Supporting Latina First-Generation College Students’ Transitions from High School to College

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Overview

• Challenges and barriers experienced by Latina FGCS

• Psychosocial needs of Latina FGCS

• Latina First-Generation College Graduates Psychosocial Support Model

• Identifying support services offered on campuses for Latina FGCS
A Call to Action on College Opportunity

Economic disparities are growing in the United States, and improving college opportunity may help increase economic mobility and growth for individuals from low-income communities (Office of the Press Secretary, 2014)
What are your experiences with first-generation college students?
First-Generation College Students

- Universities are still struggling with the retention and graduation rates of first-generation college students (FGCS) (Slaughter, 2009)

- In 2011, **4.5 million FGCS** were enrolled in higher education, approximately **24 percent** of the undergraduate population (The Pell Institute, 2011)

- Only **11 percent** of FGCS earn a bachelor’s degree in six years compared to **55 percent** of non-FGCS (The Pell Institute, 2011)
What challenges do first-generation college students experience?
Challenges Faced by FGCS

• Lack of cultural capital (Lundberg et al., 2007; Sanez et al., 2007)

• Struggle financially (Prospero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007)

• Low levels of college and bicultural self-efficacy (David, Okazi, & Saw, 2009; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007)
Issues of marginality become more salient

FGCS are left to navigate these multiple identities along with participating academically in college

(Orbe, 2008; Orbe, 2004)
Latin/o College Students

• In 2010, the Pew Hispanic Center reported that Latina/os enrolled in college reached an “all-time high” (Fry, 2011, p. 3)

  • Latina/o college enrollment increased by 15%
  
  • Half of all Latina/o college students are FGCS
  
  • However, only 13% of Latina/os completed a bachelors’ degree (Fry, 2011)
Latina/o FGCS

- Cultural congruency (Cerezo & Chang, 2013; Edman & Brazil, 2009)

- Negative stereotypes, prejudices, marginalization, and microaggressions (Gonzales, Blanton, & Williams, 2002; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009)

- Strengths of Latina/o college students
  - Coping strategies (Cavazos et al., 2010b)
  - Resiliency (Cavazos et al., 2010a)
The Need for Support

• Understanding the experiences of Latina FGCS can help those working with this community and aid in increasing their retention and graduation rates.

• High school and college counselors can play vital roles in helping to increase the college enrollment and persistence of underrepresented groups in higher education (Bishop, 2010; McDonough, 2005; McKillip et al., 2012).
The Roles of Counselors in Supporting Latina FGCS

School Counselors
• Perceptions of school counselors (Eckenrod-Green & Culbreth, 2008; Vela-Grude et al., 2009)
• School counseling experiences of Latina/o students (Dockery & McKelvey, 2013; Smith & Zhang, 2010)
• Navigating college choice (Martinez, 2013)

College Counselors
• Improving academic outcomes (Wlazelek & Coutler, 1999)
• College retention (Bishop, 2010; Van Brunt, 2008)
• Psychological well-being (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000)
• Mental health needs (Del Pilar, 2008)
• Providing counseling services for Latina students (Capello, 1994)
Purpose of the Study

To explore the experiences of Latina first-generation graduates who received financial and cultural capital support as undergraduates.

• The current literature on FGCS tends to focus on their first-year experiences (e.g., Padgett, Johnson, & Pascarella. 2012; Shields, 2012; Ward et al., 2012).

• The data gathered in the study was used to develop a theory grounded in the participants’ experiences (Charmaz, 2006).

• The theory will provide a foundation to assist high school and college counselors in addressing the needs of Latina FGCS.
Research Questions

What are the psychosocial experiences of Latina first-generation graduates who received financial and cultural capital support?

a. What role did high school and college counselors (if any) have on the experiences of Latina first-generation graduates?

b. What role (if any) did receiving the financial and cultural capital support play in the experiences of Latina first-generation graduates?

c. What were the experiences of Latina first-generation graduates who encountered validation and invalidation?
Description of Participating Program and Participants

• National scholarship program that provides cultural capital and financial support to low-income college students
  • 2,998 students and alumni
  • 98% are FGCS and 30% identify as Latina

• 25 participants
  • Self-identified as Latina first-generation graduates
  • Completed bachelor’s degree in the last five years
  • Participated in the national scholarship program
Participants’ Demographic Information

• Ages ranged from 21 – 27 ($M = 23$)

