

¡ÉCHALE GANAS!: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-GENERATION
LATINX COLLEGIATE STUDENT-ATHLETES

A Dissertation

by

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BS, Wilson College, 2010
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This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

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ABSTRACT

Latinxs continue to be underrepresented in the ranks of college graduates despite increasing in the proportion of U.S. population and undergraduate student bodies. Approximately 6% of Hispanics participate in intercollegiate athletics, which is one type of extracurricular activity among many others that are available to students. Overall, research links involvement in such campus services and activities to increased rates of student persistence to degree attainment. However, a large gap in literature currently exists concerning studies that explore the experiences of Latinx student-athletes. As such, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of first-generation Hispanic student-athletes who participate in NCAA Division I non-revenue sports at HSIs as well as PWIs in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to their persistence to degree attainment.

Grounded in Latinx Critical and Rendón's validation theories, this qualitative study found athletic participation to be beneficial for first-generation Latinx student-athletes' persistence to degree attainment. Specifically, Latinx student-athletes who participated in this study built a support network from their teammates, athletic advisors, and coaches. However, given the time demands of their sport, most of the student-athletes did not engage outside of the athletic community on their respective campus. Moreover, first-generation Latinxs relied on their cultural and familial capital to persist to degree attainment. Additionally, while the student-athletes perceived all campuses as welcoming, the setting of the university, HSI or PWI, made a difference in the strategies Latinxs utilized to carve out a sense of belonging and to find their Hispanic niche on campus.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my Mom. Thank you for all your love, guidance, and sacrifices you made for me. I wouldn't be here in the USA and earning this EdD without all you have done for me in the past. Thank you for providing me the opportunity to become an exchange student – look where it took me! I am sorry I have to live so far away from home but thank you for still supporting me in this journey. Moc děkuji! I also want to dedicate this to my Grandma who raised me right and Michal for taking care of my Mom.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The cultural, racial, and ethnic composition of the U.S. population has been shifting in recent decades (Smith, 2016). Nevertheless, those with power predominately remain the same since the colonial times, with the population still divided into countless social layers and hierarchies (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Johnson, 2018). A complex interlocking social system of power, privilege, and oppression in the form of racism, sexism, or heterosexism prevails and shapes one's life opportunities based on her/his interrelated social identities, making some feel invisible (Johnson, 2018; Núñez, 2014; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). U.S. society is organized around power and privilege in all aspects of people's lives, with institutions of higher learning and big-time college sports programs further perpetuating inequities as well (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013; Gaston Gayles, Comeaux, Ofoegbu, & Grummert, 2018; Marina & Holmes, 2009; Núñez, 2014; Johnson, 2018).

Visibility and invisibility are at the center of the system of privilege and oppression (Johnson, 2018). While Latinxs¹ (used interchangeably with Hispanics) are the largest ethnic minority group in the U.S. today (Flores, 2017), they remain vastly underrepresented in intercollegiate athletics as participants (Lapchick, 2019; Ruffins, 2010). Specifically, only 6% of all male and 6% of all female student-athletes (used interchangeably with athletes) participating in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sports are Latinxs (Lapchick, 2019). Yet, Hispanics comprise 17% of all students enrolled in postsecondary institutions at the undergraduate level (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016c). The interplay of race, class, and gender is at play in U.S. sports (Coakley, 2015) and thus likely contributes to the small number of Latinxs participating in athletics despite sports playing an important part in

¹ The term Latinx is intentionally used in lieu of Latina/o to avoid gender binaries and promote inclusiveness of the intersecting identities of Latin Americans.

shaping Hispanic communities throughout history (Alamillo, 2013; Williams, 2002). The current invisibility of Hispanic student-athletes also concerns literature. As of today, only a limited number of studies have been published to examine their unique experiences.

Exploring experiences of Latinxs who participate in intercollegiate athletics is warranted given the mix of social identities they encompass. Specifically, scholars continue to highlight the atypical experiences of student-athletes in comparison to their non-athlete peers, referring to them as a *non-traditional* or *special* group of students with a distinct culture and problems (Beyer & Hannah, 2000; Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Gayles, 2009; Hyatt, 2003). Some scholars specifically criticize the culture of intercollegiate athletics, describing it as incompatible with the culture of academia (Feezell, 2015; Harrison & Bukstein, 2014; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012). Specifically, the presumed lack of athletes' focus on academic activities at the expense of athletic participation is highly criticized. As a result, athletes face many forms of prejudice and stereotyping on their campuses from faculty and staff as well as other students (Comeaux, 2011; Parsons, 2013; Simons, Bosworth, Fujita, & Jensen, 2007; Wininger & White, 2015). Hispanic student-athletes confront all of these challenges as well, in addition to experiencing cultural incongruence between their own distinct cultural identity and the dominant White ideology present at most college and university campuses today (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; Núñez, 2014). The struggles of Hispanic athletes are likely to be amplified further among those students whose parents did not graduate from college, also known as first-generation students (Pike & Kuh, 2005).

In addition, Latinx student-athletes may also feel oppressed through the unequal distribution of resources among revenue and non-revenue sports at their institutions (Osborne,

2014). As Johnson (2018) wrote, capitalism is at the root of the system of privilege and oppression. In general, the most privileged sports are men's basketball and football, also known as revenue sports; women's basketball tends to also fall under this definition despite its lower popularity with fans and media in comparison to men's revenue sports. According to Osborne (2014), men's football and basketball players comprise less than 7% of all student-athletes. Yet, 78% of all spending on men's sports is allocated to these two sports (Osborne, 2014). However, the majority of Hispanics participate in non-revenue sports (NCAA, 2017b), which generally attract lower media attention, fan support, and athletic funding. Hispanics tend to gravitate to these sports, especially to baseball and soccer, because it is part of their cultural heritage (Alamillo, 2013). Historically, sports have played an important part in lives of Latinxs, enabling the early immigrants to maintain their ethnic identity in the mainstream American culture. In the early 1900s, sports served not only as a recreational activity but also provided an escape from racial discrimination for Latinxs (Alamillo, 2013). Sports continue to represent an important part of Latinx culture through today, with the majority of Hispanic student-athletes gravitating to non-revenue sports (Lapchick, 2019; NCAA, 2017b).

Subsequently, student-athletes from low-profile non-revenue sports are likely to have different experiences from their peers in high-profile revenue sports (Paule & Gilson, 2010). The majority of literature on college student-athletes, however, focuses predominately on revenue sports (Paule & Gilson, 2010). In other words, Hispanic student-athletes from non-revenue sports are presumably the most understudied segment of today's college athletic population. Yet, they face an abundance of challenges stemming from their interconnected social identities as Latinxs and student-athletes that should be further explored.

Despite all of the presumed challenges, athletic participation can be beneficial for Latinx student-athletes as well. Osborne (2014) tagged athletic participation as a *privilege* given the many tangible as well as intangible benefits it provides. In particular, the NCAA reports on the success of student-athletes in the classroom every year. Specifically, since 1993 the NCAA athletes graduate at higher rates than non-athletes (NCAA, 2018f). The year of 2016 was the only time when the federal graduation rate (FGR) was the same (66%) for athletes and non-athletes (NCAA, 2018f). However, athletes still outperformed non-athletes in all subgroups based on gender and ethnicity (except for White males) that year (NCAA, 2018f). In 2018, the FGR for student-athletes reached 68% in comparison to 66% for all students (NCAA, 2018f).

Additionally, athletic participation is believed to generate various positive outcomes such as life satisfaction, happiness, high self-esteem, self-confidence, and sense of achievement (Leppel, 2006). Interestingly, Rendón (1994) theorized similar outcomes to be a result of validation of students by various on- and off-campus agents. Further, Reynolds and Weagley (2003) found participation in high school sports to be positively correlated with persistence to degree completion. Leppel's (2006) study found a similar relationship at the college level, with one's involvement in intercollegiate athletics increasing her/his probability of a return to the same institution the following academic year.

In other words, college athletics and specifically the personnel it encompasses, such as coaches, athletic academic advisors, and other athletic staff, may be a source of validation for Latinx student-athletes that converts into persistence. Scholars attribute the impact of validation as important for success in college for non-traditional groups such as first-generation students, adult learners, and racial/ethnic minorities (Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón, 1994). Validation, both academic and/or interpersonal, results in feelings of acceptance, belonging on campus, and

competence for students who at first had doubts about their ability to succeed in college (Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón, 1994). Subsequently, validation leads to a sense of self-efficacy and belonging that converts into persistence to degree attainment. Hispanic student-athletes from non-revenue sports, and especially those who are first-generation students, experience cultural incongruence in a multitude of ways. For example, many student-athletes dedicate significant portions of their time to their sport, not being able to partake in other activities that non-athletes get to experience as part of their collegiate journey. Therefore, Hispanic student-athletes constitute a group in high need of affirmation, support, and validation of having the ability to be successful academically.

Overall, research shows that providing support to students in various forms of student engagement services and activities increases the rates of retention and persistence of *all* students, not just student-athletes (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2010). As Calderon (2015) noted, Latinx students, specifically, need access to support systems that are capable of remedying the challenges they encounter in their college journey. Further, according to Gloria and Castellanos (2012), first-generation Hispanic students may benefit from a culturally sensitive, emotional, social, and informational support. Validating agents provide such support through their mentorship of students (Rendón, 1994).

Historically, college graduation rates of Latinxs continue to be low in comparison to other ethnic/racial groups (NCES, 2016a). Frequently, studies analyze the discrepancies in college persistence of Latinxs with a deficit thinking (Sarcedo, 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005). Many researchers use the same deficit lens when examining student-athletes (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to bring visibility to the group that other scholars have overlooked. Specifically, this qualitative study seeks to explore

the experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports as it relates to their involvement in student engagement activities and services contributing to their persistence to degree attainment. Further, this study explores what role, if any, culture plays in the validation of Latinx student-athletes.

Background of the Study

To fully understand the educational experiences of Latinx student-athletes, it is important to first position the discussion within the broader experiences of Latinxs and higher education. Overall, college enrollment of Hispanic students has been on the rise in recent years (Krogstad & Fry, 2014). Specifically, from 1996 to 2012, the college enrollment of Hispanics ages 18 to 24 years increased by 240% in comparison to an increase of 72% of Blacks and 12% of Whites (Krogstad & Fry, 2014). Nearly 48% of all Latinx undergraduate students today are the first in the families to enroll in postsecondary education (NCES, 2015). Despite the increased college matriculation, Latinxs still significantly lag behind in the attainment of bachelor's degrees compared to other racial and ethnic groups. Specifically, only 17.2% of Hispanics compared to 38.1% of individuals who were White held at least a bachelor's degree as of 2017 (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities [HACU], 2018a).

Approximately 74% of all the NCAA members are predominately White institutions (PWIs), with at least 50% of all the undergraduates being White (NCAA, 2017a, 2019). Furthermore, depending on the level of resources committed to intercollegiate athletics by institutions, the NCAA divides its members into three divisions: I, II, and III (Sweitzer, 2009). Only Division I and II institutions are permitted to award athletic scholarships while Division III student-athletes can merely receive some form of academic grants or need-based scholarships (NCAA, n.d.-e). Among the NCAA Division I members, the most competitive level of

intercollegiate athletics, 71% of institutions are PWIs, defined by the NCAA (2017a) as having 50% or more of White undergraduate student population. Overall, 7% of the members fit the distinction of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) while 8% are Hispanic-Serving institutions (HSIs) (NCAA, 2017a).

HSIs, defined as colleges and universities with a minimum of 25% equivalent full-time enrollment of Hispanic students (HACU, n.d.), play an important part in increasing access to postsecondary education for Latinx students. As of 2017, HSIs accounted for only 14.9% of all U.S. non-profit colleges and universities but enrolled 63% (two-thirds) of all Hispanic undergraduate students (HACU, 2018a). Interestingly, Latinx student-athletes are evenly distributed among all types of institutions as the analysis of NCAA Division I data reveals that only 13.5% of all NCAA Division I Latinx athletes attend HSIs (HACU, 2018b; NCAA, 2018b, 2018c). This finding is not surprising given that approximately half of all HSIs are two-year institutions; 22% of all HSIs are classified as four-year public institutions and 28% as four-year private colleges and universities (HACU, 2017). Further, most HSIs were founded as PWIs, gaining the HSI designation only as a result of shifts in the demographics of the population and subsequent changes in student enrollments (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Laden, 2004). Given that Latinxs continue to experience low college completion rates, scholars specifically criticize HSIs for failing to carry out missions to properly serve their Latinx students (Calderon, 2015; Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Fosnacht & Nailos, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

In order to make the United States truly equitable, the Hispanic population needs to become more visible in the ranks of college graduates, not just enrollees. However, the research on college persistence of Latinxs continues to be limited and mostly neglects the important

aspect of cultural identity (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016). Additionally, the available research on this topic frequently utilizes a deficit lens (Yosso, 2005) and/or applies Tinto's (1975, 1978) theory of college student persistence (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016). However, many scholars have objected to applying Tinto's theoretical model to students who are Latinxs because culture plays a significant role in their lives (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; Stieha, 2010). Tinto's theory, however, states that students are able to persist in college only if they assimilate to the dominant ideology of the college and thus abandon their own cultural identity (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016). Hence, given that Hispanics continue to increase in the proportion of the population, it is important to further explore the experiences of successful Latinx students via a different framework in order to enable practitioners to grasp a better understanding of the unique needs of this particular student population in regard to persistence.

