this case the organic chemistry professor, may have had a more manageable load for students. While educational experiences and learning changed dramatically during the global pandemic, Christina gave herself credit for her excellent work ethic. This is an example of a counter-story (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002) where she took full ownership for having a successful academic semester. Counter narrative helped to center the experiences of Students of Color (Miller et al., 2020).

Other feelings about imposter syndrome were attributed to being a university student to meet a "quota." Thus, while some students recognized imposter syndrome was linked to lacking confidence, they also pointed out ways in which the institution was less inclusive. Some students felt because they were Students of Color or were from a historically marginalized identity, it became the qualifier for which they were accepted to the institution. Elizabeth shared the first time she learned about imposter syndrome, and she remembered drawing a comparison between her and others in her group. She expressed the following:

> I feel like I felt it [about imposter syndrome] as early as high school, where I was part of these programs that help you get into college. We would have monthly or weekly meetings. I feel like that's when I first experienced it in those meetings, but when I would look around, it was usually me surrounded by other BIPOC community members. I was like, "How do I fit in with them?" You get me? They are amazing. They're doing great stuff. How are we the same? It was still very inspiring because there were still people that looked like me that were off doing great things, so I was like, "Yes. Maybe I deserve to be here." I feel like when I came to college, it was definitely something I struggle with, and even today, I look around, and I start to believe all the negative things people say, like, "You're only here for the diversity count." Or like, "You're only here for the quota. You're not really here because you deserve to be here."

For Elizabeth, the contrast between her two environments was distinct. She felt content with the people around her because of shared identities, but as the climate and the individuals' demographic makeup shifted, the doubts and insecurity began to change. For Elizabeth, the messages about being a diversity count implied she could never belong on her merit. This created a disconnect for students like Elizabeth from feel like they belonged on campus. The internal messages implied imposter syndrome prevents students from feeling included in the university. Elizabeth's reflection demonstrated ways in which she felt the institution was not necessarily *for* her or other Latinx peers. LatCrit highlights the commitment to social justice and Elizabeth's reflection demonstrates the university's lack of commitment to social justice and can be a form of oppression (Solórzano et al., 2000; Villalpando, 2003). While imposter syndrome, in this case, might be affecting her individually, she called out institutional issues which were different than an individual idea of imposter syndrome as someone lacking confidence.

Similarly, Lucia reflected on being a student at Lakeshore University, and attributed her success to "affirmative action." She shared:

> Remember I mentioned [earlier in the interview] there's a group of White people who you just stay away from? Well, they were in class, and I heard them say, "Oh, yes, but she's going there now," and everyone was like, "Oh, but how?"…They were like, "Oh, but she got a big scholarship," and then now it's like, "Oh, well, I think she only got into Lakeshore University because she's a Person of Color and because of affirmative action, and that's why she got her scholarship, too."

For some Latinx college students, like Lucia, this internal thought they were not admitted based on their academic merits can be harmful. Again, Lucia identified the institution as not necessarily a place for her to belong. While this is a form of imposter syndrome, she pointed to the institutional sense of exclusion rather than her own need to be more confident.

Luna described her feelings of imposter syndrome when awarded a full-time scholarship. She said:

> I got [name of scholarship]. I never expected I would get it because I was surrounded by so many other brilliant individuals and students. Once I received the news, I just couldn't believe it. I know I have done so much to achieve that [scholarship], but I just didn't think it was enough to get it.

Luna's quote demonstrated this issue was not just about the individual or a topic related to self-efficacy but rather a structural and institutional policy outcome. This was also influenced by peer reactions based on racism. Using LatCrit helps draw attention to the different forms of oppression showing the injustice of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano & Yosso, 2009). Imposter syndrome for Luna was not just about being more confident, it tells another

story—a story that happens in the daily lives of Latinx college students. Participants also drew connections to their self-confidence related to imposter syndrome.

Paola, an international studies and Spanish double major, drew a link about how she thinks others think of her. She talked about her confidence in the educational setting and addressed the institution's responsibility about the imposter syndrome. First, Paola reflected the mental process by sharing the following:

> I don't know. I think a lot of it comes from not having the confidence, but also socially, I feel like some people probably judge a little there, like, "Why is she here?" As I said, when people were comparing, when I was scheduling the first day at program, everyone was in each other in classes, and I was just sitting there. They asked me, "What's the highest math you took?" I'm like…They were just judging me lowkey a little bit. That, for me, was kind of like, "Oh lord, they are judging."

While Paola does point to the need for more confidence, she connected it to institutional accountability for inclusion. Additionally, when Paola began to have these experiences, she described particular emotions. She narrated the feelings and emotions she felt as a consequence of others' judgment by stating:

> I felt in between sad, anxious, nervous, and kind of stressed. I would say [that] more than anything, I was scared. That imposter syndrome kicked in and thought, "you're not going to do it; you're not good enough." But I'm like, "No, I have to try." So it was that battle between being scared but also trying just to push through. I would say mostly scared and anxious, but the stress comes along with that too.

These particular feelings and experiences came at an emotional and mental cost for Paola. She had an internal conversation with herself to understand all of this, and it was clear these feelings

had negative emotional and psychological consequences. Similar to how Lucia interpreted the thoughts about others, Paola also interpreted others' judgment of her. This was about how participants felt and perceived their experiences and how these invisible structures created an exhausting internal dialogue for Latinx college students. LatCrit theory helped explain how students face multiple layers of oppression (Avalos, 2013). These structures, or institutions, were not built with Latinx students in mind, and participants know these policies and practices were not inclusive from the beginning.

While most of the participants did experience imposter syndrome, a couple of the participants did not experience imposter syndrome at Lakeshore University. Juanita shared she had not experienced imposter syndrome. She was college junior and mentioned:

> I don't think I've ever felt that [imposter syndrome] like for myself. I mean, I know I've done a lot in high school. I have a friend who is also in [Name of Program]. I guess I haven't heard if the imposter syndrome is primarily specific identities, but [a friend] told me that she felt like she had the imposter syndrome.

Juanita knew about imposter syndrome because a friend shared imposter syndrome experiences with her. Juanita went and said the following about not experiencing the imposter syndrome:

> Yeah, I don't think I've ever felt [IS] because in high school I was a part of a lot of pre-college things [programs] and it was building up my resume to be someone who would be accepted into Lakeshore University. And even today, my resume is still pretty built up just through what I've done. I want to keep working in something focused like diversity and education. So, I have been very active and doing things to continue to build that up, so I know I've been working for it. Regardless of what somebody saying, I guess I don't believe it because I know I've been doing work for it.

Juanita pointed out she does not experience imposter syndrome at Lakeshore University. She reflected her pre-college experiences certainly prepared her for the transition to college. Juanita indicated she continued to add experiences and expand her already strong resume.

A second participant also expressed not experiencing imposter syndrome as a college student. Chris, an international studies and economics double major, expressed how his peer talked to him about imposter syndrome but Chris did not quite understand. He reflected on a situation when a peer tried to minimize Chris' accomplishments. Chris mentioned the peer had blamed his acceptance to Lakeshore University because "[you] received a full tuition scholarship . . . that's nice, you have it because you're Hispanic [Latinx]. However, Chris knew that was false and instead shared, "well, I did earn it. I got the grades . . . [I] don't have to feel like an imposter." Chris recognized his peers may struggle with imposter syndrome and added, "it feels nice to have a support system there and available." Chris said, "[it] helps build [his] confidence for the new school year. Knowing you're going to have resources available to help you if you ever stumble or fall. That help[ed] build confidence for me." Chris shared how the institutional supported was the critical for his success and important to not experience imposter syndrome during college.

For this first theme, Latinx college students share their reasons for why they are successful and expressed their rational. The next theme focused on how the COVID-19 global pandemic shaped participants' experience with the imposter syndrome.

A Temporary Break? The Impacts and Changes of Imposter Syndrome During the COVID-19 Global Pandemic.

Participants shared ways they managed their education, but they also called out institutions for not creating diverse and inclusive spaces. The following participant's quotes

highlighted changes that occurred during the COVID-19 global pandemic and how it was specifically related to imposter syndrome (individual). The setting for living and attending college during a global pandemic indicated how current structures (i.e., policies and practices) are not truly serving Latinx college students. Participants also asserted the distinct impact of a virtual platform and how it changed their feelings of imposter syndrome (institution). The shift from in-person learning to online learning was a drastic shift for Latinx students. Both academic and social engagement became an uncomfortable and major transition episode for Latinx colleges. Negative assumptions were made about online learning; however, data from Latinx students showed something different.

The following quotes came primarily from the second interview. The data demonstrated a shift in students' college experiences before and during the COVID-19 global pandemic. For instance, Christina shared the difference she felt due to the world health crisis. When asked what was particularly influential for her in the moment we spoke, she said:

> COVID and its consequences because this semester was well too in terms of academics, but in the end, again, it wasn't necessarily me attributing it to myself. It was easier for me to focus because I was home 100%. I didn't go out, I didn't do this, just things going on, but one thing I will say is that just this past semester, I do think I felt imposter syndrome a bit less because everything is going on.

Christina expressed a lack of motivation in her educational studies, but said imposter syndrome feelings were less intensified because of significant distractions happening in the world. For too long, higher education institutions have placed strong emphasis on in-person engagement; however, stories shared showed an online platform tells a slightly different story. Christina's counter-story (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002) about imposter syndrome highlighted

circumstances of the pandemic have shifted how she thinks and feels about and toward imposter syndrome. She liked not having her day-to-day distractions, and because of the COVID-19 global pandemic, everything was virtual. While she did not explicitly identify the institution as less than welcoming, one might wonder if being online kept Christina from feeling excluded on campus in ways that might sometimes activate imposter syndrome.

Another Latinx student also drew differences between imposter syndrome pre-pandemic and during the pandemic. Elizabeth stated:

> Feeling imposter syndrome does not have the same tension now than what you would see when you are in person. It's like [during-pandemic], if you don't want to deal with somebody, you can kick them out of the zoom call.