• Language(s) spoken at home
  • Spanish: 14 participants
  • English and Spanish: 9 participants
  • English: 1 participant
  • English, Spanish, and Arabic: 1 participant

• Generational Status in the United States
  • 1st generation: 3 participants
  • 2nd generation: 20 participants
  • 4th generation: 2 participants

• College Settings
  • PWI: 20 participants
  • HSI: 5 participants
Latina First-Generation College Graduates
Psychosocial Support Model

High School \rightarrow College \rightarrow Post-Bachelor's Degree

\begin{itemize}
  \item Cultural Influences
    \begin{itemize}
      \item Family
    \end{itemize}
  \item Relational Support
    \begin{itemize}
      \item Teachers, School Counselors, Peers, Mentors, Advisors, and Professors
    \end{itemize}
  \item Campus Involvement
    \begin{itemize}
      \item College Preparatory Programs, Multicultural Organizations, Latina Sororities, Research, and Volunteering
    \end{itemize}
  \item Adverse Experiences
    \begin{itemize}
      \item Institutional, Microaggressions, and Socio-Economic Status
    \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}
## Invalidation – Adverse Experiences

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<tr>
<th>High School</th>
<th>College</th>
<th>Post-Bachelor’s Degree</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Institutional</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Tracked into regular courses instead of honors/AP courses</td>
<td>• Lacked ethnic diversity</td>
<td>• University not understanding the specific career concerns of Latina FGCS</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Lacked ethnic diversity in honors/AP courses</td>
<td>• University not understanding the specific needs of Latina FGCS</td>
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<tr>
<td>• HS counselors with high caseloads</td>
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**Microaggressions**
- Judgments from professors and/or advisors about the participants’ academic abilities
- Judgments from peers about the participants’ presence on campus and/or academic abilities

**Socio-Economic Status (SES)**
- Awareness of coming from a low-income family
- Worked multiple jobs to support self and/or family
But then you start thinking like, why did they pick me? Did they need like a nice brown girl to put on the cover or like a legit brown girl to put on their pamphlet?” – Lydia
“I honestly was disappointed. I thought I had made the wrong choice. I was told by somebody in my class that I was only accepted into [university name] as a token acceptance. So there was a lot of the feeling that I didn’t belong here and that I was only here because [university name] was trying to fulfill some quota, like for women of color, that they had in their school. So that was something hard I had to deal with. I felt like I didn’t deserve to be here. If I were to go to tutoring I would let other people, especially white folks, cut in front of me and get tutoring before I would, because they deserved to be here and I didn’t. So it was a really hard battle with myself to acknowledge that I did belong here and that it wasn’t just that I was here because I was a token choice.” – Metzli
## Validation – Campus Involvement

<table>
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<tr>
<td><strong>College Preparatory Programs</strong></td>
<td><strong>Multicultural Organizations and Latina Sororities</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provided participants information about college</td>
<td>• Connected with peers who had similar backgrounds and understood their experiences on campus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Helped the participants in developing a sense of belonging on campus</td>
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**Research**

• Connected the participants to academic opportunities
• Recognized for scholarly work and bringing a valuable perspective

**Volunteering in the Community**

• Helped to stay connected to their cultural community
College Campus Involvement – Latina Sororities

“I think, if it wasn’t because of my sorority, college would have been not necessarily difficult academically but just emotionally trying just being away from my family. And my sorority was a Chicana/Latina based sorority. So they understood the struggle of being the first person to attend college and what that meant, and just kind of having that support system from Latinas going through the same thing really helped… I think that not having that close network I probably would have transferred out of [university name], just to come home to my state.” – Alexis
“I went to [ivy league university] for a research project, and I was sent to Ethiopia. And then for three months, and they paid for it. And I was like, what, I get paid to travel and they paid for this. And I went to, for example, for a few months, I went to Ecuador with another professor from [university name] and [medical school] to do research, medical work. And so it was a like, sophomore, junior year with the state of empowerment I can say that when I got into these programs it’s like, you know, I have a 2.9 GPA and I got to [ivy league university]. I can, I can do it. It was like a sense of hope.” – Abigail
# Validation – Relational Support

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<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers and School Counselors</strong></td>
<td><strong>Peer Mentors</strong></td>
<td><strong>Advisors and Professors</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Invested in the academic success of the participants</td>
<td>• Peer mentors from similar backgrounds and became role models on campus</td>
<td>• Provide career information to participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Connected participants to college opportunities</td>
<td>• Provided direct information about navigating college</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Advisors and Professors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Connected participants to opportunities on campus</td>
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High School Relational Support – School Counselor