While Hispanic student-athletes participate in college sports in limited numbers, it is particularly important to examine their experiences, especially since they graduate at higher rates in comparison to their non-athlete Latinx peers (NCAA, 2018f). However, a paucity of research currently exists on this particular student-athlete population. Thus, it is unknown if, and if so in what ways, participation in intercollegiate athletics shapes the level of persistence to degree attainment of Latinxs. In particular, it is important to explore whether the personnel surrounding athletics, such as coaches and administrators, or the athletic activities themselves, provide some level of validation and/or support for Latinx student-athletes that converts into persistence to degree attainment. Further, as Kuh et al. (2010) asserted, what students do in terms of student engagement outside of class while in college is more indicative of college persistence than their level of academic skills. Therefore, Latinx student-athletes may rely on validation and support elsewhere on campus or even at home as familial connections can be a source of strength,

especially in Latinx culture (Arana, Castañeda-Sound, Blanchard, & Aguilar, 2011).

Consequently, it is important to explore what specific student engagement services and activities as well as who, in particular, Hispanic student-athletes from non-revenue sports view as key for their persistence in college.

The culture of college athletics is unique and involves its own set of challenges but also benefits (Osborne, 2014). Specifically, Leppel (2006) pointed out the possible positive influence of athletic participation on student-athlete retention. However, Leppel's (2006) study only focused on the differences between women and men and not on different ethnicities or races. Therefore, scholars need to explore Hispanic student-athlete population in more detail while being cognizant of Latinxs distinct cultural identities that are incongruent with the White dominant culture in U.S. higher education. Since the majority of Hispanics are enrolled at HSIs, which research identifies as a setting reducing the salience of Latinx identity (Arana et al., 2011; Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Núñez, 2014), it is also important to further explore whether the experiences of Hispanic student-athletes are different at these colleges and universities in comparison to PWIs.

Further, since privilege is intersectional (Johnson, 2018), all athletes' backgrounds, unique identities, cultural heritages, and life experiences need to be taken into account as they largely influence their social reality. Exploration of the first-generation student status is of particular relevance today given that Warburton, Bugarin, and Nuñez (2001) found lower persistence rates among these students in comparison to second-generation college students. Further, as Pike and Kuh (2005) found, first-generation students engage less in student engagement activities in comparison to their peers whose parent(s) graduated college. Close to half of currently enrolled Hispanics are first-generation students (NCES, 2015); 16% of NCAA

athletes self-identify as first in their families to enroll in college (NCAA, 2016). Therefore, the first-generation identity needs to be further explored, especially since Arana et al. (2011) found Latinxs' first-generation status to be a source of motivation and not a hindrance as suggested in other studies.

Participation in non-revenue sports is an interesting factor as well, given that student-athletes in these sports are likely treated differently from their peers from revenue sports due to the unequal distribution of resources (Osborne, 2014). Stereotypes of *dumb jocks* (Simons et al., 2007; Wininger & White, 2015) and dominance of hegemonic masculinity (Johnson, 2018) also provide additional challenges for some athletes, with the latter specifically marginalizing participants in women's sports (Wolf-Wendel, Bajaj, & Spriggs, 2008). Further, the results of Gayles and Hu's (2009) study suggest that effectiveness of different types of student engagement services likely varies for student-athletes from revenue and non-revenue sports. However, it is unclear what these differences are due to limited research solely focusing on the experiences of athletes participating in non-revenue sports.

One's culture has the capacity to nurture and empower (Yosso, 2005). Hispanic student-athletes are members of athletic as well as Hispanic communities. However, both of these cultures are currently incongruent with the culture prevalent on college campuses today. Rendón's (1994) seminal work suggests that non-traditional students need validation from others. Since athletic participation fosters community (Bendick, 2017; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2008) and is linked to high life-satisfaction and sense of achievement (Leppel, 2006), it may be possible that Hispanic student-athletes gain some validation through their involvement in college sports. However, they may also rely on other student engagement services and activities and its personnel and/or gain strength and motivation through connections with their families at home.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study seeks to explore the experiences of first-generation Hispanic student-athletes who participate in NCAA Division I non-revenue sports at HSIs as well as PWIs from a multilayered perspective. The primary research question of this study is as follows:

1. What are the experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes who participate in non-revenue sports in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to persistence to degree attainment?

Ancillary research questions are as follows:

1. What role, if any, do culture and familial connections play in the validation of Latinx student-athletes?
2. How do the sources of validation differ among student-athletes attending HSIs and PWIs?

Conceptual Framework

To better understand the experiences of first-generation Hispanic student-athletes from non-revenue sports as it relates to student engagement services and activities contributing to persistence to degree attainment, this study will utilize a conceptual framework of Latinx critical race theory (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) and validation theory (Rendón, 1994).

Latinx Critical Race Theory

Latinx critical race theory (LatCrit) was introduced as an extension of the Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Similar to CRT, LatCrit acknowledges the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression and its impact on experiences of people of color. However, LatCrit specifically places Latinx ethnicity at the forefront (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Torres, 2011). LatCrit emphasizes that college

degree attainment is not just a matter of individual motivation and effort (Núñez, 2014). Rather, Latinxs' educational outcomes are heavily influenced by institutional racism and negative stereotypes. While similar to CRT, LatCrit expands the existing theory by focusing on additional issues that are central to Latinxs, including but not limited to immigration, language, and phenotype (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Based on LatCrit, due to their multiple identities, first-generation Latinx student-athletes may rely on a different type of support in form of services and student engagement activities in comparison to their peers of different races/ethnicities. Specifically, the cultural incongruity of college campus environments with Latinx and athletic cultures (Feezell, 2015; Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; Harrison & Bukstein, 2014; Núñez, 2014) is likely to result in dissimilar experiences and needs. The motivation for involvement in athletics may vary as well for Latinxs in comparison to student-athletes of other backgrounds. Further, Hispanic student-athletes may utilize a different type of support networks in order to persist in college. Since Hispanics graduate at lower rates in comparison to other races/ethnicities, it is important to learn about the unique needs of this population in regard to student engagement activities and services contributing to persistence to degree attainment and whether these experiences vary between HSIs and PWIs. Likely, as some studies suggest (e.g., Arana et al., 2011), the setting of HSIs may result to completely different experiences for Latinxs due to more opportunities to interact with peers of the same ethnic or cultural backgrounds.

Validation Theory

This study also adopted Rendón's (1994) validation theory. According to Rendón (1994), students who come from cultural backgrounds incongruent with the dominant college culture need to be validated in order to persist to degree attainment in college. Specifically, academic

and/or interpersonal validation from campus constituents allows students from marginalized groups to gain confidence in their abilities and subsequently increase their sense of belonging to the institution, which then results in heightened persistence towards degree attainment (Rendón, 1994). Overall, validation is not a one-time interaction but rather an ongoing process with validating agents affirming students throughout their collegiate career (Linares & Muñoz, 2011).

While Rendón (1994) attributed validation to individuals, both on- as well as off-campus, this study will adapt the usage of the validation theory to activities as well. Specifically, athletic participation has been previously linked to an increased self-confidence and sense of achievement (Leppel, 2006). Therefore, other on-campus activities and services may be a source of similar positive outcomes for students, with Latinxs possibly crediting them as a source of empowerment and validation while attending colleges with a dominant White ideology.

Overall, given that first-generation Latinx student-athletes likely experience various forms of institutional oppression, including racism, sexism, and classism, the need for validation may be heightened for this particular student population in order to achieve higher rates of persistence to degree attainment. Hence, it is important to explore what specific student engagement activities and services junior and senior first-generation Hispanic student-athletes from non-revenue sports view as integral for their persistence to degree attainment.

Methodological Framework

As previously described, first-generation Latinx student-athletes are a heterogeneous group consisting of individuals possessing multiple identities, which subsequently result in a variety of experiences. Therefore, in order to explore student-athletes' persistence experiences from a multilayered perspective, this study utilized a qualitative research methodology and the case study method of data collection. Further, a purposive sampling of participants and site

selections were implemented in order to explore the studied phenomenon and answer the research questions.

Research Design

Research designs must fit the problem and research questions of the study along with, and importantly, the paradigmatic view of the researcher (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Merriam, 2007). Traditionally, scholars distinguish between two major methods of inquiry, which are qualitative and quantitative (Glesne, 2016; Jones & Abes, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study utilized a qualitative research methodology with the premise that multiple truths exist and are socially constructed by people via their lived experiences (Merriam, 2007). The qualitative method of inquiry is particularly well-suited for critical research studies in the field of education. LatCrit, which is the conceptual framework guiding this study, fits within the critical research paradigm.

Furthermore, this study employed a double-bounded case study method. The *case* refers to a phenomenon defined by clear boundaries such as social groups, geographic locations, or certain time periods (Merriam, 2007; Yin, 2014). The end product of case studies is a *thick description* of the case that unearths new knowledge pertinent to the phenomenon under study (Geertz, 1983). In this study, two cases, which represent the setting of HSI and PWI, were compared. Specifically, this study focused on exploring in what ways, if any, the experiences of first-generation Latinx athletes from non-revenue sports vary between HSIs and PWIs.

Participant and Site Selections

In order to select the participants for this study, a purposeful sampling was utilized. Purposeful sampling entails finding information-rich cases with knowledge relevant to the research problem (Patton, 2014). Researchers of most qualitative studies select this method as it

allows them to explore a certain phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2007; Patton, 2014). Specifically, researchers must determine the selection criteria that will identify the participants who are key informants with an extended experiential background in relation to the studied phenomenon (Merriam, 2007; Patton, 2014; Thorne, 2016). Subsequently, the selected participants for this study had to meet the following criteria: (1) self-identified ethnicity of Latinx, (2) first-generation student status, (3) participation in an NCAA Division I non-revenue sport, and (4) junior or senior academic standing classification. These criteria were selected as a means to better understand the experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes who participate in non-revenue sports in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to persistence to degree attainment. Overall, 16 participants took part in the study.

Furthermore, the study was conducted at four institutions, from which two were HSIs and two PWIs. All of the institutions were purposefully selected for this study because they were classified by the Carnegie Foundation as doctorate-granting universities. In order for an institution to be classified under this category, it must annually award at least 20 doctoral degrees (Griffin & Hurtado, 2011). This study purposefully focused only on doctorate-granting universities because the majority of the NCAA Division I members, or 63% respectively, are accounted under this classification (NCAA, 2017a). The names of the selected research sites were kept confidential throughout the study. Chapter 3 provides further details about the selected research sites.

Data Collection

Qualitative researchers rely on multiple data-gathering sources in order to produce a rich thick description of the phenomenon from all available perspectives but also to validate and cross-check the findings (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993); Glesne, 2016; Patton,

2014; Thorne, 2016). The process of data collection via multiple sources is known as *triangulation* (Glesne, 2016). The triangulation of the data of this study was accomplished via semi-structured interviews, demographic sheets, and online guided questions. Moreover, this study employed a double-bounded case study method, in which two cases were compared. Specifically, this study focused on exploring in what ways, if any, the experiences of first-generation Latinx athletes from non-revenue sports vary between HSIs and PWIs.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a complex process that consists of organizing all of the collected information from the various sources and transforming them into coherent findings via inductive reasoning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2014). This study utilized a content analysis, in which data were carefully unitized, coded, and categorized in order for the researcher to discover patterns, identify themes, and develop categories.

Trustworthiness

The worth of a study depends on the level of its trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The primary data instrument in qualitative studies is the researcher who naturally possesses biases and value-laden perspectives. Therefore, in order to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, several techniques recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were implemented throughout the stages of data collection and data analysis. Specifically, multiple sources of data were collected in order to assure *credibility* of findings. Further, this study relied on a thick description, purposeful sampling, and reflexive journaling in order to establish the *applicability* of the findings to similar settings and participants. An audit trail was also created in order to ensure *consistency* of the findings. Last, the researcher engaged in peer debriefing and member checking in order to attain *neutrality* in regard to the studied phenomenon.

Significance of the Study

This study is of significance for three reasons. First, given the increasing proportion of Latinxs in U.S. population, it is important for academic and student affairs practitioners to learn about the experiences of persisting students of this ethnic background. Access to higher education is just a first step in accomplishing educational equity. Hispanic students need to increase in the ranks of graduates, not just enrollees, in order to gain professional opportunity, affluence, and higher quality of life. Further, while Hispanics constitute a small number of NCAA student-athletes today, the number is likely to increase in the future. Therefore, it is important to study the experiences of this student population in order for other higher education institutions with similar settings, both HSIs and PWIs, to provide essential student engagement services and activities increasing this group's persistence towards degree attainment.

Second, a large gap in literature currently exists concerning the experiences of Latinx student-athletes. Overall, researchers continue to overlook the experiences of student-athletes who participate in non-revenue sports although they constitute the majority of all NCAA athletes today (Paule & Gilson, 2010). Therefore, higher education practitioners need to explore the unique experiences of this particular subset of Latinx and student-athlete population. As Johnson (2018) wrote, visibility and invisibility are at the center of the system of privilege and oppression. Hence, it is time to bring visibility to first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports who have been overlooked by scholars for years.

Third, first-generation Latinx student-athletes are a heterogeneous group consisting of individuals possessing multiple identities, which subsequently result in a variety of experiences. Therefore, a qualitative methodology seems most fitting to gain a deep understanding of their

unique experiences in regard to utilization of student engagement services and activities and sources of validation leading to persistence towards degree attainment.

Glossary of Terms

The following terms are used uniformly throughout the study to ensure consistency and clarity:

- *Culture*: Shared behaviors and values among a specific group of people (Yosso, 2005).
- *First-generation student*: A student whose parents have not graduated with a 4-year degree, a definition adapted from NCAA (2016) but revised to expand the potential participant pool.
- *Generational status within the U.S.*: Place of birth of parents referring to first, second, and third- or higher generations (U.S. Census of Bureau, 2016a). As of today, 65.6% of Latinxs were born in the U.S. while 34.4% of them are immigrants (Flores, 2017). Those who immigrated are also recognized as first-generation Latinxs. Second-generation constitute of those born in the U.S. to their immigrant parents while Latinxs from the third-generation and higher are those born in the U.S. to their U.S.-born parents (Pew Research Center, 2004).
- *Hispanic*: This term is used interchangeably with Latinx throughout the study in order to avoid its repetitive usage. The term *Hispanic* itself is a racial/ethnic category created by the U.S. government and does not describe any particular country of origin or cultural heritage (Alcoff, 2005).
- *Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI)*: A colleges or university with a minimum of 25% equivalent full-time enrollment of Hispanic students (HACU, n.d.).
- *Latinx*: Any person of Latin American descent who lives in the United States (Garcia-Navarro, 2015). Latinxs are a diverse group of individuals with different cultural backgrounds and social identities (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016), including nation of origin, immigrant status, class, gender, language, and religion (Núñez, 2014).