Elizabeth described the webcam made classroom interactions with imposter syndrome less intense because there was a sense of power for individuals to be removed from a virtual space. She also shared pre-pandemic, when in-person, she would see "favoritism" from professors, but when everything was online and virtual, she said it was not as evident. It was as if everyone was on the same playing field. With the online learning, it meant Latinx students were not being excluded from academic engagement or even classroom visibility. While participants shared the difficulties and challenges of learning online, they admitted feeling included in the day-to-day classroom activities. Participants reflected feeling less like a Student of Color and more like a student across their classrooms.

Next, Lucia described her imposter syndrome experiences as different between pre-pandemic classroom engagement and during COVID-19 classroom engagement. She particularly called attention to the use of the webcam as giving her a break from racial exclusion on campus. Lucia, a 21-year-old education studies major, stated:

> I feel with the pandemic, since we aren't allowed to see each other in person, I feel like I have remained who I am, I'm comfortable…they look like me. They talk like me, so I'm always very comfortable to be around them [other classmates] and just live out of my space and being in my comfortable bubble. When it comes to a regular semester, walking into a classroom, and walking into a classroom full of White students, I would get very intimidated. I would start doubting myself, and I would start being almost on attack mode.

Lucia's engagement with physical space attends to the difference between webcam engagement. in-person interaction, and how students were at a much more level playing field via the video camera. To this end, a couple of students also described how online courses during the pandemic allowed them to feel more in control of the classroom. It was not that participants were learning better or learning more during the global pandemic, but that they were relieved from the day-to-day racial hostility they may encounter when in-person on-campus. This narrative, or story, does not suggest online learning is the solution to the imposter syndrome; it shows how the virtual campus became and was an inclusive space for Latinx college students.

The academic environment felt less competitive in this virtual space. For example, participants were asked how the global pandemic may have changed these potential feelings and experiences with imposter syndrome at Lakeshore University. Anna began by sharing:

> It's like you're still on online courses. It's nice because if someone makes a comment and you're uncomfortable or whatever, you can just turn your audio and video off, step away from the class, or whatever. It also makes those situations difficult…it is weird. Everything's so weird over Zoom that even trying to educate someone or correct

someone's like, it's like, "Hold on, let me interrupt class so I can say what I have to say." Whereas if you were in-person, I don't know. It just not as easy to interject.

For Anna, the video camera made for a unique class engagement, where she could "step away" by muting others or interject openly and comfortably. Using the physical space, Anna asserted herself on the virtual platform. Anna used a counter-narrative for how to engage during the pandemic. LatCrit theory examines how counter-narratives were used to think about lived experiences (Miller et al., 2020; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002). In education research, use of counter-narratives is a tool that represents voices from Communities of Color and helps reach educational equity (Miller et al., 2020). Anna narrated her authentic, lived experience as a Student of Color and began to disrupt the discourse on virtual classroom engagement, suggesting she could be more assertive via Zoom.

Similarly, Paola, a 19-year-old international studies and Spanish double major, shared, "we're all doing the same thing, and we're all relatively getting the same scores. It's [classes] not competitive. It doesn't feel like that." For Paola, attending class during a global pandemic made imposter syndrome less intense in the classroom environment. She expressed how the shift in learning created a break in on how she felt about herself on campus. She told of the difficulties of everyone being in the same physical and psychological circumstance, but spending time online was a less intense setting among her peers.

Furthermore, Andy also described how imposter syndrome influenced unwarranted events of the COVID-19 global pandemic. He said, "you don't necessarily feel those feelings, those emotions that come with it, necessarily through a webcam. For me, I felt like I was just mostly doing my own work and in charge of my work." With remote learning, Andy could focus on his work and not feel associated as a Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC) in the

room. In this case, Andy felt like there was a sense of freedom and liberty to focus on this own work without necessarily having other kinds of distractions.

While some participants found the pandemic offered them a type of counter space on campus (Nuñez, 2011), others still felt hostility and exclusionary practices even online. Furthermore, when asked if the global pandemic had changed the feelings of fraudulence now that everything was online, Lucia shared a situation she witnessed before the start of the global pandemic and how it caused some particular feelings to differ. She stated:

> I've seen a few times where a professor has [said to a student], "All right, then get out of my class." Then, he will just kick them out. It's like, "Why would you do that? Their education is hard enough to get right now, and you're kicking them out of the class for correcting you on doing something wrong." It's upsetting to see. I would say, yes, it is. I think it's around the same for imposter syndrome because you are kind of conditioned to stay silent or not to say anything.

Lucia recalled a hostile and uncomfortable in-person classroom setting for one of her classes. At the same time, she highlighted the power dynamic in the university. In this moment, she recognized what happened in the classroom was not appropriate but often saw students silenced. Furthermore, Lucia shared it was easier to "kick out" someone from a Zoom lecture during the pandemic during a disagreement.. Similarly, Elizabeth described parallel feelings:

> When I do get like a successful outcome, I don't feel as bad as before. I don't have anyone to compare myself to as much because I'm not sitting in a room with my classmates where I'll hear about like, "Oh, well I did this and this." No, now in, class everyone gets on the Zoom link at almost the same time. We're all on there for the class, and then we all just get off our link and hop on a new one, but in person, you can be

> like—I would get to class early so I'd be sitting there and then, so with other kids and then you're often like you're bound to talk to each other after…In that sense, I feel like my work [online] is more valid because I'm not constantly comparing myself to other students or hearing about like all these amazing opportunities people have had that I didn't even know existed.

Elizabeth expressed before the global pandemic, insecurities began to arise when engaging with a classmate before the lecture or when students talked among themselves. However, through a webcam, physical space and time were removed, there was no longer a possibility to compare, and she felt relief.

Similarly, Andy, a rehabilitation psychology major senior, considered how the pandemic has alleviated some feelings of imposter syndrome. He stated:

> The imposter syndrome has definitely mitigated because of the pandemic…I only had one synchronous class this semester, it was an educational policy class. The imposter syndrome, I don't really feel it because we're all behind a computer screen, and it's like if you want to talk, but if you don't want to talk, you're not necessarily forced to. It's a different environment because, at least in person, you're in a room, and people are looking at you, or most of your TA are looking at you.

Andy felt a shift with imposter syndrome changing to the online platform. He said because his classes were behind a computer screen, there was less pressure to engage or perform in class. Participants spoke about the different functions of online learning and how the pandemic was a break from the inequalities and unfairness Latinx college students often face. In these examples, using a video camera did not provide an environment for students to compare themselves. Using video cameras became a protective piece for Latinx students. They were not encountering some

of the same hostilities that occurred at the university. The use of the online platform provided an avenue for turning it off differently.

While the pandemic may have provided an unusual opportunity for forced online learning that, in some ways, provided relief from campus racial hostility, there were other negative consequences of this time period. Family or family-like structures and relationships were critical for the well-being of Latinx students (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Rodriguez et al., 2021). Family was a key component of the Latinx culture; it greatly influenced the perceptions students had of their education, and it was a motivation to attend a college and succeed. Christina, a high-performing student, said the following:

> Sometimes I've tried to do is talk to someone about how I feel because I found that talking to someone always helps. It's getting input, but also just being able to express how you're feeling with family or friends. I think with friends, sometimes they also understand, so it's a little bit easier in that sense, what I realized. That's something that I've tried to do if I ever feel like that, but also just maybe taking some time for myself, like how I did yesterday with taking a break for my class. I just chose to spend time with my family and just focus on that and stop thinking of school and everything going on with it, so just taking a mental break.

For Christina, spending time with family rather than her friends was the best for her and the best strategy for coping with imposter syndrome. Christina relied on her family (i.e., familial capital) to get her through these experiences. Additionally, Luna shared the impact the COVID-19 global pandemic had on her related to imposter syndrome. She reflected how not being with her family during the pandemic further added to imposter syndrome:

> I wasn't able to be with my family. That added to that imposter syndrome I had because I just didn't feel like I was able to finish class strong, but luckily, I feel like even though I had that imposter syndrome, I feel like this COVID made me value everything I have more and made me just value my education more because I know there's a lot of other students or people that would love to be in my shoes and have an education.

Luna received a merit-based scholarship to attend Lakeshore University and expressed gratitude for her education; however, for Luna, imposter syndrome was still present. The difference between Lunas's narrative and that of other students was Luna spent her studies in the on-campus housing complex, whereas the other students who shared they did not experience imposter syndrome as much moved back home with their families. The physical connection to family or proximity to family might have influenced and minimized those feelings.

Family was a social connect important for Latinx college students, and they also highlighted other social relationships that helped Latinx college students. The next theme focused on the potential mechanisms used when experiencing the imposter syndrome.

"Talking to People and Opening up to Folks": The Mechanisms Used to Cope (or not) With Imposter Syndrome

This theme points out the institution and highlights their obligation to do better. The third theme attended to how self-identified Latinx undergraduate participants coped, and did not cope, with imposter syndrome, identifying relationships as important to their coping. Participants highlighted mechanisms they experienced during a global pandemic. Like other BIPOC college students, Latinx college students managed a range of experiences in higher education; however, the data highlighted how Latinx college students addressed these particular imposter feelings. There were two subthemes relative to this third theme, the first was relationship and the second

was particular spaces. Relationship is connected to people they connected with that helped them cope with imposter syndrome, these individuals trust members of their communities that helped with navigating the process. The second subtheme relates to locations on campus that specifically collected students no feeling like an imposter. The participants' responses and quotes are primarily from our third interview together, next are examples of a relationship-focused coping mechanism.

Luna talked about when she felt imposter syndrome and how talking about it helped her cope with it. Luna shared how she was awarded a full scholarship as a high school student but did not know if she truly deserved it. During our third interview, Luna expressed the following:

> I feel the imposter syndrome, but once I talked to my [academic] trainers, they told [me] about how valid it is to think like that but that we deserve it. I needed to acknowledge that I deserve this because I work so hard for it. That's when I was like, I need to start being proud of myself and accepting everything I've done.

Luna felt she was not worthy of her accomplishments or her awards. Then, she talked with the academic advisors and helped her through the uncomfortable mindset. Luna recognized having these feelings, decided to speak to others, and as a result, began to practice self-talk. For Luna, being reflective about her accomplishments was how she started to make sense of these particular feelings. Luna had academic mentors normalize the specific experience, which then led her to disconnect from the thought and own her creditability. Luna also shared the following when it came to coping with imposter syndrome:

> The other way I coped with these experiences has been just talking to many individuals that reassure me. For example, a lot of my friends…I talked to them, I FaceTime them, we've been doing lots of FaceTime because of COVID and everything. Just getting

> things off my mind, off my chest, helps me. It reaffirms my value and potential, so definitely talking to family members, of course. My mom, she calls me whenever, yesterday. Last semester, she called me every day, which I thought was cute. At the same time, I'm like, "Mom, it's every day."