“I will also say because of the high school I went to, because it was small, I was able to have a lot of one-on-one with my counselors. They were the ones that helped me apply to the scholarship, apply for FAFSA. They would take me to some interviews to get my scholarship. I got really lucky, because we were so small and nobody really wanted it, so I got a lot of attention.” – Isabel
College Relational Support – Advisor

“I had a pretty influential advisor that constantly put opportunities in front of me, such as applying for summer internships and even graduate school. So I was fortunate to have him in my life guiding me throughout undergrad. I think he definitely push on just doing grad school and making sure I had good undergrad experience, getting experience outside of the classroom, doing internships, and things like that over the summer.” – Elena
# Validation – Cultural Influences

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Family provided positive messages about college</td>
<td>• Family provided a source of support and comfort when participants faced challenges in college</td>
<td>• Participants provided college information to siblings and relatives</td>
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“My family was always there. I want to say financially and emotionally. So I think emotionally was very important to be there, to just help me to get through [college]. I remember at beginning of the semester, I would have goals and talk to them [family], talk to my siblings, and to my friends. And at the end of the semester, I would like, recap on those goals . . . And I remember it was also very emotional for all us . . . I think just little things like that were just, kind of kept me going, it was a team. We were a team; we’re a team.” – Valentina
Post Bachelor’s Degree Cultural Influences – Family

“He [brother] started pharmacy school this year, this fall. So certainly, I mean, he's told me, I’m his role model... I helped him during his senior year to apply for colleges, apply for scholarships, and tell him about the whole college experience. I share my experience... My younger brother is currently a junior in high school. I know for sure next year we'll be helping him with scholarships and applying for college. And this year, I’m pushing him to make sure he's doing the right steps during his junior year, like taking the ACT. So I’m just really preparing him and remembering back when I was in high school. Remembering, okay, my junior year I did this, my senior year I did this. It's just really being able to help him out and show him he has support from me.” – Yajaira
College Counseling Experiences

- Described academic advisors instead of college counselors

- 6 participants accessed college counseling and all prematurely terminated services
  - Difficulty connecting with their college counselors

- Felt their counselor did not build a relationship with them

- Acquired large amounts of fees
College Counseling

“I think it was because most of the students that go there haven’t been through half of the stuff that I have [been through]. And it was new to them [college counselors], seeing this kind of struggle. This was kind of heartache in a way, because not a lot of the students there have gone through the same experiences . . . I know where I grew up. I was below poverty level throughout high school . . . They just tried to treat me like everybody else there. They really shouldn’t, because they weren’t taking into consideration what I had been through and all that stuff.” – Jennifer
The Impact of Receiving the Financial and Cultural Capital Support

**Cultural Capital Support**
- Described an inaccessibility of the webinars

**Financial Support**
- Allowed participants to attend four-year universities instead of beginning at community colleges
- Alleviated some of the financial worries about paying their tuition
- Supported other college opportunities
  - 5 participants study aboard (England, Spain, Brazil, Chile, & Ecuador)
“I never really had a plan to go to a university, of course coming from a low-income family, my plan was to finish high school and get a job. When I really got involved in school I was like I have an opportunity to go to a community college. Something a little bit cheaper but still get a career. So when I found out I could get a scholarship and all the opportunities to help us, I started applying [to four-year universities]. So when I got the opportunities to registered at [university name] that’s when I decided to continue my education.” – Michelle
How can you support Latina FGCS on your campus?
Implications for School and College Counselors

• Identify Latina FGCS and tailor college information to these students

• Have a presence on campus

• Develop and support initiatives directed towards the psychosocial needs of Latina FGCS

• Advocate for initiatives that support diversity on their campuses

• Help Latina FGCS develop coping strategies that revolve around the support factors outlined in the model
Implications for Counselor Educators

• Help counseling students with recognizing the importance of building relationships with Latina FGCS

• Relational Cultural Theory (RCT) provides a counseling framework that places a focus on relational support

• The goals of RCT connect with many of the cultural values of Latina FGCS

• Relational resilience can encourage empowerment, confidence, and well-being (Jordan, Walker, & Hartling, 2004)
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References


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Fry, R. (2011). *Hispanic college enrollment spike, narrowing gaps with other groups*. Washington, D.C. Pew Hispanic Center


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