- *Non-revenue sports*: The sports include men's baseball and wrestling and women's beach volleyball, bowling, field hockey, rowing, and softball. Further, the NCAA sponsors both men's and women's athletic programs in cross country, golf, gymnastics, ice hockey, lacrosse, skiing, soccer, swimming and diving, tennis, indoor track and field, outdoor track and field, volleyball, and water polo. Fencing and rifle programs are usually classified as co-ed non-revenue sports (NCAA, 2018a). Further, the synonymous term for non-revenue sports is *Olympic sports* (NCAA, 2004).
- *Persistence*: A student's goal to attain a degree (Reason, 2009).
- *Predominantly White Institution (PWI)*: All colleges and universities except for those with a federal designation of minority-serving institutions (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).
- *Revenue sports*: Men's basketball, men's football, and women's basketball (Paule & Gilson, 2010).
- *Student-athlete*: A full-time undergraduate student who is also a participant in one of the 24 sports currently governed by the NCAA (NCAA, n.d.-e).
- *Student engagement*: Participation in out-of-class activities that lead to student learning and development (Kuh et al., 2010).
- *Validation*: An act of proactive and intentional affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class constituents, such as faculty, staff, coaches, parents, and peers (Linares & Muñoz, 2011).

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter consists of three major parts, which are (1) the conceptual framework, (2) historical background of intercollegiate athletics and the role of U.S. higher education, and (3) the literature review. First, it is necessary to introduce the conceptual framework undergirding this study about the experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to persistence to degree attainment. Next, in order to understand the current experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports, it is also necessary to examine the historical origins and evolution of intercollegiate athletics within the context of U.S. higher education. Last, a detailed literature review follows, which further expands on some of the briefly discussed concepts in the introductory conceptual framework and historical background sections.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in LatCrit (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) and Rendón's (1994) validation theory. LatCrit underscores the larger societal context that influences daily experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes on college campuses today. Validation theory serves as a framework for a solution how to empower these students and assist them in overcoming the institutional barriers that make attaining a college degree a gnarly endeavor for students from traditionally marginalized groups.

Latinx Critical Race Theory

First-generation Latinx student-athletes have to navigate an educational system where the cultural capital of White people is deemed more worthy than their own (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; Yosso, 2005). Subsequently, many past studies faulted Latinx culture, or rather the cultural mismatch with the White culture, for the low graduation rates of this student population.

Fortunately, a large group of scholars utilizing some form of critical theory began publishing work that confronts the deficit view on people from traditionally marginalized groups. Initially, the majority of such studies utilized CRT to empower African American students (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). With the immense and ongoing shifts in the racial/ethnic make-up of U.S. population, however, CRT was no longer sufficient. Subsequently, LatCrit was introduced in 1995 (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). This theory added on CRT by placing Latinx ethnicity at the forefront and expanding the Black-White narrative (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

The Black-White narrative is currently present in the majority of studies on collegiate student-athlete population. Since this study intends to focus on experiences of a largely unexplored subset of the student-athlete population from the ranks of Latinxs, utilization of LatCrit is warranted. Currently, the narratives of Latinx student-athletes are vastly missing from the scholarly literature. However, the few published studies expose the existence of systems of power, privilege, and oppression that influence the lives of first-generation Latinx student-athletes. Specifically, Jamieson (2005) describes the challenging path of entry to collegiate sports for first-generation Latina softball players. While these Latinas were able to succeed both academically and athletically, they had to jump over various hurdles to become collegiate student-athletes, in some instances only gaining entry with the aid of an institutional insider, such as their older sibling or peer (Jamieson, 2005). In other words, despite the immense effort expended, the structural systems of power and privilege embedded within collegiate athletics influenced the experiences of the Latina athletes. LatCrit challenges the idea of meritocracy and colorblindness (Núñez, 2014).

Furthermore, LatCrit acknowledges that racism exists and intersects with other forms of oppression, such as sexism and classism (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Torres, 2011). The notion of the intersectionality of various forms of oppression and its impact on Latinxs is particularly evident in Jamieson's (2003) study. Specifically, Latina softball players described their resistance to being classified under specific socially constructed categories and instead positioned themselves in relation to others and within the situational contexts (Jamieson, 2003). Overall, different gender role expectations shape experiences of Latinx students, with research suggesting that they result in different patterns of involvement in extracurricular activities (Baker, 2007). Therefore, as asserted by Johnson (2018), privilege is indeed intersectional and all backgrounds of Latinx athletes need to be considered in order to understand their unique life experiences.

The goal of LatCrit scholars is to empower and emancipate Latinxs (Yosso et al., 2001). Given the lack of available research, the goal of this study is to explore the experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes who participate in non-revenue sports in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to persistence to degree attainment. In particular, by utilizing LatCrit, this study will explore the interplay of various forms of cultural capital as pathways to degree attainment. Latinx student-athletes have access to their cultural capital stemming from their ethnic *and* athletic identities. As Latinxs, they rely on their families, communities, and cultural heritage (Arana et al., 2011; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Lara & Lara, 2012; Yosso, 2005). Specifically, first-generation Latinxs may aspire to graduate to make their families proud and typically give back to their communities (Jamieson, 2005; Kouyoumdjian, Guzmán, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2017; Storlie, Mostade, & Duenyas, 2016). Moreover, as athletes, they have access to extra on-campus resources and programming (Huml, Hancock, &

Bergman, 2014). Further, athletic participation allows them to grow holistically as well as to foster the development of various life skills, such as time-management and ability to multi-task (Comeaux, Snyder, Speer, & Taustine, 2014; NCAA, 2015a; Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007).

However, some of the benefits of athletic participation and/or overall experiences may vary from what the literature depicts given that majority of studies focus on revenue sports. As noted by Paule and Gilson (2010), the experiences of revenue and non-revenue athletes differ. Further, some scholars point out to the dissimilar distribution of resources between the two branches of sports, with non-revenue sports operating from the margins (Hogshead-Makar, 2011; Osborne, 2014). In other words, first-generation Latinx athletes from non-revenue sports may face several forms of oppression due to their interrelated identities. LatCrit recognizes this intersectionality of racism with other forms of subordination (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Lastly, this study compared the experiences of Latinx athletes attending HSIs and PWIs. As noted by scholars, a large number of first-generation Hispanic students enroll in HSIs today (Núñez & Bowers, 2011; Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). Despite research reporting that Latinxs experience a higher sense of belonging at some HSIs in comparison to PWIs (Arana et al., 2011), the findings of many studies provide mixed conclusions concerning HSIs’ effectiveness to serve and empower this student population (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Nelson Laird, Bridges, Morelon-Quainoo, Williams, & Salinas Holmes, 2007). Based on LatCrit, HSIs should embrace a supportive campus environment and offer services and activities enabling the success of Latinxs. As noted by Quaye, Tambascia, and Talesh (2009), institutions need to create initiative and programming that place students’ racial/ethnic identities at the forefront of the learning process in order to meet their unique needs. Yet, scholars still assert that the

espoused missions to serve Latinxs do not match the enacted missions of many HSIs (Calderon, 2015; Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Fosnacht & Nailos, 2016). Subsequently, this study seeks whether experiences in regard to student engagement services and activities vary among Latinx student-athletes attending HSIs and PWIs.

Validation Theory

The current climate at many U.S. college campuses is perceived as unwelcoming to first-generation Latinx students (Chang, Eagan, Lin, & Hurtado, 2011; Fischer, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008; Rodriguez, Parrish, & Parks, 2017). According to Rendón's (1994) validation theory, students who come from cultural backgrounds outside of the dominant college culture need to be validated in order to persist to degree attainment. This validation, which is an ongoing process and not a one-time interaction, can be academic, interpersonal, and/or cultural and results in heightened feelings of acceptance, belonging on campus, and competence for students (Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón, 1994). Importantly, validating agents do not try to assimilate students into the campus culture and strip them of their cultural backgrounds. Rather, these agents empower the students by providing them guidance and support on how to navigate the college environment while utilizing their cultural and social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Tello & Lonn, 2017; Yosso, 2005). Subsequently, such validation is linked to heightened intentions to persist to degree attainment (Dowd, Pak, & Bensimon, 2013; Garcia & Ramirez, 2015; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Tovar, 2015).

Studies depict various institutional agents from ranks of peers, faculty members, and student affairs personnel who validate first-generation Latinxs (Baker, 2013; Garcia & Ramirez, 2015; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Hurtado & Alvarado, 2015; Jehangir, 2010; Kouyoumdjian et

al., 2017; Lopez, 2005; Museus & Neville, 2012; Núñez, 2011; O’Keeffe, 2013; Rendón, 1994; Strayhorn, 2008; Tett, Cree, & Christie, 2017; Torres & Hernandez, 2010; Yosso et al., 2009).

For student-athletes, the institutional agents also include coaches, athletic academic advisors, and other athletic staff (Crawford, 2007; Darvin, Cintron, & Hancock, 2017; Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007; Rankin et al., 2016; Scarcella, 2016; Traynowicz, Harrison, McPherson-Botts, Bukstein, & Lawrence, 2016). While peers, faculty, and staff are important agents that Latinxs meet on campus, they are not the only source of validation and support. Latinxs also utilize their familial capital, which consists of off-campus agents who come from students’ families and communities and are linked to college success (Arana et al., 2011; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Matos, 2015; Tello & Lonn, 2017).

On campus, students typically get to meet and develop personal and mentoring relationships by engaging in student engagement activities and services. These extracurricular activities and various support programs complement classroom learning as they promote the development of various skills in order to foster the holistic development of students (Baron & Corbin, 2012; Kuh et al., 2010). Therefore, involvement in on-campus activities and programs provides an important avenue through which Latinxs may gain some validation. While students acquire access to institutional agents and peer support, the involvement in the activities may validate students’ belonging on campus as well. Athletic participation, in particular, has been found to increase motivation to persist to degree attainment as it fosters community and is linked to life satisfaction and sense of achievement (Gaston-Gayles, 2009; Leppel, 2006; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2008).

Importantly, differences in institutional settings contribute to different student needs in terms of campus involvement (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Kezar & Kinzie, 2006; Manning, Kinzie,

& Schuh, 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The HSI setting is particularly beneficial to Latinxs by offering them extracurricular opportunities that enable them to develop their salient ethnic identity (Garcia, Patrón, Ramirez, & Hudson, 2016). At PWIs, however, Hispanic students utilize counter-spaces that allow them to exist simultaneously in the two cultural worlds of their home community and that of their college campus (Delgado-Guerrero, Cherniack, & Gloria, 2014; Núñez, 2011, Von Robertson, Bravo, & Chaney, 2016; Yosso et al., 2009). Therefore, students attending PWIs have a higher need for validation. However, given the prevailing gap in espoused and enacted missions to empower Latinxs at many of today's HSIs, Hispanic students at many U.S. colleges and universities are likely to benefit from validating agents and activities in order to heighten their intentions to persist to degree attainment.

According to Traynowicz et al. (2016), “future research with validation theory and student engagement with athletic populations has the potential to create new knowledge with practical applications” (p. 28). This study follows the recommendations for future research of these scholars. Both validation theory and LatCrit provide the conceptual framework for this qualitative study. These theories frame the subsequent literature review to better situate the purpose of this study as it relates to the experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes who participate in non-revenue sports in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to persistence to degree attainment.

Literature Review

An abundance of research exists in regard to various aspects of student-athletes as well as Latinx students' college experiences. However, almost no studies currently exist that focus *solely* on Latinx collegiate student-athletes and/or student-athletes from non-revenue sports. Therefore, this review of the literature highlights the fragmented research in an attempt to provide a

complete picture in regard to the intersecting identities of first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports. First, in order to understand the current underrepresentation of Latinx collegiate student-athletes, this literature review provides a brief snapshot of the history of intercollegiate athletics and Latinx participation in sports. Second, the literature review highlights the role of higher education within U.S. society. Third, the literature review addresses most recent studies concerning the topics of culture, forms of capital, and student engagement services and activities of (a) Latinxs, (b) first-generation students, (c) student-athletes, (d) Latinx athletes, and (e) athletes from non-revenue sports while also examining (f) differences in their experiences at HSIs and PWIs. Last, this literature review commences with a brief chapter overview.

Historical Background of Intercollegiate Athletics

In order to understand the current experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports, it is necessary to first go back in history and study the origins and evolution of intercollegiate athletics within the context of U.S. higher education. This section embarks on this journey by highlighting the most relevant topics of (1) early commercialization, (2) race and intercollegiate athletics, (3) the impact of Title IX, (4) NCAA Divisions, (5) academic reform, (6) business model, and (7) today's state of college sports.

Early Commercialization

The U.S. is the only nation in the world where organized sports are part of the formal higher education system (Coakley, 2015). The origins of intercollegiate sports date back to the colonial times where students first organized sports as a form of on-campus entertainment (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015; Flowers, 2009). With the growing popularity, the competitions evolved into a more formal system and gradually transformed into organized competitions

among different higher education institutions by late 1800s (Bass et al., 2015; Yost, 2010). As the number of competitions grew, especially in football, leaders of institutions accordingly began to notice an increase in alumni support and student applications (Bass et al., 2015; Flowers, 2009). Ever since, intercollegiate athletics have continued to surge in scope, popularity, and influence within the U.S. higher education landscape.