Luna also examined different avenues that helped her get through those particular experiences. Her peer group from home and her family, especially her mom, were her main people to talk to through these experiences. For Luna, these structural forces have forced her to feel and experience the university in an exclusive way.

Another example of cope that focused on relationship was, Emma who sought out her family for help and support her with the imposter syndrome experiences. Emma was a 21-year-old human development and family studies and psychology student who shared how her family was helpful in this particular process. She said imposter syndrome causes her a lot of stress, but her family continued to engage her. Her family told her,

> "Emma, you're doing so great." They're just reminding you of like, "You're doing good. The person that's hard on themselves or you're the one being so hard on yourself." From an outside perspective, my family was always the first to tell me, "Emma, you're doing just fine." They always just compare it to how far we've come.

Emma deeply values the connection to her family and how her family members are her biggest fans. Her family was critical so that she did not feel like an imposter.

Additionally, for other undergraduates, directly talking to people helped with coping with their feelings. For instance, Marco, a Mexican American Latino male, said the following about his specific coping style:

> My coping skills switch to talking to people and opening up to folks in the position that I am currently in as a student. So, like talking to my [specific] professors about how they feel like, hey, are you feeling like this because I think these sorts of things that I need some sort of guidance here.

Marco expressed different coping mechanisms when he was on campus. However, when he was asked about coping with imposter syndrome, Marco said he "switched" to talking with others. Marco reflected when he spoke to his professors, it was, in fact, specific professors who shared similar racial and ethnic identities as him. Similarly, Alejandro also spoke with others to cope with imposter syndrome and stated:

> I really like to speak a lot with [college] seniors because they already have the whole experience, and so that really helped me feel less of the imposter syndrome. I do call friends at other institutions, and they tell me that they also [experience] imposter syndrome at their campus.

Alejandro talked about peers and social relationships to cope with imposter syndrome. where Another participant who spoke to her peers was Juanita, a 21-year-old senior, community and nonprofit leadership, and social welfare major, who shared her coping mechanisms for imposter syndrome. Talking with peers and the like became a counter space (Nuñez, 2011). She said:

> I think one of the biggest coping mechanisms I have used is talking it out with a friend. Especially if the situation were frustrating or upsetting or impacted me emotionally, I would normally step away from that and then talk it through or reflect by myself and then eventually talk through with someone. Someone like my best friend or my sister, someone really close to me, just because that helps me process what happened, and hear an outsider's opinion about it. Usually, the person would help me feel, not that I'm like

> seeking validation, but that would help me feel better as well about what happened and how things happen.

Juanita identified her counter spaces by those closest to her. While some students highlighted seeking therapy or outside resources related to imposter syndrome, Juanita and others did not seek therapy for this particular concern. Juanita also indicated her sister was an individual who supported her.

Additionally, other students highlighted different organizational spaces that helped them cope with imposter syndrome. The second subtheme was particular spaces and places that participants shared during their interview. These locations were immensely important and became a safeguard for participants to not feel like an imposter. For instance, when asking Anna what resources, she needed in place to have more successful coping strategies, Anna said:

> Going to the cultural center and surrounding myself with other Students of Color, other first-generation college students, other women, it's also super empowering to know that I'm not alone and I'm not the only one who feels this way. There are others who are facing similar struggles as me.

The reflection, or acknowledgment, that happens in this process was the first step for participants. For instance, Anna opened up about how she had to demonstrate and convince herself of her success. She said the most challenging part in coping with imposter syndrome was "learning to acknowledge it." Anna goes on to share:

> I just acknowledge that you're doing it and working toward building up your confidence in the work that you're doing and recognizing your worth in all that you do. I feel like that's a lot easier said than done. Again, you feel like society socializes you to not admire ourselves in our work, as Students of Color, as People of Color to acknowledge our worth

> in general because I feel like society doesn't recognize our worth. So, to challenging oneself to be like, "No, I am worth all of this. I am putting in the work." It takes a lot out of a person. I also surround myself with people who empower me and make me feel comfortable.

There was mental self-talk for Anna; she said it was easy to get caught up to feeling one must continue to validate their self-worth. There was an element to which she acknowledged her accomplishments to vocalize them. For Anna, what was particularly interesting was she verbally self-talked to minimize particular thoughts of being an imposter. In this particular experience, she validated her self-worth and suppressed society's perception of her by showing evidence she deserved to be there.

Furthermore, Paola, a Mexican American sophomore, described imposter syndrome as a "cycle" in her college experience. She said:

> It's [imposter syndrome] is like a cycle, because there's moments where you start to do better and then you meet people and you compare yourself, even though you don't want to, and you just fall again. You're like, "Oh, I'm not that smart, or I'm not qualified."

Paola shared the feeling imposter syndrome was a pattern where she felt both empowered and an undesired comparison to others. Knowing about imposter syndrome helps participants like Paola build a counter-narrative (Miller et al., 2020; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). In deconstructing the master narrative, she began to recreate an alternative narrative. The ideology and principles that hold this dominant narrative dismisses the relatives and truths for Latinx college students. The use of LatCrit challenges the dominant ideology by creating a different narrative (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002).

For Paola, a high-achieving student, imposter syndrome prevented her from achieving her next steps. She first said, “I think that in some ways it [imposter syndrome] stops me from moving forward or thinking like I can continue in this track, in this major or with my life plans.” Paola said she had these exhausting constant and consistent feelings. When I asked her specifically how she managed imposter syndrome, she also said, “I’m not sure how well I’ve coped. I think that a lot of it is just trying to have a little bit more confidence. I think that it takes a lot of work.” Paola was a first-year college student, and perhaps it made sense she was learning how to cope. Confidence is not, and should not, be enough for students to not feel like an imposter. Structural and institutional changes are needed to create a less toxic academic and educational environment for Latinx college students. The quality of education is not just about their academic rigor and what they learned; the quality is also about the holistic college experience. However, this was another example of how the environment created these particular feelings. Paola also expressed the following:

> I guess believing in myself that’s helped me…I don’t know if I have a specific coping mechanism or if there’s anything that would ever truly help me just get over it. Still, I just like to know that I actually am putting in the work, and I actually do deserve to feel like I’m accomplishing something because I am working hard no matter what…I’m not good enough…I just start putting myself down.

Paola shared how she did not believe in herself even though there was clear evidence she had the appropriate skills to succeed. She highlighted how she worked hard, but somehow, she did not feel “good enough,” which caused her to feel different. Additionally, Paola might be internalizing the individual approaches by needing to “get over it” by herself. Paola challenged

how the dominant discourse has influenced and affected their thinking about herself and the university.

In contrast, Andy did not know how to cope with imposter syndrome. Andy, a 23-year-old graduating senior, reflected the following:

> I feel I haven't necessarily coped with these experiences well because I think as I'm finishing up my last year, being away from campus and being back home in [City Name] definitely has given me a space to reflect more thoughtfully, as opposed to on-campus, because being on campus…I feel I haven't necessarily coped well with what has happened at Lakeshore University.

Andy recognized he has not coped with such experiences, but being away from the COVID-19 global pandemic has given him a break he needed to step away from the university. Andy talked about how the physical distance from the university has become favorable for him.

Diana, a communications art with a double certificate minor, shared she did not like her Friday economic class discussion because it felt so lonely. She goes on to explain:

> Yes, I think, honestly, going back to my economic class, I was so motivated. Prior to coming in, I had taken on academic decathlon, and that one of the topics that we covered were economics. I felt so comfortable and confident [to] major in it. At the time, I was like, I've learned a little bit. I'm going to learn more through these courses. One thing that I really dreaded every Friday was my discussions because I always felt so isolated.

Diana shared she felt alone and coped with it by attending weekly workshops at the university. She also highlighted thoughts about her therapy appointments:

> Honestly, it was the weekly workshops. I thought of that because, like I said, with my therapist, we don't meet as often. We meet every three to four weeks just because she has

> a very busy schedule and obviously she's meeting with a lot of students. I think weekly workshops would be helpful just because it's each week, we learn about different coping mechanisms. It doesn't necessarily have to be something that's too time efficient, but I think it's a lot harder with workshops because who's actually going to lead them.

Diana also recalled her coping mechanism has been better and did state she would overeat because of these particular imposter syndrome experiences. She said:

> I think my coping mechanisms have gotten a lot better as time went on on campus. My first year [in college], I definitely had no idea how to cope with it…I didn't seek for help because I didn't know how to ask for help or anything like that. It was a very unhealthy coping mechanism my first semester where well, at least I felt was a little unhealthy just because I always felt so bad afterward. I used to do a lot of overeating and stress eating just because I was like, I didn't feel good. At the time, eating as much as I would, I felt good. It just made me forget.

Diana shared her journey to how she made sense of the imposter syndrome. At first, she did not know how to cope with it and realized that she could not cope with it in the healthiest of ways, but she eventually learned ways to cope as an individual. It did not seem as if there were institutional mechanisms to aid her coping.

Some students did not know how to cope when it came to imposter syndrome. Paola, an international studies and Spanish double major, said she had difficulty dealing with imposter syndrome. Earlier, she described imposter syndrome as a "cycle" and the moments of doubts between feeling she was "smart" or "qualified" enough to be at Lakeshore University. She said:

> I just don't know how [to cope] because almost everybody else I've talked to in a similar position that I am also doesn't know what to do about it, except try to push through,

> which I don't think is always that good. I come back sometimes because you don't deal with it. You just push it aside.

Paola shared she does not know how to cope with imposter syndrome; she had conditioned herself to push through. Dismissing these feelings and not recognizing imposter syndrome can be detrimental to the student because it can invalidate their actual experiences. It was crucial to address these concerns of imposter syndrome and create a community where students felt welcomed to have an open dialog about their struggles in the university setting.

Specific Institutional Changes to Address the Latinx College Student Needs

In the fourth theme, participants highlighted the foundation of how the university was built (i.e., policies and practices) needs to change to facilitate success for the Latinx college student population at Lakeshore University. This theme was focused on the institution and participants are pointing out how the university is lacking inclusion at the institution. Participants emphasized particular and practical ways to reconstruct some of the habits occurring at Lakeshore University. This fourth theme was pulled primarily from Interview 3, and participants were asked about changes they would like to see at the institution. The fourth theme has two subthemes. The first subtheme is The Institution Needs to be Restructured and Address Funding Concerns Related to Latinx College Students. This subtheme attends to the redistribution and reallocating of funds—a proper reevaluation of how the university spends its money. The second subtheme was A Careful and Critical Examination of Students' Mental Health Needs to Create Attention, Awareness, and Reevaluation. The practices in place did not meet the current needs related to imposter syndrome, according to these participants. Participants shared there must be a change in how money was distributed across the institution. Additionally, participants addressed the valid and essential need for counseling support to address imposter syndrome. Importantly

this fourth theme draws out institutional responsibility for improving conditions to make imposter syndrome less present on campus.

In addressing the more significant social structure issues, Elizabeth examined the larger system, racism, policies, and practices in the university setting needed to change. She stated:

> I think it's just the system. Everything, history, internalized racism, people who aren't educated [on these issues]. I feel that people will always have their opinions on things many times, and they will always come in freshman year. I knew so many people who had a lot of internalized racism, and they were used to institutional and systematic racism. That is just crazy. They are not always held accountable in their friend group or the community they belong to. Then they come to school, or these discussions, and have these problematic opinions about things. It's blamed on the university because that's something that they came with before they are college students.

Colleges and universities are responsible for bringing diverse groups of students to every incoming class of students. However, these diverse thoughts and groups of people can be very narrow and "problematic" when it comes to larger classroom discussions. If the institution says it was dedicated to "social inequalities" and education should "influence people's lives beyond the boundaries of the classroom," how does the institution take responsibility for what is happening with their students? Additionally, diversity allows for learning and growth to occur, and that is important. Thus, how does the institution create and support these efforts if its students are expressing these particular concerns? It is also equally important to protect students from feeling isolated or feeling like a particular group of people do not belong. She stated:

> I just feel like a lot of the issues that students try to bring up about, the reason why we are coping, the reason why we're having this issue in the first place, and we try to explain

> those issues to staff, the chancellor, the vice-provost, whoever that would listen to us, but they'll usually write it off because they don't look like diverse students. They're just listening to us, but they can't understand our frustrations, they don't understand what we're trying to say…they don't understand the full depths of our struggle on campus. This university started experiencing issues with the hate and bias on campus, it has been a long [time], and they don't correct anything about it. They just cover it up. For example, the homecoming video last year, where it had only White students, and they did record a historically Black sorority, but then they edited them out, a complete erasure. Nothing really corrective was done about it besides the committee being like, "Oh, we apologize. Here's a letter. We're going to try to do better next year." It's like, "Where's the corrective measure?"

To this end, Lucia expressed frustration about how the institution handled these kinds of situations, questioning whether the institution was doing enough to be inclusive to students. During Lucia's time as a college student, she felt the university did not understand or acknowledge these very accurate and genuine concerns for Latinx students. Lucia recognized change could take time, especially at a large institution like Lakeshore University, but she expressed proper and timely urgency. It is not the student's fault but the responsibility of the institution to be inclusive and not intentionally marginalize Students of Color. Institutions need to address students' needs and provide a successful academic experience because the results of system racism mean racial disparities will continue to persist if these factors are not prioritized. Christina, a 20-year Peruvian woman and neurobiology major, shared how she felt about university engaging its students. Christina addressed the racial injustices, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, and Lakeshore University's response to the movement during the summer of

2020. She reflected on the kind of institution she wished she could attend. She shared the following statement about the university:

> They [the university] say, "we're here for you and stuff." Those are kinds of words. Those aren't actions that they're taking to make the campus a more comfortable place for Students of Color. I would say that sometimes those issues make it hard…I would love to be at a university that really, really tries to include everyone and educate others. I've heard this stuff before, even though there is an ethnic study requirement to graduate from Lakeshore University, and it's one class. And a lot of students view that as taking an easy course to get it out of the way. That sucks because it is their [Lakeshore University] attempt to educate people, but I don't think it's enough. I just think that with regard to those types of issues, the university could do better.

She recognized one class was not enough to fix what was happening on campus. Christina felt the university does not go beyond basic intention about such timely issues. She suggested having additional requirements in terms of topics related to racial injustice. Christina knew folks were advocating for more changes and more actions, but she shared only the people who care about it were affected by it. She shared the need to increase the number of ethnic course requirements to broaden students' perspectives.

Additionally, Anna expressed the same sentiment about ethnic studies conditions, and she recommended:

> I would appreciate it if the university provided more than one ethnic studies requirement, encouraging students to learn more and educate themselves on the various mishaps of the world and our society and our systems because I feel that one ethnic studies requirement isn't doing much for students.

Both Cristina and Anna wished for more engagement from university personnel to help promote diversity among students. Both asserted the increase of ethnic studies requirements for students would increase student's awareness about learning different cultures which would benefit all students. This social-action driven change Anna shared includes participation from university leaders (i.e., university chancellor and cabinet) and from an administration willing to work on behalf of the best interests of the students. For example, Luna, an education studies and Spanish double major, mentioned she wished to see more from the current chancellor. She said, "the things she [university chancellor] does for students were not directed for Students of Color. I feel like they're directed more to the White students." Luna felt the chancellor did not have BIPOC's best interests in mind when making decisions. Luna showed how actors in the institution were not fair. She said, as a BIPOC student, she had a challenging time obtaining medication from the university health center. She said, "we don't get the resources that we deserved." This quote spoke to some of the resources issues several students shared during their interviews. For instance, when Diana talked about how she felt about the university, she said:

> I genuinely think that the university definitely puts up this front that they support you and that they're here for you. Still, when it comes to real concerns, they [the university] really don't do anything. For example, with recent protests at the Capitol and all of these Trump supporters, a lot of students went to counter-protests the Trump supporters that were outside of the Capitol because of the presidential election that was happening.

These concerns created an understanding of the actual functions of institutions and often described "in a perfect world, there would be resources that are accessible to all students in the same ways, and we would have an administration that actually cares for us," said Anna. Students would like resources and genuine support from the institution. Institutions like Lakeshore

University are not being set up to support these students, and the policies and practices are not created with Students of Color (i.e., Latinx undergraduates) in mind.

Some students were nervous and afraid to speak up because they feared repercussions from the university. Lucia, a Mexican American woman, shared how she continued to be "scared that by speaking out so harshly and so critically of the university that they could somehow penalize you." Students feared vocalizing their concerns may affect their student status and may have negative, academic consequences. The feeling of being silenced and inability to advocate for what they truly expect is harmful to the Latinx college experience. Marco, a 27-year-old rehabilitation psychology and education major, explained an incongruence between what the university state and what they did:

> It's that they want the idea of you, but they don't actually want you to be at the table, and so I wish that they put their money where their mouth was, in terms of this whole diversity and exists expansion of cultures and stuff like that to a point where it wasn't just like let me just have you guys write about this, which will increase our scholarship in the, in the world of academia and then let it be that.

There was a sense the institution's values, mission, and vision that did not reflect or align with the values, mission, and vision of the students it served. The institution should be serious about their intentions toward diverse populations, and they "would benefit so much if they just genuinely sat down and had a conversation," Marco said. The institution needs to acknowledge when these institutions were created; they were not created with the needs of Latinx college students in mind. Recognizing the foundations of how the institution was built (i.e., policies and practices) and then understanding the true and genuine needs of Latinx college students can help the institution then adopt practices, change services, and fully serve their students. Additionally,

Paola, Mexican American international studies and Spanish double major, told how she felt "school send out emails saying, 'we're all in this together,' but their actions don't reflect that." Examples like this one show Latinx college students do not feel supported by the institution. Emails being sent out saying they are "fighting together" are not enough.

Andy suggested the best starting point was acknowledging and having a genuine interest in understanding the student experience. Andy said:

> I say that the best starting point is with the people who are in charge. Either you get people who acknowledge and generally understand the experience of Students of Color, or you get them out of there, and you get people who do. I think that the administration can be fake sometimes and only says the right things just to say them, and even then, they say they are going to do something, don't do it, or the change is super slow.

Participants spoke about the incongruence between what the university said it would do for Latinx students and what they actually did for Latinx undergraduate students. This created tension and can caused harm to students. One way to repair this tension or harm is for the university to be held accountable for two specific actions, they are: Redistribution of funding and need for mental health resources.

Redistribution of Funding

Latinx students mentioned redistribution of the institutions' financial resources was necessary when it is about equity. For example, Elizabeth, a 21-year-old textile and fashion design major with a criminology justice, gender and women's studies, and ethnic studies triple certificate shared the need for, "funding for People of Color programs, student life, and organizations so that Students of Color can feel supported and can-do things that make us feel at home." She expressed her desire to fund programs specifically for BIPOC student groups. For

some students, their sense of self and connection to the university was connected to their mental well-being. Elizabeth reflected and said, “I’ve realized my well-being is correlated with my mental health.” She explained how she had a new member of the multicultural sorority and fraternity experience. She gave Elizabeth a gentle reminder of her high school and the city where she grew up. The following example was from 20-year-old Gabriel, an education studies and Russian double major. When he was asked about changes he would like to see at the university, he shared:

> Overall, the university needs to be restructured and restructured so that funding is split up. I guess football and sports shouldn’t have that much money, and Students of Color and other marginalized identities should not be struggling as much as they are. If we could allocate the funding to be more equitable and fairer, that would be a good start.

Latinx students mentioned redistribution of the institutions’ financial resources was necessary and critical in thinking about access. Attending to these fundamental needs can create room for students to truly focus on their academic responsibilities. In an interview with Anna, she expressed this continual worry about funding and how its impacts her life. For instance, during her second interview, she shared, “if a student doesn’t have to worry about just necessities, they can actually focus on making friends and focus on doing school and finding that life balance.” Students were consistently worrying about having their basic necessities, and in turn, cannot find a balance and focus on having a satisfying college experience.