The lack of formal oversight of intercollegiate sports proved troublesome in the early 1900s. Many serious athletic injuries, and even deaths, were reported at the time due to lack of safety measures (Bass et al., 2015). Consequently, President Theodore Roosevelt called an emergency meeting with leaders of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton to urge development of an organization overseeing intercollegiate athletics as a way to provide structure, integrity, and safety (Bass et al., 2015). By 1906, the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the U.S formed, which has since morphed into the NCAA, at the time consisting of 62 institutions (Bass et al., 2015).

The establishment of the NCAA marked a start of a new era for intercollegiate athletics. With the upsurge in popularity, institutions gradually increased spending on athletics, football in specific, hoping this investment would result in the generation of revenue as well positive institutional reputation (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Flowers, 2009). As Bass et al. (2015) note, athletic departments became the most visible facets of the institutions. Being referred as the *front porch* for universities, athletics became important for generating contributions from donors, increasing national visibility of the institutions, and growing the rates in student applications (Bass et al., 2015). In the following decades, the influence of athletics grew as years progressed, especially since colleges and universities became increasingly reliant upon alumni and their monetary donations for funding (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Race and Intercollegiate Athletics

College athletics is widely believed to be a microcosm of U.S. society, mirroring the existing societal patterns and trends (Beyer & Hannah, 2000; Stahura, Brown, & Choi, 2016; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2008). In other words, the culture of intercollegiate athletics is interrelated within the societal contexts (Beyer & Hannah, 2000; Stahura et al., 2016). With racism prevalent and higher education institutions racially segregated until World War II, mostly only White athletes participated in the NCAA sports. African Americans (used interchangeably with Blacks) attended HBCUs and participated in their own professional sports leagues, especially in the mainstream sports of football and basketball (Cameron, 2012; Vidal, 2016). After World War II when segregation was outlawed, racial and ethnic minorities have gradually gained access to higher education both as students and student-athletes (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Hartmann, 2000).

With the continuing drive to win in order to generate revenue and institutional prestige, institutions of higher learning sought the most athletically talented recruits. Through the adherence to a widely believed stereotype of the natural athletic prowess of African American athletes, the rosters of football and basketball teams quickly became saturated with student-athletes who were Black (Hartmann, 2000; Ruffins, 2010; Stahura et al., 2016). Institutions viewed these individuals as means to capitalistic gain in a form of winning, profits, and institutional prestige (Stahura et al., 2016). As Johnson (2018) asserts, capitalism is at the center of the system of power and privilege. Through today, Black athletes comprise the majority of rosters in men's football, men's basketball, and women's basketball (Lapchick, 2019).

For Latinxs, sports have always played an important part in their culture. However, a pipeline similar to that of HBCUs and professional leagues for Blacks was not developed for Latinxs, which partially explains their low participation in revenue sports of football and

basketball today (Alamillo, 2013; Cameron, 2012; Vidal, 2016). Overall, Latinx culture emphasizes the importance of hard labor, viewing sports solely as a leisure activity (Cameron, 2012). Further, the most popular professional sports for Latinxs do not require participation in college sports. Specifically, intercollegiate athletics are the main pipeline for the National Football League (NFL) and the National Basketball Association (NBA). However, professional sports in which Latinxs traditionally excel, such as soccer and baseball, maintain minor league systems not requiring participation in college sports (Cameron, 2012; Ruffins, 2003). Consequently, Latinxs continue to be underrepresented in intercollegiate athletics today despite being a force to reckon with in Major League Soccer (MLS), Major League Baseball (MLB), and championship boxing (Cameron, 2012; Ruffins, 2003).

Overall, the Black-White narrative continues to dominate historical depictions of U.S. sports at all levels, from youth to professional leagues, with the study of the role of sports for Latinxs still in its infancy (Iber, 2009). To this date, at the collegiate level, the vast majority of available studies concerns experiences and participation patterns of non-Hispanic Whites and African Americans (Silva, 2014). Even topics relating to race issues within athletic domains scarcely mention experiences of Latinxs despite the currently dense U.S. political climate that targets refugees and immigrants (Barba, 2017; National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, 2017). According to the Pew Research Center (2010), Hispanics have become the most frequent target of discrimination among all racial/ethnic groups today. Thus, it is time to provide Latinx athletes the opportunity to recount their experiences and fill the gap in the scholarly literature on this subset of the student-athlete population.

The Impact of Title IX

Women's sports. The 1960s and 1970s marked an era soliciting changes in terms of the racial composition of the NCAA's student body but also in terms of gender. While only men were part of the NCAA athletics for the first 70 years of its existence, the enactment of Title IX Education Amendment in 1972 changed the gender composition of college sports completely (Hogshead-Makar, 2011). In particular, Title IX legislation prohibits discrimination based on sex in all federally funded educational programs, including intercollegiate athletics (Rose, 2015). Subsequently, Title IX indirectly mandates that men and women receive equitable access to opportunities, including athletic scholarships and facilities (Ballenger, 2010). Consequently, women have gained access to higher education as students as well as sport participants. In 1970, only about 16,000 female student-athletes competed while attending college (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). However, these athletic competitions were not organized by the NCAA but by the Division for Girls and Women in Sport (DGWS), which was later renamed to the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) (Bell, 2008). Today, over 200,000 female student-athletes compete in the NCAA sports (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014).

Non-revenue sports. Despite several efforts by the NCAA to overrule the legislation in the past decades, Title IX continues to remain in effect through today (Hogshead-Makar, 2011). While having a profound positive effect on women's sports, the legislation faces criticisms for its adverse effects on men's non-revenue sports. Specifically, at some colleges/universities, numerous athletic programs have been eliminated today in order for institutions to stay compliant with Title IX (Van Rhee, Minjares, McNeil, & Atwood, 2011). For example, 45% of men's wrestling and 73% of men's gymnastics teams have been cut since 1981 (Clarke, 2012). However, such reductions in team sponsorships stem from the overall spending climate

within the NCAA member institutions that originated in the 1900s at the commencement of the governing body. In other words, Title IX is an enabler but not the sole cause of the decline of non-revenue sport programs.

Specifically, intercollegiate athletics continue to engage in the proverbial metaphor of *arms race* frequently used to describe the increasing institutional spending on athletics to upsurge the level of competitiveness and the subsequent level of institutional prestige. However, the escalated funding is funneled primarily to two sports: football and men's basketball, with all other sports competing for the leftover scarce resources within athletics (Hogshead-Makar, 2011; Osborne, 2014). Specifically, while men's football and basketball players comprise less than 7% of all student-athletes, 78% of all spending on men's sports is allocated to these two sports (Osborne, 2014). The combination of arms race and compliance with Title IX subsequently results in financial pressures on men's as well as women's non-revenue sports. Since higher education institutions are required to provide equitable opportunities for female and male students, some athletic departments drop sponsorship of men's non-revenue sports in order to be able to maintain full rosters of men's football and basketball (Hogshead-Makar, 2011).

Women's non-revenue sports are not immune to this cost-cutting trend either. Most athletic departments are not financially self-sustainable and thus rely heavily on institutional funding to cover their operating expenses (Burnsed, 2015; Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Desrochers, 2013). Since men's basketball and football are the most popular sports with media and fans, athletic departments continue to increase spending on these sports in hopes of capturing higher profits and institutional prestige. According to Hawkins (2013), 90% of the NCAA revenue is generated by less than 1% of all student-athletes in these sports. Subsequently, some departments decide to reduce participation opportunities in both men's and women's non-revenue sports in

order to increase funding of its revenue sports and become more competitive with these programs (Hogshead-Makar, 2011). In other instances, when no reductions in sport sponsorships are made, a large number of athletes in non-revenue programs must share a small portion of athletic budgets. The limited funding, however, only provides them with sub-par sports experiences in comparison to those of their peers from revenue sports (Hogshead-Makar, 2011). In other words, the uneven distribution of resources marginalizes participants in non-revenue sports.

NCAA Divisions

The enactment of Title IX was not the only significant event for the NCAA in the 1970s. Importantly, in 1973, the NCAA divided its member institutions into three divisions, I, II, and III, to ensure competitive fairness and to distribute television revenues more equitably (Bass et al., 2015; Yost, 2010). The key dividing factor was the level of resources that the college/university committed to operating their athletic department (Bass et al., 2015; Sweitzer, 2009). Division I institutions had significantly larger athletic budgets in comparison to Division II and III institutions (Sweitzer, 2009). Further, only Division I and II institutions were permitted to award athletic scholarships while Division III student-athletes could merely receive some form of academic grants or need-based scholarships (NCAA, n.d.-d).

This membership system remains in existence to the present day with some NCAA Division I institutions having budgets amounting to over \$100 million in comparison to Division II members' median budgets ranging between \$2-3 million (Sweitzer, 2009). Division III athletic programs utilize the smallest allocated budgets, averaging \$1-2 million (Sweitzer, 2009). In other words, Division I sport participation is most coveted and its student-athletes viewed as most elite.

While dismal in the overall percentage of all college athletes, data shows that Latinx student-athletes are evenly distributed among the three NCAA divisions (Lapchick, 2019). During the 2017-2018 academic year, 5.1% of all student-athletes who competed in Division I were Latinxs in comparison to 7% of Latinxs in Division II. The Division III student-athlete body consisted of 6.2% Latinos and 5% of Latinas (NCAA, 2017b). Overall, only 6% of male and 5.5% of female athletes amid all NCAA divisions were Latinxs (Lapchick, 2019) (see Appendix A for distribution of Latinxs by sport and NCAA division). This study solely focuses on exploring experiences of the NCAA Division I Latinx athletes as this is the most competitive level of intercollegiate athletics and, arguably, results in most challenges in terms of balancing academics and athletics for its participants.

Academic Reform

The mission of the NCAA and all of its members, all three divisions included, is to serve as an integral part of higher education and focus on the development and well-being of student-athletes (NCAA, n.d.-b). Through the 1970s, however, many athletes, especially those in revenue sports, did not graduate despite fully exhausting their athletic eligibility (Hollis, 2002). Athletic staff advised athletes for eligibility and not graduation, steering them into less academically demanding courses not counting towards a degree (Gaston-Gayles, 2003; Hollis, 2002). Subsequently, to address this issue, the NCAA started introducing various academic rules required for establishing, as well as maintaining athletic eligibility (Brown, 2014; Yost, 2010).

Specifically, as one of the new initiatives, the NCAA created the Graduation Success Rate (GSR) in 1998 to measure the graduation rates of student-athletes (NCAA, n.d.-a). Traditionally, colleges and universities use the U.S. Department of Education's federal graduation rate (FGR). Both rates look at the proportion of first-year, full-time student-athletes

who entered college receiving athletic financial aid and graduated from the same institution within six years. However, NCAA leaders argue that the GSR is a better measure of student graduation success as it does not penalize institutions for their athletes transferring to other institutions. Under the federal rate, all transfers are considered non-graduates (NCAA, n.d.-a). Therefore, the FGR underscores the number of students who will eventually graduate from four-year institutions, as it is relatively common for students to transfer. According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center ([NSCRC], 2015), 37.2% of college students transfer at least once within six years of attending college.

The GSR from 2002 through 2018 reflects a growing and favorable trend in the number of graduating Division I athletes of all races and ethnicities (NCAA, 2018f). Specifically, in 2018, 85% of Latinxs graduated in comparison to 92% of Whites and 79% of African Americans (NCAA, 2018f). The GSR rate for Latinxs has increased by 21% from 2002 through 2018 (NCAA, 2018f) (see Figure 1 below for a visual representation of these data).

Figure 1. GSR Comparison of NCAA Division I by Race/Ethnicity: 2002-2018

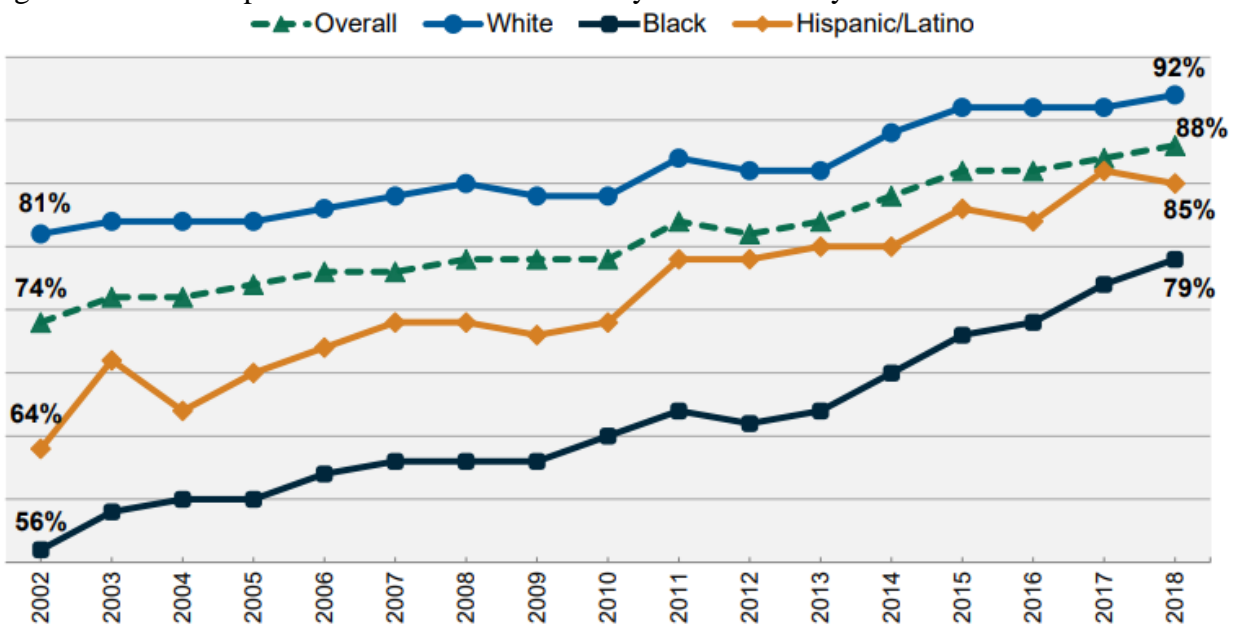


Figure 1. Comparison of the annual GSR of all student-athletes at Division I institutions by race/ethnicity. From National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2018d). *Trends in Graduation*

Success Rates and Federal Graduation Rates at NCAA Division I institutions. Retrieved from https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/research/gradrates/2018DIRES_D1FedGSRTrends.pdf

Overall, NCAA Division I female student-athletes graduate at higher rates than their male counterparts; GSR for all women was 93% in comparison to 82% for men in 2018 (NCAA, 2018f). Among Latinxs, the disparities between genders are less pronounced than in other racial or ethnic groups, as 87% of Hispanic females versus 83% of Hispanic males graduated in 2018 (NCAA, 2018f). Differences also exist between sports (see Table 1 below with 2018 GSR for a selected few men's and women's sports). In particular, athletes from men's football, regardless of athletic subdivision, graduated at significantly lower rates in comparison to athletes of all other sports in 2018. As an aggregate, GSR for athletes from non-revenue sports outranked that of those from revenue sports (NCAA, 2018f).