This worry of financial capacity also expands beyond the person’s needs and the individual. In the case of Marco, a Mexican American Latino male who has been at Lakeshore University for several years:

> One thing that would be cool is if Lakeshore University would place our department, like the ethnic studies department, as essential and provide yearly funding instead of having ethnic studies constantly have to apply and pretty much assert the reason why they are imperative and convey of all the many ways that they are essential. And for them to get funding like why, like what is, why are we having that conversation is so it's such an interesting thing. You know, why are we not what why are we having every single year?

Marco expressed frustration ethnic studies must consistently prove why the program deserves funding year after year. Another student, Emma**,** a 21-year-old human development and family studies and psychology double major, shared a similar sentiment regarding multicultural Greek life. She highlighted these particular communities do not feel appreciated for what they stand for. One of her concerns was the lack of financial resources for these organizations, and a related concern was the council's inability to identify an advisor for the organizations. She shared how, without an advisor, events cannot be organized.

Support and funding university personnel was also essential and something participants shared during their interview. As mentioned earlier, Emma addressed the need for having an advisor, or mentor, and Andy addressed the need for a specific kind of identity as important. Andy said, "mentorship is a critical thing, and I would like to see…I feel it's often harder for us to find mentors, especially first-generation college students because there's no one that came in front of you that can help you out." For Lucia, this shared identity was very accurate. She shared:

> I typically look for mentors and for support systems from people that look like me and who speak like me and understand the struggle it is to be a first-generation student, to be away from home for the first time, dealing with parents that have mental health issues, things like that.

She said she does not gravitate to advisors or mentors who do not share her identity. She added these particular struggles "don't come up in conversations when it comes to White staff or White peers. It's predominantly in our own affinity groups." Funding for mentorship targeted for BIPOC is critical, especially since Latinx college students are first to attend college (Toutkoushian et al., 2021), and having similar experiences or identities are essential. The university needs "more diverse staff to support students, to show that representation was there for them," said Lucia.

Furthermore, considering communication, or lack of communication, sends a message to the already underrepresented students on campus. Elizabeth, a 21-years old, textile and fashion design major shared if "you [the university] have enough money to build a whole new gym, two new gyms back-to-back, there are resources on campus that need more funds," and one of these resources is the counseling center. The need for financial support means the monies spent on specific support and services for students. For instance, allocating money to support diverse student programs and BIPOC programming, expanding the ethnic studies curriculum (i.e., faculty, student-focus, community-building activities), paid dedicated facilitators to host and lead weekly workshops related to student success, and initial hires for diverse academic staff. There is a specific need for money to be spent was on mental health services.

Need for Mental Health Services

The need for mental health in the redistribution of resources was a critical subtheme. A consistent theme among students discussed the importance of health addressing imposter syndrome specifically. Latinx college students shared their struggles with feeling in the space and how a positive mental health space is necessary when navigating imposter syndrome. Anna and Andy both expressed their concerns about counseling services. Anna, a 19-year-old,

international studies and Spanish double major said, “it can just be intimidating to be here. I think personally, with my mental health, that is where I struggle the most. I think there’s been times when it has negatively impact.” Andy, a 23-years-old, rehabilitation psychology major said:

> I feel it’s important to have conversations and to have someone to talk to at the end of the day, especially if it’s something surrounding, maybe something you don’t want to talk about directly to your friends or your loved ones, so that would be the first one.

Both Anna and Andy had additional counseling support, which was incredibly important for them when navigating this experience and place. Andy added having therapy services free for students was incredibly important because some students do not have the opportunity to talk about their experiences. An example of this was Paola, an international studies and Spanish double major, who said she has spoken to her friends about imposter syndrome; however, the support was “very difficult” to find because many of her closest and trusted friends lived back at home. When she spoke about her concerns on campus, she was faced with peers who did not want to talk about imposter syndrome. Paola added, “it’s not a topic that people talk about a lot after freshman year.” Here, Paola felt imposter syndrome only existed in the constraints of their freshmen year. It was portrayed as something students only experienced during their freshman year and eventually no longer felt.

Similarly, Diana expressed, “My first year I definitely had no idea how to cope with it [imposter syndrome], I didn’t really seek for help because I didn’t know how to ask for help or anything like that.” Here, part of the issue was not having space or resources available for incoming students to utilize such services. Specifically for Elizabeth she addressed how it would be helpful if there was not a “limiting the number of times that students can go to these mental

health meetings." She went on to say the limited number of sessions made it "seem like your mental health-related issues can be resolved in a certain amount of time when that's not the reality of it." This was also true for Gabriel, a 20-year-old education studies and Russian double major, who said to "definitely increase the amount of [therapy] sessions" and went on to say, "if I am supposed to get through my sh*t, I need to see you [a therapist] more than ten sessions." Gabriel asserted how counseling centers should increase the number of sessions if the institution expects students to succeed at the university.

While some students expressed wanting more availability and frequency with their academic counselor, other students felt they could not seek help. For example, when Marco was asked how often he would seek help or avoid these particular kinds of experiences, he said the following, "I don't want to seem like this great student can do these things, and then ask for help, which means I could let some people down or some people to believe that I'm not really that capable." For Marco, he feared asking for help would let people down. He was in an environment that does not encourage students to have an open dialogue about the personal struggles he faced while in the institution. He shared he did not want others to know he was struggling which in turn did not motivate him to seek counseling services. Marco's story speaks to the stigma often associated with therapy. For instance, Gabriel, 20-year-old education studies and Russian double major, sought treatment but addressed the stigma. He said:

> I feel like counseling has always had a negative connotation around it. It's like even if you don't have like a mental illness or a mental health problem or whatever, it doesn't hurt to just kind of vent and you know people who can tell you that you're good, don't worry about it, you're fine what you're feeling is okay and everything. I think people don't realize that that's okay.

Some students had access to these additional clinical services, but not all students used the same services. Imposter syndrome was a common phenomenon across different groups of individuals—it can be experienced in multiple settings, at various times, and in numerous ways. However, Latinx college students attending a PWI already have a layered and complex experience (Ponjuán & Hernández, 2020; Von Robertson et al. 2016). An increase in accessibility to health services was vital for Latinx college student success.

Summary

The focus for the four themes highlighted both the individual's needs to "deal" with the imposter syndrome and how participants hold structures and institutions accountable. Participants had specific recommendations and conclusions for how to begin to repair some of the harm. Using LatCrit theory helps explain these social structural issues and helps explain why this matters. Latinx college students at a PWI campus faced a range of challenges, in particular, their success in managing imposter syndrome impacted their achievement. Latinx college students took risks every day as they engaged in their day-to-day educational activities while also experiencing imposter syndrome at an institution creating those particular feelings. The COVID-19 global pandemic gave participants a break and paused many of their day-to-day activities allowing students to spend time at home and not physically engage with the university. Even through this adversity, Latinx college students highlighted specific ways to improve and remarkably change their educational experience.

Chapter 5 - Discussion and Conclusion

The findings in this study demonstrate the lived experiences of 14 self-identified Latinx undergraduates by listening to their authentic stories about imposter syndrome. Imposter syndrome can cause people to doubt their achievements and fear others will expose them as fraudulent. Across gender, race, age, and professions, imposter syndrome is especially prevalent among high-achieving women and minorities. Imposter syndrome is prevalent among different groups, but little research addresses Latinx college students. Therefore, this study attended to their stories by providing rich narratives from Latinx college students who may experience imposter syndrome at a predominately White institution (PWI). As a result of these findings, educators, practitioners, and researchers may begin implementing or strengthening existing programs and services to support Latinx students at PWIs.

In this study, I attempted to understand how multiple forms of oppression can intersect with the lives of Latinx college students at Lakeshore University. A critical qualitative inquiry approach (Winkle-Wagner et al., 2018) is different from traditional qualitative research because critical researchers are called to change the world and change it in ways that resist injustices while celebrating freedom (Denzin, 2015). Winkle-Wagner et al. (2018) shared critical qualitative researchers highlight the lives and histories intentionally placed at the center of the research project. LatCrit provided a proper lens for qualitative education research (Delgado Bernal, 2002) because it focused on illuminating Latinx voices through storytelling so Students of Color voices are acknowledged, and their lived experiences can serve as a powerful means for survival and liberation. LatCrit also helped to highlight ways that the institutional campus structures included or excluded Latinx students (Garcia, 2019; Villalpando, 2004).

In this study, participants explained how imposter syndrome showed up in the lived experiences of Latinx college students. The research questions that guided this project include:

1) How, when, and where do Latinx college students experience imposter syndrome at a predominantly White university, if they do?
2) How do Latinx students cope with imposter syndrome during college?

The data collected for this study highlighted elements participants attributed their success and impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic related to imposter syndrome. Themes also emphasized how Latinx students cope specifically (through connections and places) with imposter syndrome as they were in the process of earning a bachelor's degree. The research study has a call to action for supporting Latinx college students in addressing their educational needs. It is important to go beyond the individuals cognitive processing of being an imposter and imperative to focus on institutional responsibility to be inclusive. In addition, I share future research options and recommendations for a student-center approach to increase access and retention of Latinx college students in higher education and understand the educational possibilities for students often pushed to the margins.

Summary of the Study

This study indicates it is the institution's responsibility to understand why Latinx college students experience imposter syndrome and to address policies and practices upheld at universities which are perpetuating students' experiences of feelings of self-doubt; furthermore, mental health and student support services in place to manage these experiences need particular consideration. Notably, there is a mismatch between the Latinx students' experiences and needs and the institution's goals and purpose. Universities operate from an individualistic perspective, where students are expected to be strong, self-reliant, assertive, and independent (Thelin, 2004);

however, universities should understand the consequences when operating from this mindset. Previous research highlights the collectivistic nature and perspective of Latinx college students at 4-year universities (Conrad & Gasman; 2015; Nuñez, 2011). This research study presents a call for institutions (i.e., 4-year, PWI) to recognize the differences (i.e., instances where exclusions is happening) and adapt to the critical needs of Latinx undergraduates. If higher education institutions around the country adapted to the challenges of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the university can adapt to the critical needs of Latinx college students. The current global pandemic did not minimize structural harm, nor did it completely "fix" the experience of imposter syndrome for students who did experience it. Rather, the global pandemic and virtual learning environment was only a temporary fix.

The motivation of this dissertation was rooted in a deep commitment to telling the stories of a group of Latinx college students with an asset-based approach that valued students' backgrounds and identities. I explored significant aspects that supported and hindered students' ability to persist in higher education related to imposter syndrome. Through a critical race narrative inquiry, I centered the stories of 14 self-identified Latinx college students who spoke about their experiences with imposter syndrome. I used LatCrit theory to examine how multiple forms of oppression can intersect in the lived experiences of Latinx college students and how these intersections manifested in their daily lives. Using LatCrit theory as the theory to guide my research questions, data collection, and data analysis, Latinx students were seen as holders and creators of knowledge. They were seen as people who can transform schools into places where the experiences of all individuals are acknowledged, taught, and cherished (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Roberts & Cantu, 2012). Additionally, participants moved away from the idea that the imposter syndrome was less of their fault to an institutional responsibility.

The number of Latinx college students enrolled and graduating from higher education institutions has increased over the years. However, attention to the differences in enrollment and graduation numbers continues to show a disparity between Latinx students and their White counterparts. For instance, less than 20% of men of color (e.g., Latino males) possessed a 4-year college degree in 2012 (Pérez Huber et al., 2015), and these particular numbers have not changed over the last few years (NCES, 2020). Latinx folks have a history of being stripped of their education. The concept of "subtractive schooling" (Valenzuela, 1999) is an example of how institutions eradicate the language, culture, and academic well-being with the intention to assimilate the marginalized group. Universities are not fully aware of the needs of Latinx college students. They have not developed an appropriate institutional response to the retention and graduation of Latinx students (e.g., men of color; Clark et al., 2013), which can cause harm to the students it is intended to serve.

The current research study supported literature that calls for the examination of imposter syndrome for racial and ethnic minorities (i.e., Latinx college students) (Cokley et al., 2013). Participants shared how they experienced imposter syndrome and attributed their success to a range of circumstances. Some participants attributed their success to professors who made it "easier" to get good grades, the global health pandemic, or the student who was fulfilling some "quota." The second theme, using a video camera during the COVID-19 global pandemic, minimized the feelings of imposter syndrome. The third theme was how Latinx college students coped with imposter syndrome, specifically while a student at a PWI and shared the importance of specific connections and relationships, as well as places and spaces that helped students coped. The fourth theme highlighted specific student recommendations to the university. Participants emphasized the importance of change at the institution's core—it must be

reconstructed to move in a positive direction that supports Latinx students in the search for adequate support to help them address their mental health.

Previous literature characterized imposter syndrome as feeling like fraud, contributing success to luck or by chance; it is the ability to deny competence and discount praise (Clance 1985; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Imposter syndrome is this fear of failure or fear of and guilt of success. Imposter syndrome was first identified in high achieving women in academia (Clance & Imes, 1978), and the concept is identified in multiple quantitative studies (Bernard et al., 2002; Chae et al., 1995; Ferrari & Thompson, 2006; Hertel, 2002; Ross et al., 2001). The majority of the literature attends to quantitative methods (Rose et al., 2001; Ferrari & Thompson, 2006; Bernard, Dollinger & Ramaniah, 2002), and thus the use of a qualitative approach helps fill the gap in the literature.

However, my use of critical theory was important in the study because it allowed me to contemplate not just how participants are processing their own experiences of feeling like an imposter but also how the institution might either provide a positive or negative context for students to feel included. That is, my work centered on institutional and structural responsibility, so students were not being blamed for the way they do or do not feel like they are able to do well. While there may be multiple factors that influence the day-to-day lives of college students such as microaggressions (Solórzano, 1988; Nadel et al., 2014) or familial expectations (Michel & Durdella, 2019), this research study provided a middle ground between focusing on individual cognitions and institutional responsibility.

Through this qualitative approach, the research study helped make sense of reality to describe and explain the concept of imposter syndrome. Results of this study enhanced the narrative of racial and ethnic identities; specifically, individuals who self-identified as Latinx

college students, focusing on institutional responsibility for exclusion. The three-part in-depth semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share information they felt comfortable sharing with me. The three-part interview is an intentional aspect that allows the college student's voices to be heard, analyzed, and theorized (Atkinson, 1998). Using Seidimen's (2013) three-part interview approach allows for the interview to truly understand and build rapport and trust with the participants. Additionally, the use of critical life story design enables participants to share with the researcher what is most important (and impactful) to them.

The first interview focused on the life history of the participant. This first interview also served to established rapport with each of the participants. The second interview detailed the experience—participants focused on how they did or did not encounter imposter syndrome. The COVID-19 global pandemic had disrupted the educational experiences and pathways and increased the use of technology. Although an increase in social and ethical concerns about technology arose because of the pandemic (Nuñez et al., 2020), the Latinx undergraduate participants expressed a sense of relief to remove themselves from their classrooms. Participants shared the pandemic, where learning was all online, created an opportunity for them to have a more balanced experience in the university.

Participants described having to negotiate and navigate multiple identities, experiences, and challenges related to their race when classes were in person. Latinx college students expressed a more even playing field from being in this virtual space. They pointed out higher education structures and institutions created spaces harmful to them—instead of creating spaces of inclusion and diversity—there is a tension these students face every day when attending this PWI.

Prior literature attends to how people in different majors such as psychology (Ferrari & Thompson, 2006); engineering (Felder, 1988); and medical, dental, nursing, and pharmacy students (Henning et al., 1998) experienced imposter syndrome and reported lower levels of self-esteem. However, some research suggests students reported less satisfaction, felt worse, and reported lower levels of self-esteem (Cozzarelli & Major, 1990; Rose et al., 2001). In the case of Latinx college students, participants did not specifically say they had lower levels of self-esteem. They reflected on the circumstance or experience that happened to them in their day-to-day lives, where some participants noted imposter syndrome prevented or "stopped" them from moving forward. Others shared they would do a lot of self-talk to recognize their accomplishments and everything they have done. For the participants who experienced imposter syndrome, naming they experience imposter syndrome was not enough to fix the problem. For participants who did not experience imposter syndrome, participants express how they did not experience the imposter syndrome and identified ways the institution was less supportive towards their educational goals.

The third interview reflected on the meaning of their experiences, particularly how Latinx college students coped with imposter syndrome and how it could be different. A multitude of research attends to first-generation college students (Change et al., 2020; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012) and Latinx college students (Espino, 2020; Gloria et al., 2009, 2016; Sanchez et al., 2018) coping with the experience in higher education. Specifically, first-generation college students may experience a range of challenges (i.e., academic, financial, academic, and personal) that are intensified because of the "cultural mismatch" between independent university culture and Latinx student collectivistic culture (Castillo et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2020; Gloria & Castellanos, 2007).

In early work on imposter syndrome on high achieving women in academia (Clance & Imes, 1978), the participant's experienced: generalized anxiety, lack of self-confidence, insecurity, depression, and frustration related to the inability to meet self-imposed standards of achievement (Clance & Imes, 1978; Clance & O'Toole, 1988). Since then, scholars have expanded to find observations in other groups like gender (Bussotti, 1990; Langford, 1990; Topping, 1983); college students (Bussotti, 1990; Langford, 1990); medical students (Henning et al., 1998); marking managers (Fried-Buchalter, 1992); physician assistants (Mattie et al., 2008; Prata & Gietzen, 2007); and now, self-identified Latinx college students.

Consequences for high achievers are often overlooked due to exemplary functioning; imposter phenomenon is internalized and isolating. Therefore, it is essential to hear from the people experiencing it. Coakley et al. (2013) addressed imposter phenomenon among racial and ethnic students; findings highlighted this experience affects students' overall well-being and collegial experiences. For instance, the stress in response to perceived insensitivity of peers or faculty and questions of belonging on a college campus contributed to imposter phenomenon among Black students (McClain et al., 2016). Adding to the existing literature, most Latinx college students in this research study expressed how Lakeshore University operated under a structure that perpetuates White, cis-gender males who "hold" and "protect" those in power. For example, in a cross-sectional qualitative study, Gwayi-Chore et al. (2021) explained the higher education institution "operates within a structural hierarchy that perpetuates white, male, and/or class privilege that protects those in power" (p. 1). My work builds on examining the ways institutions provide contexts of inclusion or exclusion that can result in students feeling like they are imposters when they are successful and high achieving individuals (e.g., Gates Millennium Scholar, awarded merit-based scholarships).

Important attention to how Latinx college students coped with imposter syndrome results draws attention to how participants internalize or understand imposter syndrome. Experts addressed a range of coping mechanisms (Castellanos & Gloria, 2008; Espino, 2020; Gloria et al., 2005, 2009, 2016; Sanchez et al., 2018; Sanchez-Connally, 2015); the current study adds to the existing body of literature by addressing these particular mechanisms from the perspective of the students themselves. Importantly, students' recommendations were centered on institutional responses and responsibilities for building inclusive environments for students to thrive. The literature draws attention to the importance of mental health services for Latinx college students (Cokley et al., 2013; DeFreitas et al., 2019; Sampe et al., 2019). Students in this study suggested that institution could be more supportive in offering free mental health services for them. Previous literature addressed the different means by which college students deal with negative and hostile campus climates, like racial-ethnic microaggressions (Sanchez et al., 2018). In this study, students often identified institutional responsibility for the imposter syndrome. That is, because Latinx students often experienced racial hostility on campus, they identified the exclusive campus environment as part of the reason for the imposter syndrome they experienced.

Reflections on LatCrit as a Theoretical Framework

Something about the system creates imposter syndrome for Latinx college students: LatCrit theory helps us examine and understand higher education provides certain privileges and opportunities to particular groups. Using LatCrit theory in this research project went beyond a Black and White paradigm related to race (Espinoza & Harris, 1997). This use of LatCrit theory for this project helped extend Latinx communities' concerns by attending to the institutional problems. Structures created to support and enhance the Latinx college student's college

experience are the ones inhibiting these feelings of imposter syndrome according to these participants.