Table 1. GSR for selected NCAA Division I Men's and Women's Sports, 2018

Sport	Men	Women
Baseball	83.7%	-
Basketball	85.0%	90.7%
CC/Track	83.2%	90.7%
Football FBS	79.1%	-
Football FCS	78.9%	-
Golf	90.6%	94.9%
Soccer	85.7%	93.7%
Softball	-	91.0%
Swimming	90.3%	95.7%
Tennis	93.3%	95.5%
Volleyball	85.2%	94.0%

Note: From National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2018f). *Trends in Graduation Success Rates and Federal Graduation Rates at NCAA Division I institutions.* Retrieved from https://ncaaorg.s3.amazonaws.com/research/gradrates/2018DIRES_D1FedGSRTrends.pdf

While Steinbach (2011) questions the NCAA's usage of GSR rather than FGR with the claim that student-athletes transfer as often as non-athletes, comparison of FGR rates also reveals favorable graduation rates for those individuals participating in athletics. Specifically, since 1993

the NCAA reports athletes graduate at higher rates than non-athletes (NCAA, 2018f). The year of 2016 was the only time when FGR was the same (66%) for athletes and non-athletes (NCAA, 2018f). However, athletes still outperformed non-athletes in all subgroups based on gender and ethnicity (except for White males) that year (NCAA, 2018f). In 2018, the percentage increased to 68% in comparison to stagnating 66% for non-athletes (NCAA, 2018f). It is important to note that among Latinxs, female athletes' FGR surpassed that of male athletes', 69% vs. 56% respectively. However, among non-athletes, 64% of Hispanic females and 56% males graduated in the 2018 graduation cohort (NCAA, 2018f). These statistical findings suggest that participation in intercollegiate athletics is beneficial in terms of persistence to degree attainment for all students, including those from racial/ethnic minorities (Latinxs included). Yet, as the graduation rates highlight, female athletes benefit more than male athletes, especially among Latinxs (NCAA, 2018f).

Nevertheless, scholars continue to focus on the presumable disconnection between athletic and academic missions (e.g., Feezell, 2015; Harrison & Bukstein, 2014; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012). Various high-profile scandals, including that of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where athletic staff intentionally steered some athletes into sham courses to maintain athletic eligibility (Wainstein, 2014), have resulted in an ongoing tarnished public perception of intercollegiate athletics. As New (2016b) asserted, an epidemic of academic fraud has plagued big-time college sports. More than half a dozen of NCAA institutions committed academic misconduct in the last two years alone, with the NCAA currently investigating 20 more programs for academic violations (New, 2016a). According to a data analysis by Adamek (2017), revenue sports of men's basketball and football account for 73.9% of academic fraud cases. Not surprisingly, a multitude of studies reports that student-

athletes perceive being negatively stereotyped for their academic ability and belonging on college campuses by their faculty and peers (Paule & Gilson, 2010; Simons et al., 2007; Wininger & White, 2015). As discerned by Paule and Gilson (2010), some athletes from non-revenue sports attribute the existence of this particular stereotype to their peers from big-time revenue sports.

Business Model

Despite these criticisms, intercollegiate athletics are credited with extending educational opportunities to many students from traditionally marginalized groups (Denhart, Villwock, & Vedder, 2009). The most athletically gifted students who participate in intercollegiate sports receive athletic scholarships covering a portion, if not all, of the tuition and fees that provide them with access to higher education that their families could not in many instances otherwise afford. More than 150,000 student-athletes are awarded over \$2.7 billion in athletic scholarships annually (NCAA, n.d.-c). Undeniably, today's student-athletes come from various ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic upbringings (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2008); 16% of NCAA athletes self-identify as first in their families to enroll in college (NCAA, 2016).

Overall, children living in the U.S. are socialized to play sports from a young age (Beckman & Strand, 2016). As an NCAA study found, many parents expect their children to participate in college and/or professional sports in the future (NCAA, 2016). Therefore, many children specialize in a sport and participate in it year-round growing up (NCAA, 2016). According to Koba (2014), U.S. parents start their children in organized sports as early as age five with hopes to prepare them to earn a college athletic scholarship. Given the increasing cost of college tuition and the rising number of students in debt following graduation (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2012), many parents and students themselves view athletic

scholarships as an avenue for earning a higher education degree debt-free or at least with a lower debt. Therefore, youth sports are becoming more commercialized as rising number of families invest in private lessons and/or club sports memberships in hope of increasing their children's chances of being recruited to play intercollegiate sports (Farrey, 2017).

This trend, however, reduces opportunities for others, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. A recent analysis of the NCAA data by Farrey (2017) highlighted a steep decline of first-generation students participating in the NCAA sports, including those traditionally associated with serving disadvantaged groups such as men's basketball and football. According to the NCAA (2016a), 33% of all Latinxs participating in NCAA sports, the largest group, are first-generation student-athletes in comparison to 30% of all Black athletes and 18% of all White athletes. This statistic is striking given that Latinxs make up only 6% of all male and 6% of all female student-athletes (Lapchick, 2019).

With the growing importance of large financial investments to be recruited for college sports, the underrepresentation of Latinxs in the NCAA is likely to linger further in the future. As Ruffins (2010) asserts, high equipment costs and lack of transportation already contribute to the low figures regarding Latinx participation in college sports. In addition, a relatively few Hispanics can purchase early training of their children (Alamillo, 2013; Ruffins, 2010). However, these early sport participation experiences result in improved athletic skills and subsequent higher chances of making it on varsity middle and high school teams, which provide a necessary exposure for recruitment onto college athletic teams. Nevertheless, success is possible as demonstrated by the current Latinx athletes who participate in the NCAA sports, with some of them receiving Division I partial or full athletic scholarships.

Today's State of College Sports

College sports have evolved greatly since their inauguration over a century ago, especially in recent years with the evolution of technology. In particular, with the influx of money via television contracts, the NCAA has grown into a billion-dollar industry (Bass et al., 2015), overseeing more than 1,100 colleges and universities today (NCAA, n.d.-a). To provide an example, in the early 1980s, the NCAA received on average \$35 million annually for television rights (Bass et al., 2015). In 2010, the NCAA earned \$10.8 billion for signing a 7-year television broadcasting contract (Bass et al., 2015). Furthermore, in 1998, the NCAA introduced the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) in football, which has been tied to significant revenue for athletic departments (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Yost, 2010). In particular, the participants in the top BCS bowl in 2003 earned \$13 million (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Statistics such as these serve as a good example of why athletic departments predominately focus on revenue sports today. As Yost (2010) further added, the money from television contracts and other revenue generated by football are essential to support all the non-revenue sports.

Unmistakably, financial concerns have grown as a critical component of college and university solvency in today's public higher education. The financial cost of higher education has increased over the past several decades (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2012). However, as states have made significant cuts to the higher education funding, with state governments spending 28% less money on higher education per a student in 2013 compared to 2008 (Oliff, Palacios, Johnson, & Leachman, 2013). Subsequently, intercollegiate athletics are likely to continue to operate as a business with colleges/universities dedicating large amounts of operating funds to athletic departments, which in turn spend the allocated resources on revenue sports in hopes to become more competitive with other institutions. After all, the need to attract students is

pressing, given that student tuition has become an important and highly sought-after source of funding (McGuinness, 2016). Therefore, with the ongoing commercialization of higher education, more colleges and universities are likely to sponsor athletic programs, revenue sports in specific, to differentiate their campuses and attract students.

The Role of U.S. Higher Education

Higher education plays an important role in today's society. The expanding technological innovations along with globalization have resulted in an increased demand for jobs that require a higher level of education/training, problem-solving, and communication skills (Stewart, 2012). Consequently, high school graduation has become the norm in most industrialized countries with a college degree now viewed as an important means for securing a well-paying job (Stewart, 2012). As Hess (2016) notes, postsecondary education has become a necessity for professional opportunity and affluence. Statistics consistently report on the college education wage premium for bachelor's degree holders whose income is close to twice as high as of those with high school diploma only (e.g., Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). As such, this section of literature review provides important information regarding (1) college attainment by race/ethnicity and (2) persistence to degree.

College Attainment by Race/Ethnicity

The U.S. has experienced immense shifts in the population's demographics in the 21st century (Smith, 2016). Currently, 76.9% of the population is White, 17.8% Hispanic, and 13.3% Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016b). Many projections forecast that the majority of the nation's population will consist of racial and ethnic minorities by 2050 (Smith, 2016). In particular, the Hispanic population is increasing rapidly, growing by 50% from 2000 through 2012 (HACU, 2018a). According to the Pew Research Center (2016), Latinxs are the youngest major ethnic or

racial group in the U.S., having a median age of 28 in comparison to median ages of 33 for Blacks, 36 for Asians, and 43 for Whites. Nearly half (47%) of U.S.-born Hispanics are younger than 18 in comparison to 27% of U.S.-born Blacks and 20% of U.S.-born Whites (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Propelled with efforts to increase access in order to raise the educational level of the entire population, college enrollment among all races and ethnic groups has been growing as well (Krogstad & Fry, 2014). Specifically, from 1996 to 2012, the college enrollment of Hispanics ages 18 to 24 years increased by 240% in comparison to an increase of 72% of Blacks and 12% of Whites (Krogstad & Fry, 2014) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. College Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity: 1993-2012

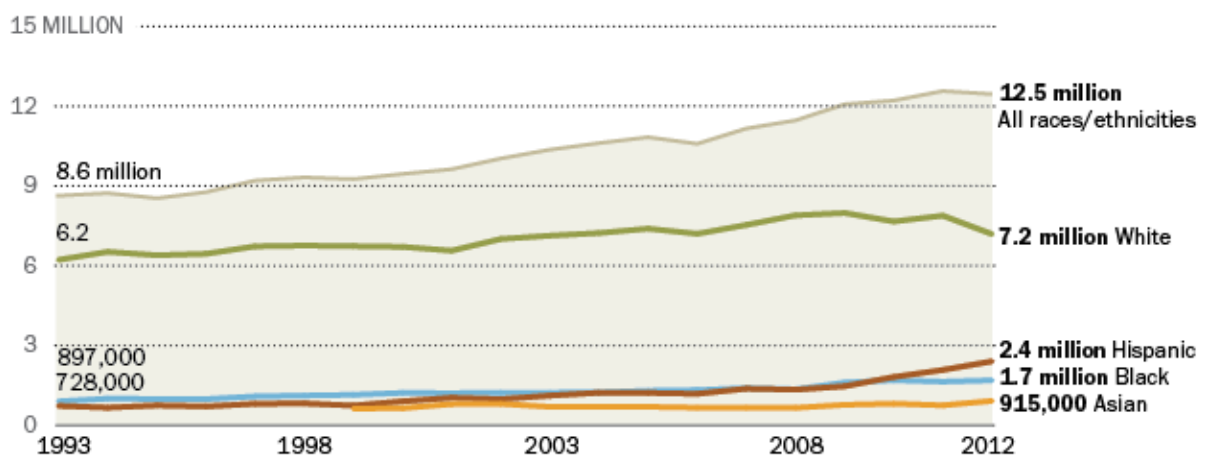


Figure 2. College enrollment by race/ethnicity of 18-24 year-olds enrolled in college from 1993-2012. From Krogstad, J. M., & Fry, R. (2014, April 24). More Hispanics, Blacks enrolling in college, but lag in bachelor's degrees. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/24/more-hispanics-blacks-enrolling-in-college-but-lag-in-bachelors-degrees/>

However, the increased access has not converted into actual student retention and subsequent degree completion for Latinxs. Rather, a significant gap between college enrollment and completion rates remains, with Latinxs lagging behind other ethnicities (Ryan & Bauman,

2016). Specifically, only 15.5% of Hispanics compared to 36.2% of Whites held at least a bachelor's degree in 2015 (Ryan & Bauman, 2016) (see Figure 3 for a comparison of the percentage of population by race/ethnicity by the level of education). Hence, the U.S. cannot surpass other nations in the proportion of college graduates unless explicit programming initiatives are made to increase the rate of degree attainment of Hispanics (Calderon, 2015; Kelly, Schneider, & Carey, 2010; Núñez, 2017).

Figure 3. Educational Attainment of U.S. Population by Race/Ethnicity

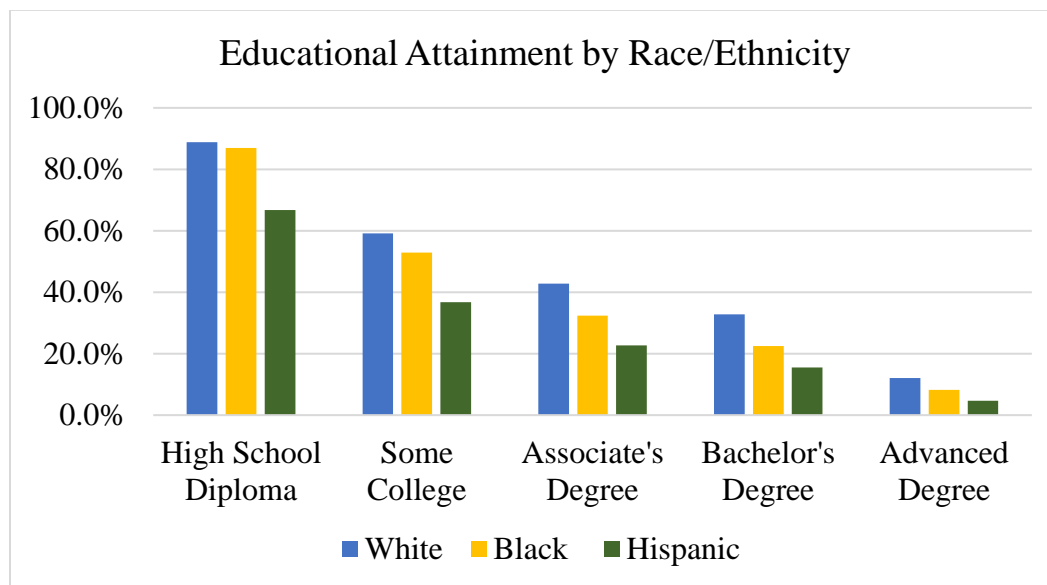


Figure 3. Educational attainment of the U.S. population aged 25 and older by race/ethnicity. From Ryan, C. L., & Bauman, K. (2016). Educational attainment in the United States: 2015. *U.S. Census Bureau*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p20-578.pdf>

Persistence

Given the importance of college degree for both the individual as well as the economic prosperity of the nation, a growing body of literature focuses today on the underlying factors affecting student success (Crisp, Taggart, & Nora, 2015; Hagedorn, 2005; Reason, 2009; Renn & Reason, 2013). In particular, persistence to degree attainment is one aspect of student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). However, confusion in regard to proper

terminology surrounding this term ensues, with scholars frequently incorrectly using the terms *persistence* and *retention* interchangeably (Hagedorn, 2005; Reason, 2009; Renn & Reason, 2013). However, as Reason (2009) explicitly notes, retention is an institutional measure while persistence gauges a student's intent to a particular goal. Overall, an intent to persist is strongly correlated with actual persistence (Bean, 1982; Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora & Hengstler, 1992; Hasmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009). Subsequently, this study seeks to explore experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes who participate in non-revenue sports that contribute to their persistence to degree attainment, or rather, intentions to earn a college degree.

As of today, the efforts to increase retention and graduation rates are at the top of agendas of policymakers as well as higher education institutions (e.g., Smith, 2019; Witham, Chase, Bensimon, Hanson, & Longanecker, 2015). In order to implement effective student service programs, it is crucial for institutions to understand the unique characteristics of the particular population of students they serve (Hyatt, 2003). Research identifies certain subgroups to be at high risk of not persisting to degree completion (Kuh, 2009). Specifically, Hyatt (2003) lists first-generation students, ethnic/racial minorities, and student-athletes to be the student populations who benefit from various programming efforts to increase their chances of graduation. Many student-athletes today are minorities and/or first-generation students. Subsequently, their experiences are shaped by the interaction of their multiple social identities within the systems of power and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989; Johnson, 2018).

The current gap in college degree attainment between Latinxs and other ethnic/racial groups warrants further examination. However, too frequently, scholars analyze the discrepancies in college persistence of Latinxs and/or first-generation students with a deficit lens (O'Shea, 2016; Reyes & Nora, 2012; Sarcedo, 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005).

As Sarcedo (2014) remarks, current research predominantly explores the question of “Why do so few Latinxs graduate from college?” (p. 6). A similar deficit lens is present in studies about collegiate student-athletes (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Yet, since the educational outcomes of Latinx students are heavily influenced by institutional racism and negative stereotypes (Núñez, 2014; Tello & Lonn, 2017; Yosso et al., 2009), it is important to use a different lens when exploring the experiences of Hispanic student-athletes in relation to persistence to degree attainment. Subsequently, this study focuses on first-generation Latinx student-athletes who participate in non-revenue sports and the positive attributes and influences contributing to their successes in terms of persistence to a degree. In other words, this study utilizes an assets-based approach.

Culture

Exploring the current climate present at the U.S. college/university campuses is an important first step in understanding the experiences of today’s first-generation Latinx student-athletes. According to Rankin and Reason (2008), the term *climate* encompasses “current attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students that concern the access for, the inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential” (p. 264). Yet, the current system of higher education currently favors one type of culture over others, which presents a number of challenges for those who are members of the non-dominant groups, such as Latinxs, first-generation students, or student-athletes (Bourke, 2016; Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; McGovern, 2018; Núñez, 2014). Yosso (2005) defines culture as shared behaviors and values among a specific group of people. Nevertheless, these students rely on their cultural capital in order to come victorious and complete their college degree (Matos, 2015; Yosso, 2006). The following subsections highlight the current body of literature pertaining to the

topics of (1) culture of intercollegiate athletics, (2) Latinx culture, (3) sense of belonging, (4) Latinxs and campus climate, (5) student-athletes and campus climate, (6) HSIs, (7) understanding the context of PWIs, and (8) first-generation students and campus climate.

Culture of College Athletics

The U.S. is the only country in the world where organized sports are part of the formal higher education system (Coakley, 2015). Yet, the integration of athletics in U.S. colleges and universities has been controversial. Explicitly, college athletics exist within the landscape of higher education under the premise that these extracurricular activities contribute to the academic missions of the institutions (Flowers, 2009). As the current president of the NCAA Mark Emmert stated, the organization was founded with the goal of athletics serving as an integral part of higher education and student-athletes receiving a great educational experience (NCAA, n.d.-c). “That’s why we’re in business,” (NCAA, n.d.-c).

However, despite these reassurances by leaders of the NCAA about its mission, criticisms continue to arise over the disconnection of the cultures of higher education and intercollegiate athletics (e.g., Feezell, 2015; Flowers, 2009; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012; Yost, 2010). For example, Jayakumar and Comeaux’s study (2016) found an existing cultural cover-up within athletics. Specifically, the researchers uncovered an athletic culture with espoused missions prioritizing academic excellence but internally enacted missions reinforcing focus on athletics over academics at one NCAA Division I university (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). As a result, athletes face many forms of prejudice and stereotyping on their campuses from faculty and staff as well as other students because they are believed to prioritize their athletic participation over academic success (Comeaux, 2011; Parsons, 2013; Simons, Bosworth,

Fujita, & Jensen, 2007; Wininger & White, 2015). However, as aforementioned, graduation rates consistently show that student-athletes graduate at higher rates than non-athletes (NCAA, 2018f).

Indeed, not all athletic departments operate the same. As Schroeder (2010) identified, four interconnected elements shape a culture of an athletic department: (1) institutional culture, (2) external environment, (3) internal environment, and (4) leadership/power. The institutional culture constitutes of aspects such as the institutional mission, type, size, or admissions standards. In comparison, external environment encompasses the influence of factors such as the media, policies of the governing body (e.g., the NCAA), and corporate sponsors. In contrast, the internal environment refers to the culture of the department as displayed in different artifacts, such as logos, rituals, or written documents. Lastly, the leadership/power concerns the dynamics within the staff in charge of the department (Schroeder, 2010). All four of these elements interact and form the culture of the athletic department, which then directly influences the experience of student-athletes.

According to Trice and Beyer (1993), any organizational culture consists of ideologies (shared beliefs and values) and cultural forms (behaviors that reflect those beliefs and values). Given the ongoing arms race among athletic programs, student-athletes operate in an environment with competing cultural ideologies and forms. Specifically, the NCAA oversees all members and sets policies and establishes rules to ensure that athletic programs focus on educational experience of student-athletes and the principle of amateurism is maintained (Gaston Gayles et al., 2018; Hextrum, 2018). As part of this principle, sports should not be pursued for profits but for pleasure (Thelin, 2011). As such, student-athletes do not get monetary compensation for their athletic participation despite some institutions generating revenue through television contracts, sponsorships, fundraising, and ticket sales as a result of their athletic

achievements (Bass et al., 2015; Cohen & Kisker, 2013; Gaston Gayles et al., 2018; Yost, 2010). It is important note that such revenue comes primarily from two sports of men's football and basketball (Yost, 2010) who subsequently benefit from higher athletic funding and fan support (Osborne, 2014).

In other words, capitalism in addition to sexism and racism are part of the culture of intercollegiate athletics and influence the lives of student-athletes competing in the NCAA (Gaston Gayles et al., 2018). Thereby, first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports operate in an athletic culture that favors athletes of certain backgrounds (e.g., White and middle- and upper-class) and fails to recognize the knowledge and assets of others from traditionally underrepresented groups within this sphere (Hextrum, 2018; Martinez, 2018; McGovern, 2018). The next section describes in detail the culture of one of these populations in the U.S. - those identifying as Latinxs.

Latinx Culture

Latinxs comprise a diverse population composed of individuals with different cultural backgrounds (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; Núñez, 2014). For example, unique to all other panethnic groups, racial identification and skin color differences span within and across the different Latinx groups (Fergus, 2016). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), 2.5% Hispanics self-identify as Black, 53% as White, 6% as two or more races, and 36.7% as some other race. Furthermore, Hispanics differ based on country of origin and generational status within the U.S. (Tello & Lonn, 2017). Specifically, 63.2% of Latinxs are of Mexican origin, 9.5% Puerto Rican, 3.9% Cuban, 3.8% Salvadoran, 3.3% Dominican, and 2.5% Guatemalan (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017a). In addition, 65.6% of Hispanics were born in the U.S. while 34.4% are immigrants (Flores, 2017). Scholars pen those who immigrated as first-generation Latinxs.

Second-generation constitute of those born in the U.S. to their immigrant parents while Hispanics from the third-generation and higher are those born in the U.S. to their U.S.-born parents (Pew Research Center, 2004); approximately three-fourths of Latinxs are of this generation (Sue & Sue, 2016). In other words, there is no universal Latinx culture given the diversity in backgrounds of Latinxs.

Nonetheless, cultural commonalities among some of the Latinx groups exist. As Tello and Lonn (2017) synthesize, the cultural values of *familismo*, *personalismo*, *simpático*, and *fatalismo* are significant for many Latinxs. Familismo refers to family unity, which encompasses parents and siblings but also extended family members and close friends (Sue & Sue, 2016; Tello & Lonn, 2017). As such, many Latinxs place their family's needs before their personal needs (Tello & Lonn, 2017). Thus, Hispanic students may reach out to their family members and friends as the first source of support rather than connecting with on-campus personnel (Sue & Sue, 2016). Further, as part of personalismo, Latinxs value personal relationships and interactions as well as a sense of connectedness over formal relations, material success, and individual achievements (Class-Ehlers, 2006; Holloway, Waldrip, & Ickes, 2009).

The value of *simpático* refers to a relational style that makes Latinxs interact with others in a courteous way and strive to maintain harmony (Holloway et al., 2009). As such, Tello and Lonn (2017) posit that Hispanics are likely to hesitate bringing up problems they encounter on campuses. Lastly, the cultural value of *fatalismo* concerns Hispanics' religious and spiritual beliefs, which may contribute for some of them to take a passive approach to dealing with problems because they believe that these events are inevitable and the result of their fate (Sue & Sue, 2016).

Unfortunately, many campuses today do not recognize these cultural expressions as strengths but rather weaknesses in need of correcting through assimilation, which has a negative effect on Latinxs' sense of belonging (Tello & Lonn, 2017). A sense of belonging is a psychological dimension of integration measuring student's perceived connectedness to the institution (Hausmann, Schofield, Woods, 2007; Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009). The next subsection details more about this important concept.

Sense of Belonging

In an era with an ever-growing diversity of the student body, the need for students to feel a part of the campus community that supports them and views them as valuable members is important for persistence (Cooper, 2009; Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón, 1994). Overall, many scholars have identified one's perceived sense of belonging to be linked to heightened persistence to degree intentions (Cheng, 2004; Hausmann et al., 2007; Hausmann et al., 2009; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; O'Keeffe, 2013).

However, as Vaccaro and Newman (2016) found, differences exist between privileged and marginalized college students' needs to attain a sense of belonging. Specifically, marginalized students expressed having more complex needs, such as to be able to participate in extracurricular activities, as well as establishing friendships that allowed them to act as authentic selves. Students from privileged backgrounds had similar needs in terms of involvement, relationships, and environmental perceptions. However, these needs were more surface-level and did not require the level of authenticity that traditionally marginalized students longed for (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). Overall, differences in perceived sense of belonging on the U.S. campuses between privileged and marginalized college students currently exist (Johnson et al.,

2007; Strayhorn, 2008). Specifically, minority students, including Latinxs, report a less strong sense of belonging in comparison to their White peers (Johnson et al., 2007; Mallett et al., 2011).

Latinxs and Campus Climate

Johnson et al.'s (2007) findings are not surprising given that scholars have continually emphasized that the existence of a White supremacy in U.S. higher education system is one of the main challenges facing minority students, Latinxs included (Bourke, 2016; Brunnsma, Brown, & Placier, 2013; Hungerford-Kresser & Vetter, 2011; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rozas & Miller, 2009; Storlie & Toomey, 2016). Specifically, Latinx students report experiencing racism and stereotyping in regard to their academic abilities (Ballinas, 2017; Lopez, 2005; Vela-Gude et al., 2009; Von Robertson et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009). For example, Latinx participants in Von Robertson et al.'s (2016) study described experiencing blatant racism and microaggressions. Microaggressions are verbal and non-verbal, frequently unconscious and unintentional, and generally subtle forms of discrimination that can cause psychological distress, lower self-esteem, and inhibition of personal and academic development of those targeted (Comeaux, 2012; Johnson, 2018; Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, & Rasmus, 2014; Nadal, Wong, Griffin, Davidoff, & Sriken, 2014; Yosso et al., 2009). In addition, the unwelcoming, and often times even hostile, racial campus environment has a negative impact on students' sense of belonging (Chang et al., 2011; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Locks et al., 2008; Rodriguez et al., 2017; Tello & Lonn, 2017).