The use of LatCrit as my theoretical framework was important to these findings because it emphasized an institutional and structural analysis of students' experiences. LatCrit attended to the strengths of Latinx college students through reflections of their narratives (Nuñez, 2011). LatCrit emphasized experiential knowledge by centering the stories of Latinx undergraduate students (Delgado Bernal, 2005). Using LatCrit challenged the dominant ideologies by using counter-stories as a new framework and new way of understanding the realities of Latinx students. Lastly, in using LatCrit, the data attended to the commitment to social justice and sought critical change for Communities of Color. Latinx college students need both institutional support and interventions that address the needs of students while also building their confidence and self-efficacy. These important institutional elements can assist in helping Latinx college students feel they belong at the institution. Ultimately, my work allows for space between the focus on students' need to develop confidence and self-efficacy and work centered on institutional responsibility.

Furthermore, storytelling or counter-storytelling was an essential concept to the use of LatCrit theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Storytelling allowed Students of Color to describe and share their stories and experiences through a knowledge-driven platform (Rodriguez, 2010). For Latinx college students, it is a form of liberation that can be very powerful for students oppressed and historically marginalized at their institutions. For the participants, the counter-storytelling is similar, but with the addition of LatCrit into the story (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), this process can decolonize and reclaim values and traditions. Some of the participants indeed did *not* experience the imposter syndrome (Chris and Juanita) and they provided a counter story

to the imposter syndrome. LatCrit has an institutional focus situating a greater understanding of college student experiences. LatCrit helps explains instead of emphasizing how students should simply "feel better," institutions should critically think and work harder to include them and make it, so students do not feel like "imposters."

Contribution and Implications

Findings from this study contribute to the body of literature in three different ways. The first is this research study showed imposter syndrome is both an individual processing concern and a response to institutional inclusion and exclusion efforts. Individuals highlighted internal self-doubt and self-talk that should be addressed in a comfortable and open space for Latinx undergraduates. Where that is through educational and wellness workshops, with academic personnel, or through counseling, imposter syndrome affects the overall well-being of students and needs attention. Thus, if the campus is to be an inclusive and "diverse" space for all students, it is the institution's responsibility to make sure all efforts are equal.

The second contribution is how the COVID-19 global pandemic influenced and impacted collegial experiences of Latinx undergraduates. Findings from the pandemic suggest in racially hostile environments on-campus, the ability to remove or "turn off" their cameras are powerful for students. This indicates the need for a deeper dive into more inclusive practices, the global pandemic was only a temporary fix to the structural harm of the university. This is not to suggest online learning is the solution to imposter syndrome; instead, it highlights how this "short break" from on-campus learning points out differences in how we think about inclusion and integration of student life.

Lastly, the interviews highlighted clear recommendations from students to the institution. Through the students' lived experiences and through the range of experiences had, participants

offered suggestions to reduce imposter syndrome. While the budget and finances of the institution are very complex, direct recommendations students shared to redistribute funding to mental health services and student's services for Latinx students are a practical shift academic leaders and university personnel can consider.

Underrepresented college students continue to attend college and attain bachelor's degrees. The importance of how institutions (i.e., universities) integrate Latinx college students needs particular attention, especially if the institution's mission is to education and serve all its students. Scholars have drawn on a solid concept of how Latinx college students belong on campus (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci et al., 1991; Osterman, 2000). College and universities are complex and challenging experiences for many college students, and scholars share belonging is an essential and fundamental element for students to function (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci et al., 1991; Osterman, 2000). Previous literature connects belonging to students' motivation (Goodenow, 1993; Strayhorn, 2008, 2012), collective self-esteem and mattering (Dueñas & Gloria, 2017), first-generation college students and mattering (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020), and lower graduation rates for Latinx college students than their White student counterparts (Strayhorn, 2008).

Sense of belonging attends to the strong, social connection, and integration into society or group (i.e., a university), and imposter phenomenon amplifies how we understand change. Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggested the need to belong is characterized by a need for regular contact and the perception the interpersonal relationship has effective stability, an adequate concern, and is ongoing. For instance, a sense of belonging played an important role for Latinx students to feel they mattered as college students (Dueñas & Gloria, 2017). Failure to have belongingness' needs met may lead to feelings of social isolation, alienation, and loneliness.

Thus, a sense of belonging can be a precursor to social connectedness. Sense of belonging draws attention to peers and network connections, which imposter phenomenon attends to the personal and intellectual abilities that may be more vulnerable parts of individuals. There are also institutional barriers that hinder their college success and their ability to persist in higher education.

Implications for Theory

Theory can be understood more accurately as a body of analytical tools for examining different theoretical concepts in higher education. Critical theories try to tell another story. The story of institutional or structural racism, the racism that happens behind our backs in the daily life of Latinx college students. I utilized LatCrit theory, a critical race theory (CRT) branch, to explain Latinx student's experience in college. Focusing on the overarching themes of LatCrit, this study sheds specific light on the Latinx student experiencing imposter phenomenon. Latinx students are seen as holders and creators of knowledge who can transform schools into places where the experiences of all individuals are acknowledged, taught, and cherished (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Roberts & Cantu, 2012). The current research studies expanded concepts of LatCrit theory. The use of theory helps examine how race and other intersecting identities function on-premise assumptions that race is a social construct.

Furthermore, this study adds to the existing empirical literature by providing the first analysis that utilized LatCrit to theorize imposter syndrome for a group of students attending a PWI. In sharing their voices across the different majors, I used a theory that problematizes the institutional dynamics that occur at a 4-year institution to empower Students of Color experiences. Using critical frameworks, like LatCrit theory, allowed Students of Color (e.g., Latinx college students) to center their voices during negative experiences and environments.

The details of the experiences challenged the status quo in telling the counter-story for a group of Latinx undergraduates. LatCrit theory originated in response to perceived limitations of the CRT. While these expand on thinking beyond the Black and White paradigm, the continued use of LatCrit theory in the future continues to be encouraged.

Implications for Research

Notably, a large body of research has drawn attention to quantitative methods. While measuring imposter syndrome, generating knowledge, and creating understanding about the social world is critical, this qualitative research addresses the "how" and "why" that enables a deeper understanding of the experiences. This research project addressed the stories of imposter syndrome for 14 self-identified Latinx college students. In addition, the three-part interview added to the literature review by examining the concrete experience and the meaning the experience had for Latinx college students. Additional scope of studies can attend to the experiences of Latinx transfer students, specifically.

Pérez Huber et al. (2015) highlighted the number of students from high school to bachelor's degree and beyond are low, and particularly low for Latino males (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). To close the Latinx transfer gap under the Obama Administration (2009–2017), a series of policy briefs began to attend to these efforts (Nuñez & Elizondo, 2013). With the current Biden Administration (2021-continuing), Dr. Jill Biden, the current first lady, has shown a strong interest in supporting transfer students. Furthermore, a larger body of literature addressed the transfer students experience (Crisp & Núñez, 2011; Gándara et al., 2012; Solórzano et al., 2005), and attention to how imposter syndrome may show up for transfer students can highlight how community colleges attend to the need of Latinx students. Additionally, future research can attend to the relationship between individual students' cognitive processing and how institutional

responsibility is needed. Experts from educational psychology or a similar field could attend to the "in-between" of how students cognitively process this experience and how the institution takes on the responsibility.

Implications for Practice

Next, I share implications and offer recommendations to help universities think about some of the different policies and practices. I provide tangible solutions that are practical and timely for a PWI and the increasing the number of Latinx college students attending these particular institutions. The institution should create and adopt a curriculum that amplifies Latinx college students' lives. Latinx college student success needs to be a priority, which comes through a re-evaluation of budget expenditures. This would demonstrate how students feel at institutions like Lakeshore University about academic rigor and ensure a sense of ownership among students. Responsibility and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion are and should be the highest priority.

Another practical change is putting a percentage of Latinx professionals (i.e., academic personnel) working in the institution into leadership and faculty positions. Representation matters because it brings different perspectives, identities, and experiences informed by those perspectives. Representation allows for Communities of Color (i.e., Latinx college students) to feel validated and allows for the expression of opinion comfortably. Diversifying the faculty, staff, and student populations are real and practical practices to promote inclusivity and wellness for Latinx college students. Representation is essential for inclusivity and perception. For Latinx undergraduate students to see staff and faculty look like them makes a person feel included in the university, reinforcing positive views of themselves, and what they can achieve in society.

Students had to actively work at trying to find a staff person to connect to, so the increase in representation would make this process easier.

The university needs to expand and grow the Latinx-focused academic curriculum. Having Latinx-focused classes allows students to share their identities, struggles, and successes in a comfortable setting at the university. It is essential to recognize the COVID-19 global pandemic did not cause Latinx college students to feel less of an imposter student; but rather, the pandemic created the circumstance for this to happen. In other words, the pandemic made the academic environment less competitive for some students while others explained it as a potential excuse. The inequality in digital access is not a new problem in higher education, but the COVID-19 global pandemic spotlighted just how much some students struggled to stay connected to their colleges and universities because they lacked adequate technology, sufficient internet access, or safe, quiet places to study. Virtual learning became an equilibrium among Latinx college students; therefore, the university should consider keeping some classes online for the well-being of these students. In-person learning is critical and beneficial for the development of undergraduate students. However, this can also be a bad experience and harmful practice that minimizes the student's worth. Therefore, institutions need a deeper understanding of why these particular experiences were better while living through a global health crisis.

Future Research and Conclusion

Feenstra et al. (2020) highlighted future research should consider the role of the environment in eliciting their imposter feelings. To an extent, this project addressed the gap by showing how the environment (i.e., academic classrooms) exacerbated these experiences among Latinx college students. While the current study also adds to the growing body of literature on individual occasions (Dickerson, 2019; Sandberg, 2013; Zanchetta et al., 2020), literature

addressed the unique and solo perspective for Latinx group students attending a PWI. Future research should consider the narratives of other historically marginalized racial and ethnic groups by centering their narratives. The added value of qualitative research to these institutions provides an accurate and true reality to the students they serve. Scholars should attend to more counter-stories and, in particular, the people who did not experience imposter syndrome during college.

Furthermore, additional research should attend different institutions like liberal arts colleges, community colleges, universities, and Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs). The purpose of this study shared the stories of Latinx college students. Most of the student identities in this study were Mexican or Mexican American. While there is a representation for the university as a whole, it is crucial to know Latinx college students are not viewed as a monolithic group, and attention to other groups (i.e., Central or South American) is needed. Attending to and addressing the experience of Central American, bi-racial, Black or Indigenous folks, or multi-ethnic identities can extend this body of literature.