In turn, when students feel welcome and their culture represented within the campus environment, their intent to persist is heightened (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Torres, 2006). Using the term of *cultural affinity*, Torres (2006) specifically links this conception to persistence to degree for Latinx college students. Cerezo and Chang (2012) found a similar

relationship, connecting cultural fit of Latinx students on campus with college grade point average (GPA). An association with peers of the similar ethnic background was also found to be a significant predictor of higher college GPA for Latinxs (Cerezo & Chang, 2012).

Overall, research identifies the development of positive relationships of students with faculty, staff, and peers to be important for creating one's sense of belonging, cultural affinity, and validation that in turn is linked to heightened persistence (Hurtado & Alvarado, 2015; O'Keeffe, 2013; Strayhorn, 2008; Tett et al., 2017; Torres & Hernandez, 2010; Yosso et al., 2009). Overall, the ability to interact with diverse peers and staff is beneficial to all students and not just for traditionally marginalized students (Locks et al., 2008; Maestas, Vaquera, & Zehr, 2007). Additionally, the development of a sense of belonging for students is not limited solely to the first year of college (Tett et al., 2017).

Generally, the majority of literature on sense of belonging, retention, and persistence focuses on first-year college students (e.g., Fearon, Barnard-Brak, Robinson, & Harris, 2013; Hausmann et al., 2007; Hausmann et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2007; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; Soria, 2012; Tinto, 1999; Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). However, the findings of Tett et al. (2017) suggest that transition into higher education is not a one-time event but rather an on-going process that takes place for the duration of college studies. Specifically, students develop a higher sense of belonging at the college/university as they gradually learn to navigate and meaningfully engage within the college environment as well as continue developing positive relationships with fellow students, faculty, and staff (Tett et al., 2017). In other words, positive campus climate is important in creating a sense of belonging for Latinx students.

Student-Athletes and Campus Climate

Studies that focus on student-athletes and their perceived sense of belonging at higher education institutions have been sparse despite many critics raising concerns over the presumably incompatible cultures of intercollegiate athletics and academia (e.g., Feezell, 2015; Harrison & Bukstein, 2014; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Saffici & Pellegrino, 2012). The available research, however, generally reports findings in favor of inclusion of intercollegiate athletics in higher education sphere due to its promotion of development of heightened sense of belonging, persistence intentions, and academic performance of student-athletes (Bendick, 2017; Fearon et al., 2013; Martinez, 2018; NCAA, 2016; Sung, Gi-Yong, Kim, & Dittmore, 2015).

Reciprocally, campus climate has an impact not only on student-athletes' academic but also an athletic success (Rankin et al., 2016). Specifically, Fearon et al. (2013) found that sense of belonging has an impact on first-year student-athletes' expectations to graduate from college. The student-athletes who reported a higher sense of belonging had also higher expectations that they would graduate from college. Furthermore, Sung et al. (2015) concluded that athletes' identification with their teams directly improved their sense of belonging in college/university and their subsequent academic performance. While campus climate may be perceived as unwelcoming, the team culture may negate its negative effects by enabling student-athletes to assert a sense of belonging within athletics. Overall, 74% of male and 78% of female Division I student-athletes report having a strong sense of belonging at their institution (NCAA, 2016).

Athletes' sense of belonging in college sports likely varies depending on their mix of social identities. One's ethnicity, race, gender, and sexual orientation are of particular importance (Adjepong, 2017; Ratna, 2010). Specifically, Adjepong (2017) analyzed sense of belonging for women participating in rugby, which is considered a highly masculine sport. The responses of

the study's participants highlighted that, in order to fit in, female athletes affirmed their belonging in this particular sport domain by distancing themselves from other marginalized players instead of challenging racial hierarchies and heterosexual privilege. In other words, these athletes normalized and further reproduced the values associated with Whiteness and heterosexuality in order to assert belonging in a masculine, White sport (Adjepong, 2017). As such, women rugby players claimed the identity of a feminine and heterosexual athlete in order to feel safe in this patriarchal domain (Adjepong, 2017).

Similarly, Ratna (2010) found that in order to affirm a sense of belonging in women's soccer, minority women utilized certain coping strategies that varied depending on the situation and the variables of length of playing career, generation status, and team's racial/ethnic composition. In detail, when minority women comprised a large proportion of the team, they united and collectively challenged experiences of racism. However, when most of their teammates were White, these players lacked in social capital necessary to resist the oppression and thus decided to distance themselves from other players from marginalized groups (Ratna, 2010). In other words, contingent on the situation, the participants in Ratna's (2010) study intentionally emphasized certain identities over others in order to affirm a sense of belonging. Given that Latinx athletes attend HSIs as well as PWIs, it is warranted to explore whether similar dynamics apply to their identity expressions in these distinct institutional contexts. Undeniably, student-athletes possess intersecting identities that influence their experiences depending on the campus environment and the athletic team's culture as well as the particular sport's norms (e.g., highly masculine sport).

The concept of mestizaje. The results of Jamieson's (2003) study that focuses on Latina athletes support Ratna's (2010) findings. Specifically, Jamieson (2003) described that Latina

softball players occupy a metaphorical *middle space*, originally coined by Anzaldúa (1987) as *mestizaje/borderlands*. According to Anzaldúa (1987), one's identity is a fluid, hybrid concept rather than singular, binary position. As such, Latinas traverse boundaries of different social categories and resist binary classification, which is a tool of oppression enacted by those in power. In other words, the Latina participants in Jamieson's (2003) study positioned themselves in relation to others and the situational context, having their social identities in a constant state of flux.

As noted by Johnson (2018), the current distribution of power is closely tied to the systems of power and privilege, which commenced a century ago with the onset of modern capitalism. In order to preserve the position of power, the dominant group of White men used difference among individuals and groups to develop a system where certain social categories were intentionally defined in a way that led to privilege for the associated group. However, all others in relation to them experienced rejection and subsequent discrimination as well as limited access to certain opportunities (Johnson, 2018). The concepts of race and ethnicity are specific examples of these socially constructed categories.

Consistent with Johnson's (2018) assertions, many scholars emphasize that the Latinx/Latina designation is just a proxy variable (Gonzalez, 2012; Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; Núñez, 2014; Tyler et al., 2008). Explicitly, Latinxs are a diverse group of individuals with different cultural backgrounds and social identities (Fergus, 2016; Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; Núñez, 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2017). As described in the seminal work of Collins (1990), privilege is intersectional, with individuals simultaneously holding privileged as well as marginalized identities. However, Latinxs continue to be classified under one category, with

scholars often times failing to acknowledge the differences in their backgrounds and cultures (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; Núñez, 2014).

A similar paradigm concerns student-athletes who differ vastly in their backgrounds but are often considered as a homogenous group when studied (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). As demonstrated by Jamieson (2003), however, Latina softball players refused to be classified under a specific social category. Instead, they operated in the middle space, having their social identity in a constant state of flux where they positioned themselves in relation to others as well as to the situation's context. Specifically, while part of an athletic team, these Latinas were always aware of being different in relation to their teammates. Therefore, they embraced this *otherness* and claimed this identity within borderlands (Jamieson, 2003).

The concept of middle space applies to non-athletes as well. Without explicitly mentioning the concept of *mestizaje*, Hungerford-Kresser and Vetter (2011) asserted similar conclusions in their case study of one urban-schooled Latinx college student. Unfortunately, in this study, the participant did not academically persist and graduate. The authors concluded that the participant constructed and enacted his academic identity based on the interactions with other students, faculty, and staff on campus who doubted his academic abilities and positioned him as a university outsider (Hungerford-Kresser & Vetter, 2011). Similarly, other scholars note that transition to college is important in shaping students' identities (Brettell & Nibbs, 2009; Lopez, 2005; Tett et al., 2017; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1993). Students who come from families of immigrants often possess fluid and multifaceted identities (Brettell & Nibbs, 2009). Thereby, the aforementioned studies point out the importance of supportive campus environments that provide conditions to foster a sense of belonging of all students, not positioning some in the margins.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions

Researchers assert that differences exist in identity development as well as overall experiences for students across the different university and college settings (e.g., Cuellar, 2014; Griffin & Hurtado, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). As noted by Griffin and Hurtado (2011), the Carnegie framework classifies higher education into multiple categories such as associate's colleges and doctorate-granting universities. Each type offers a unique learning environment that necessitates a certain approach in the delivery of student services and programming, including academic support and student development (Griffin & Hurtado, 2011). In addition, a different type of institutions with missions to educate specific student populations exist within all of the Carnegie categories, which subsequently provide even more unique campus environment conditions (Griffin & Hurtado, 2011). HSIs are one example of such colleges/universities.

Historical background of HSIs. The HSI federal designation is granted to all U.S. colleges and universities with a minimum of 25% equivalent full-time enrollment of students who are Latinx (HACU, n.d.). Under Title VII legislation, the U.S. Department of Education provides grant funding to eligible HSIs to assist them in developing curriculum and programming to increase the college attainment of Latinx population (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Overall, the majority of today's Hispanic college students attend HSIs. Specifically, HSIs accounted for only 14.9% of all U.S. non-profit higher education institutions in 2017 but they enrolled 63% of all Latinx undergraduate students (HACU, 2018a). Today, HSIs award nearly 40% of all bachelor's degree earned by Hispanics; notably, 54% of all Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Hispanic graduates come from HSIs (Harmon,

2012; Hixson, 2009). As summarized by Harmon (2012), HSIs award more associate's and bachelor's degrees to Latinx students than all other U.S. higher education institutions combined.

Unlike HBCUs, the majority of HSIs were *not* founded with the specific mission to serve Latinx students. Rather, they originated as PWIs and became HSIs only because of the shifts in the U.S. population and the increasing number of Hispanics in certain geographical locations (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Laden, 2004; Núñez, 2015). Specifically, more than 50% of all Latinxs living in the U.S. today reside in California, Florida, and Texas (HACU, 2018a). In combination with New York, Arizona, Illinois, New Jersey, and Colorado, these states account for more than 75% of U.S. Latinx population (HACU, 2018a). Not surprisingly then, a large proportion of HSIs are located in these states (HACU, 2018b).

The federal government officially introduced the HSI designation in 1992, with the number of such institutions more than doubling through today (Núñez, 2015) (see Figure 4 for a visual representation of the growth in the number of HSIs from 1994 through 2015). As of 2017-2018, 523 institutions were listed as HSIs, with approximately 47% of them classified as two-year institutions, 25% as four-year public institutions, and 28% as four-year private colleges and universities (HACU, 2017). Nearly 33%, or 170 respectively, of all HSIs are located in California (HACU, 2018c). The number is likely to further grow as additional 328 institutions are emerging HSIs, defined as institutions with a full-time undergraduate Hispanic student enrollment of at least 15% but less than 25% (HACU, 2017). Currently, the list of emerging HSIs includes 47 from California, 46 from Texas, 32 from Florida, but also 27 from New York and 24 from Illinois (HACU, 2018c).

Figure 4. HSI Growth: 1994-2016

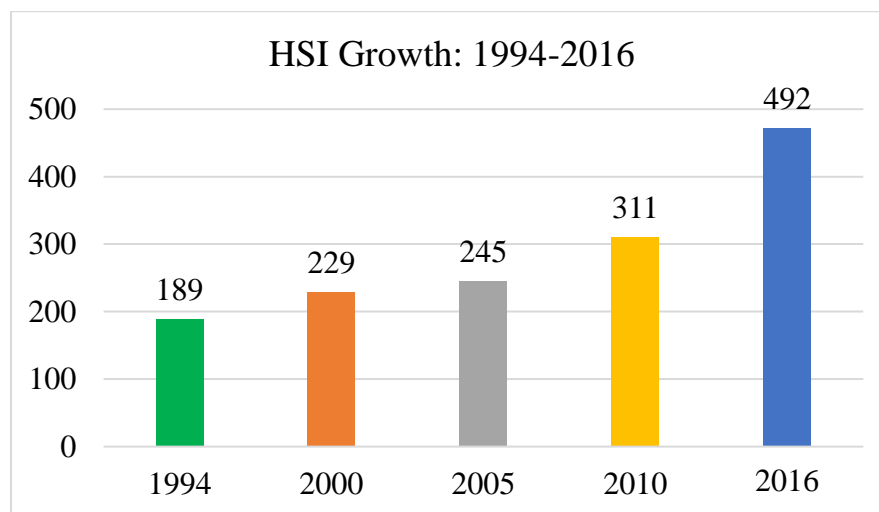


Figure 4. HSI growth from 1994 through 2016. From Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities. (2018a). 2018 fact sheet: Hispanic higher education and HSIs. Retrieved from https://www.hacu.net/images/hacu/OPAI/2018_HSI_FactSheet.pdf

The analysis of NCAA Division I data (NCAA, 2018b, 2018c) cross-listed with that published by the HACU (2018b) reveals that only 13.5% of all NCAA Division I Latinx athletes attend HSIs that comprise 8.5% of all NCAA Division I institutions, 28 respectively (see Appendix B with a list of NCAA Division I HSIs). There are 34 emerging HSIs within NCAA Division I, with 9.7% of all Latinx student-athletes participating in NCAA Division I sports at these institutions. Thus, in total, over 23% of all NCAA Division I Latinx student-athletes attend HSIs and emerging HSIs, which make up 19% of all the NCAA Division I membership. Thus, while Latinx non-athletes are overrepresented at HSIs (HACU, 2018a), the majority of Latinx student-athletes attend PWIs rather than HSIs (HACU, 2018b; NCAA, 2018b, 2018c). Importantly, as the next subsection explains, student outcomes vary among these institutional settings.