Higher education academic settings can trigger imposter phenomenon (Knights & Clarke, 2014), especially between transitions from interdependent to independent culture. We need race-based solutions to explain equitable educational opportunities. If we cannot tell the truth about why we are in the shape we are in, we cannot effectively advocate for policies and practices we need to eliminate the causes of institution's injustice. In the words of Gwayi-Chore et al. (2011), "being a Person of Color in this type of institution is just exhausting" (p. 7). These institutions need to provide Latinx college students with the support and foundation that will allow them to be successful as young adults. Changing the higher education system requires a dramatic change in policies and practices, active and intentional participation for systemic change from all

university personnel and board of regents, and constant assessments of Latinx college students' needs.

The study of Latinx college students at a PWI was and is essential to me. Supporting BIPOC, particularly Latina, Latino, Latinx college students at 4-year universities, has brought me so much excitement and happiness over the years. This research study makes a small contribution to recognizing how institutions have a responsibility to their students. If institutions and structures (i.e., policies, procedures) were built with Latina, Latino, and Latinx college students in mind, some of the research agendas and conversations might be different. If institutional agents begin to examine institutional structures (e.g., policies, social structures, practices, programs, and racism) and examine the role structures play on how students engage their campus, than there is hope that structures can be inclusive in the future.

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Appendix A: Consent Form

Research Participant Information & Consent Form | Interviews with Latina/o/x College Students

Title of Study: Latina/o/x College Students in Higher Education

Principal Investigator: Rachelle Winkle-Wagner, Ph.D.
Co-Researcher: Mary Dueñas, M.S.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCHER:

You are invited to participate in a research study about how Latina/o/x individuals navigate higher education. You have been asked to participate because you meet the study criteria for self-identifying as Latina/o/x, 18-years or older, enrolled in full-time status, and completed at least one semester at the University. The purpose of this study is to learn about your experiences attending a predominantly White institution. This study will include a sample of students attending a university and will be asked to participate in an in-person (or virtual due to COVID-19 in compliance with State and Federal safety regulations) three-part interview that will last approximately 30-40 minutes each (total of 90-120 minutes). Please know that due to the current pandemic, the safety of all individuals involved is a high priority.

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to share your story during three interviews that will last approximately 30-40 minutes each (total of 90-120 minutes). You will be asked a set of research questions followed by completing a questionnaire at the end. You will also be asked if the interview can be audio recorded for the research purpose only. Please know that study team members will only have access to the audio recordings. There may be an opportunity for the researcher to follow-up in the following weeks if questions arise. As part of this authentic process, the researcher may ask you to review your transcript and/or quotes for correct interpretation.

ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?

There are risks for breach of confidentiality and some questions may make participants uncomfortable. As the participant, you may freely skip any questions that you do not wish to answer, feel free to let the interview know. Additionally, your participation is voluntary, and if you want to stop at any time during the interview, please the researcher know.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?

There are no direct benefits to you; however, participating in the study may benefit other Latinx and higher education institutions. Findings from this research will be used for the interviewer's dissertation and may be published and shared with others to improve the college experience for Latina/o/x college students.

HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

Data collected from this project will not be retained beyond the end of the project for use in any future research. All of the information collected throughout the study will be confidential. To maintain confidentiality, you will be asked to share a pseudonym to be used in place of your name. If you would not like to have one, one will be shared with you. The background demographic will be stored in a secure place where only the study team members will have access to these files, and they will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

While there will probably be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used (only your pseudonym). If you participate in this study, we would like to quote you directly without using your name. If we do use a quote from you, it will be tied to your pseudonym.

WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today, you should contact the Principal Investigator Rachelle Winkle-Wagner (email: winklewagner@wisc.edu). You may also call the student researcher, Mary Dueñas at (email: duenas@wisc.edu). If you are not satisfied with the research team's response, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education Research and Social & Behavioral Science IRB Office at (608) 263-2320. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you begin participation and change your mind, you may end your participation without penalty. *By typing your name below, you are giving your electronic signature and indicating that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research, and voluntarily consent to participate*. You can receive a copy of this form for your records.

Full Name: _____

Today's Date: _____

Researcher Use ONLY:

Pseudonym: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Time of Interview: _____

Length of Interview: _____

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview I: Today, we are going to focus on the academic, social, and cultural experiences at the University.

1. Tell me about where your story at the University started.
    a. How did you end up here?
    b. What earlier experiences in education might have helped you get here? Or perhaps are there times when it felt not so helpful?
2. If I were from another place far away and you were to describe what your academic experience had been here, what might you say? Or tell me about your favorite class? Least favorite class?
    a. Who was the professor/instructor? Race, gender, etc.
    b. Who were the peers?
    c. Where did you sit? Who did you sit with if you had regular people you sat with?
    d. How did you engage/speak in class if you did?
    e. What were the assignments like?
3. What is a typical day on campus like for you? Can you take me through from the moment you wake up until the end of the day? (social and cultural experiences)
    a. Who did you see? Who did you want to connect with (or avoid)?
    b. Who did you try to find for support?
    c. What artifacts/art/people/physical markers did you notice as you walked across campus?
    d. Is there a space you felt like you belonged?
    e. Was there a space you felt like you needed to leave?
    f. Where did you hang out, if you did land somewhere?

Interview II: Today we are going to talk about belonging on campus – times when you felt really confident and times when maybe you did not feel that confident.

1. Can you talk about a time on campus when you felt like you really belonged there?
    a. Who were you with? Was it class/social/etc.?
    b. Where were you?
    c. How did it feel?
    d. Did it change the way you acted/thought/spoke? If so, how?
2. Can you talk about a time where perhaps you felt like you really did NOT belong on campus?
    a. Who were you with? Was it class/social/etc.?
    b. Where were you?
    c. How did it feel? How was this for you?
    d. Did it change the way you acted/thought/spoke? If so, how?

3. Have you heard of imposter syndrome? If so, tell me what you know about it? If not, here is how I might describe it [provide definition].
    a. Tell me about a time where you experience imposter syndrome at the University?
    b. Could you tell me about a time when you experienced imposter syndrome?
    c. Tell me about how you noticed these were experiences with imposter syndrome
    d. Tell me about the most challenging part of experiencing imposter syndrome?
    e. How do these imposter syndromes shape your college experience?
4. Are there things/issues/events happening in society that might influence how you feel about campus and how you feel like engaging here?

Interview III: Today we are going to talk about, coping strategies that helped you during your time at this university.

1. Can you talk about ways in which you've coped with this experience? If not, how would you potentially cope with these experiences?
    a. Who would you seek help from? Who would you talk with?
    b. Where would you seek help?
    c. How often would you seek help?
    d. Would you try to avoid these experiences? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. What resources would you need in place to have successful coping strategies?
    a. If money/budget was not a concern, what types of resources would you pay for?
    b. How often or frequent would you use these resources?
3. What would you need from the University to prevent this from happening?
    a. In a perfect world, what might the university do for you to prevent these (potential) feelings from happening?
    b. Who are those individuals that would change happen?
        i. What types/kind of changes would you like to see?
        ii. What would it take for these changes to happen?
4. How does COVID-19 global pandemic, or not, change these potential feelings/experiences?
    a. In what ways has the pandemic shaped your academic experience?
    b. Have these feelings of imposter syndrome change? If so, how?
5. Might there be other thoughts or comments you like to share before we conclude our time together?

Appendix C: Demographic Sheet

Thank you for filling out this information sheet and willingness to share about your background and educational experiences. Please know this information will only be available to the research team and will be used for research purposes only.

Name: _____

Pseudonym: _____

University Attending: _____

Age: _____ **Gender**: _____

Major: _____ **Certificate(s):** _____

Race: _____

Ethnicity (e.g., Mexican, Mexican American, Guatemalan, Salvadorian, Columbian, etc.)?
_____

Cumulative/Overall GPA: _____

Class Standing:
_____ 1st Year _____ Sophomore _____ Junior _____ Senior _____ 5th (+) Year Senior
_____ Other: _____

Where do you live?
_____ On-Campus _____ Off-Campus with friends _____ Off-Campus with family
_____ Other: _____

Have you completed one (1) semester at the University? _____ Yes _____ No

Are you a full-time student at the University? _____ Yes _____ No

Are you a transfer student? _____ Yes _____ No
If yes, from what college/university: _____

Are you a First-Generation College Student? (i.e., parent(s) did not attend U. S. college/university) _____ Yes _____ No
If not, who is the first in your family to go to college? _____

Do you have siblings? _____ Yes _____ No
If yes, are they currently enrolled in college? _____

If yes, have they completed a college degree? _____
How do you pay college (e.g., Financial Aid, Pell Grants, Loans, Family, work, etc.)?

_____

Are you a member of any student organizations on campus? _____ Yes _____ No
If yes, please name all of the student organizations with which you are affiliated:

_____

I, Mary Dueñas, will never use your real name for any reporting from the study. If I do decide to quote you, what name would you like to be called? _____ Yes _____ No

---

Researcher Use ONLY:

Pseudonym: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Time of Interview: _____

Length of Interview: _____

Appendix D: Resource Sheet

On-Campus Resource Information Sheet

Dean of Students Office

[Contact information]

Cultural Center

[Contact information]

Title IX Coordinator

[Contact information]

Counseling Center

[Contact information]

Appendix E: Recruitment Email

To: Latina/o/x College Student Participant
From: Mary Dueñas
Subject Line: Latina/o/x Undergraduate - Interview Invitation

Dear Latina/o/x College Student,

My name is Mary Dueñas, and I am a doctoral candidate at Lakeshore University. I am reaching out to ask for your help. I am interested in hearing about your college experience as a Latina/o/x college student and wonder if you are open to being interviewed for about a total of 90-120 minutes?

Participation is voluntary, and all information will be kept confidential. If you are a self-identified Latina/o/x undergraduate, full-time enrolled at Lakeshore University (for at least one semester), at least 18-years old, and would like to participate in this study, *please reply to this email*. I appreciate your time and participation in this important project. If you have any questions about the study, please contact me via email. I look forward to hearing from you soon. I hope you have a great day!

Warmly,
Mary Dueñas