Student outcomes at HSIs. Scholars report that the identities as Latinxs are less salient for those attending HSIs due to the high proportion of Hispanic students, faculty and staff present

on campus (Arana et al., 2011; Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Núñez, 2014). Subsequently, Latinxs are likely to experience less racial stereotyping and microaggressions in HSIs in comparison to PWIs. Student-athletes report being a target of microaggressions along with other forms of prejudice and negative stereotyping as well (Comeaux, 2012; Paule & Gilson, 2010; Simons et al., 2007; Wininger & White, 2015). As noted in Johnson (2018), the perpetrators of microaggressions often view these acts as harmless and even complimentary although they indeed have a negative effect on students in terms of sense of belonging and persistence intentions.

Subsequently, the setting of HSIs may result in the lesser occurrence of stereotype threat, defined as one's fear of validating a negative stereotype for her/his social group that results in anxiety and subsequent diminished performance on various tasks (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Latinxs frequently experience stereotype threat at PWIs, which can result in a negative effect on their academic performance (Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fischer, 2003; Núñez, 2011). Studies such as that of Flores and Park (2013) suggest that attending HSIs is beneficial for Latinxs' academic success. Specifically, Flores and Park (2013) found no differences between Hispanic and White students in six-year graduations rates at four-year institutions after accounting for institutional characteristics. According to other scholars, Hispanics graduate at higher rates at HSIs in comparison to non-HSIs but these findings can be inherently justified by a higher proportion of Hispanics attending HSIs in comparison to non-HSIs (Espinosa, Turk, & Taylor, 2017; Laden, 2001, 2004). In contrast, other studies, such as that of Contreras and Contreras (2015), actually find lower college completion rates for Latinxs attending HSIs. Therefore, the conclusions about the effectiveness of HSIs are currently mixed.

Nonetheless, the participants of Arana et al.'s (2011) study described how the HSI environment allowed them to assert a sense of belonging due to feeling a sense of shared cultural identity with other members of the campus community. These mutual cultural experiences further led to heightened emotional support that encouraged engagement and persistence (Arana et al., 2011). However, access to peers of similar ethnic background is not the only benefit of attending HSIs. Students are also more likely to find faculty and staff who are Hispanic. While Latinxs encompass approximately 4% of faculty members nationally, HSIs employ on average 21% of them (Gasman & Conrad, 2013). Núñez (2011) found that students benefit from interacting with faculty members who validate their cultural backgrounds. While these faculty members can be of any ethnic/racial background, it is indeed helpful if they share a cultural heritage with the students. In fact, Zerquera and Gross (2015) found that high proportion of faculty members who were a racial/ethnic minority was positively related to persistence of college-going Latinxs.

However, the scholarly remarks in regard to HSIs' effectiveness in facilitating Latinx academic success are still currently mixed. Numerous studies did not find favorable educational outcomes for Latinxs attending HSIs in comparison to PWIs (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Nelson Laird et al., 2007). Specifically, Garcia (2013) found that the overall percentage of Latinx personnel and of Latinx student body were not significantly related to institutional graduation rates for Hispanic college students. Consequently, Garcia (2013) concluded that leaders of HSIs must look at other aspects of campus climate outside of structural diversity in order to increase degree completion of Latinxs.

Given the high number of Latinx students attending HSIs and their low level of college completion in comparison to other ethnic groups, HSIs face criticism for failing to carry out their

missions to properly serve Hispanic students (Calderon, 2015; Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Fosnacht & Nailos, 2016). However, as asserted by Núñez (2015), grouping all HSIs under one category and then collectively blaming them for lack of Latinx college success is not the right approach. Just like the ethnic category of Latinx and the label of student-athlete are proxy variables (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016), HSIs are diverse in their institutional types as well as the students they serve (Núñez, 2015). Thus, accounting for the institutional context is important when evaluating the performance of every HSI (Núñez, 2015).

Additionally, as Núñez (2017) advised, graduation rates should not be the sole focus in the evaluation of the outcomes of HSIs. Other metrics, such as institutional identity and behavior, should be evaluated as *Hispanic-producing* does not necessarily mean *Hispanic-serving*. In other words, HSIs with lower graduation rates of their Latinxs may employ faculty and staff who address the needs of this student population, making them feel welcome on campus (Núñez, 2017).

Understanding the Context of PWIs

In addition to studies on HSIs, the body of scholarly literature has an abundance of articles that explore the experiences of students attending PWIs (see Brunnsma et al., 2013; Cerezo & Chang, 2012; Flores & Garcia, 2009; Lopez, 2005; Nelson Laird et al., 2007; Von Robertson et al., 2016). However, unlike HSIs or HBCUs, the designation as PWI is not an official category of any U.S. higher education institution. Generally, scholars use the term PWI to define institutions where White students comprise the largest group of full-time undergraduate student enrollees (Bourke, 2016). However, as Bourke (2016) emphasized, the label of PWI is more than just a representation of a number of enrolled students who are White in comparison to those who are from traditionally underrepresented groups (e.g., students of color). Rather, the

designation represents that an institution operates with embedded institutional practices based on White ideology (Bourke, 2016).

Therefore, in this setting, only the knowledge of the dominant group counts as valuable (Lara & Lara, 2012; Yosso, 2005). Subsequently, minority students often perceive this environment as unwelcoming and at times even hostile (Rankin & Reason, 2005; Von Robertson et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009). According to the NCAA (2017a), 71% of NCAA Division I member institutions have more than half of their undergraduate population comprised of White students, thus falling under the umbrella term of PWIs. As such, many first-generation Latinx student-athletes navigate campus environments that reproduce the norms of the dominant culture, which provides them with some unique challenges in terms of adjustment. The next subsection highlights the particular experiences of *first-generation* students.

First-Generation Students and Campus Climate

Given that Latinxs have the lowest educational attainment rates of all ethnic/racial groups (Ryan & Bauman, 2016), it is not surprising that many of today's Hispanics are first-generation college students. HSIs enroll a large population of them (Núñez & Bowers, 2011; Schneider et al., 2006). Overall, an abundance of research exists that explores the relationship between the level of attained education of one's parents and college educational outcomes and experiences of their children. However, researchers utilize several different operational definitions of the term *first-generation*, which ultimately changes the number of students who fit this classification (Toutkoushian, Stollberg, & Slaton, 2015). For example, if both parents have a high school diploma or less and have never enrolled in higher education, nearly 40% of the U.S. population 25 years and over will count as first-generation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017b). The number rises to 57%, however, when one or both parents have some college experience but do not possess any

higher education degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017b). Yet, these are just two measures of the first-generation construct, with researchers utilizing many other variations of the definition in their studies (Toutkoushian et al., 2015).

For the purpose of this study, first-generation students are defined as those undergraduates whose parents have not graduated with a 4-year degree, a definition adapted from NCAA (2016). As of 2012, nearly 48% of Latinx undergraduate students in comparison to 42% of Blacks and 28% of Whites fit this definition, with either parent holding a high school diploma or less. Further, in comparison to their Black and White peers, Latinxs were least likely to have a parent with a bachelor's or an advanced degree (NCES, 2015) (see Table 2 below for overall percentage distribution of undergraduate students by race/ethnicity and highest parental education level attained by either parent). In addition, approximately 16% of today's NCAA athletes self-identify as first in their families to enroll in college (NCAA, 2016). When further disaggregated by race/ethnicity, 33% of Latinxs, the largest group of all races/ethnicities, are first-generation student-athletes (NCAA, 2016). In other words, Latinxs dominate the ranks of first-generation students as well as first-generation student-athletes today.

Table 2. Distribution of undergraduate students by race/ethnicity and highest education attained by either parent: 2011-2012

	High school diploma or less	Some college	Associate's degree	Bachelor's degree	Advanced degree
Hispanic	47.8%	14.5%	6.9%	13.8%	11.5%
Black	42%	16.9%	8.1%	15.5%	12.3%
White	28%	15%	8%	23.5%	20.4%

Note: From National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). *Profile of undergraduate students: 2011-12*. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015167.pdf>

Furthermore, as previously noted, institutional stratification within higher education is still prominent today. In particular, one's family background, including parental educational attainment level, predicts students' educational outcomes (Schudde & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Specifically, students with parents with a high school diploma or less are overrepresented in private for-profit institutions and public two-year colleges. In comparison, students with parents who have at least an associate's degree are more likely to enroll in four-year public colleges (NCES, 2012) (see Figure 5 for detailed information pertaining to the distribution of students by parents' highest educational level and institutional type). Approximately 38% of all Hispanics who attend four-year colleges and universities today are first-generation students (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007).

Figure 5. Parental Education Across Institutional Types: 2011-2012

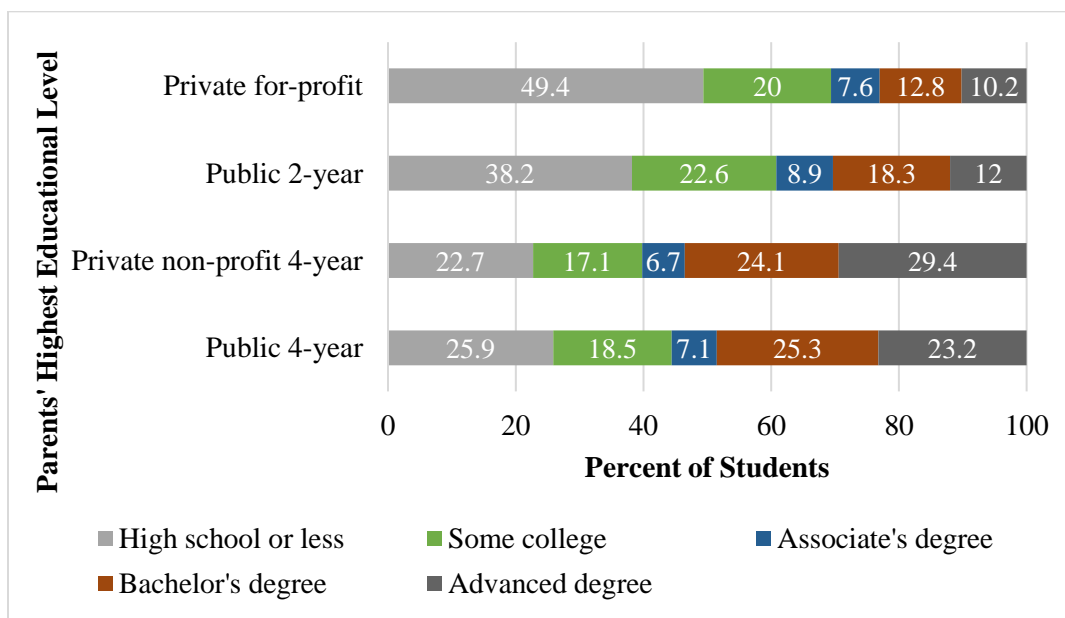


Figure 5. Parental education stratification in enrollment across institutional types. From National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). *2011-12 national postsecondary student aid study: Computation by QuickStats*. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/quickstats/default.aspx>

The literature on experiences of first-generation students largely utilizes a deficit lens, focusing on their failures rather than successes as college-goers (Demetriou, Meece, Eaker-Rich, & Powell, 2017). Specifically, Wildhagen (2015) criticizes that first-generation students are frequently portrayed as “academically deficient and in need of cultural transformation” (p. 285). Scholars highlight factors such as having to work and provide for their families while in college, lack of information from parents how to navigate college, and lower level of involvement in student engagement services and activities as reasons for first-generation students’ college non-persistence (Padgett, Johnson, & Pascarella, 2012; Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005).

Such negative attention on this particular college student group largely stems from statistical findings pertaining to degree attainment and persistence that is not favorable for first-generation students who lag behind their peers with parents who attended college (DeAngelo, Franke, Hurtado, Pryor, & Tran, 2011; Waburton et al., 2001). For example, in a study by DeAngelo et al. (2011), 27% of first-generation students graduated within four-years in comparison to 42% of non-first-generation students. Within five years, the number of students who attained a degree increased but the gap based on generational status still remained. Specifically, less than 45% of first-generation students in comparison to 60% of their peers graduated. By the sixth year, the number of graduating first-generation students increased to 50% in comparison to 64% for their peers (DeAngelo et al., 2011).

Yet, many first-generation college-goers persist and graduate, with their status as first in their families to attend college serving as a source of strength and motivation instead of a hindrance as suggested in other studies (Arana et al., 2011; Jamieson, 2005; O’Shea, 2016; Stuber, 2011). According to Kouyoumdjian et al. (2017), first- and second-generation Latinxs

actually do not differ in the number of challenges they face or sources of support on which they rely. Moreover, while the body of literature frequently links non-persistence of first-generation students to their families and their bank of knowledge, or lack of thereof, in regard to how to navigate the college environment, many researchers find the opposite to be truth, especially for first-generation Latinxs who come from a culture that highly values familial relationships (Arana et al., 2011; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017). As particularly emphasized by Gloria and Castellanos (2012), *familia* plays a pivotal role in college persistence of both first- and second-generation Latinx college students.

Family members are not the only important source of support for first-generation Latinx students. Various on-campus agents from the ranks of faculty and staff along with peers also contribute to their college success (Jehangir, 2010; Núñez, 2011; Yosso et al., 2009).

Undeniably, first-generation students are not immune to experiencing prejudice that affects their sense of belonging (Ward, 2013). However, as Ward (2013) explicitly noted, the first-generation status was inextricably linked with stereotypes concerning race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. Nonetheless, in order to counter the negative effects of racism and stereotyping, first-generation and/or Latinx students benefit from validation (Jehangir, 2010; Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Núñez, 2011; Rendón, 1994; Smith & Lucena, 2016; Yosso et al., 2009). Validation, which can be academic, interpersonal and/or cultural, results in feelings of acceptance, belonging on campus, and competence for students who at first had doubts about their ability to succeed in college (Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón, 1994).

Based on the deficit-based framework, first-generation students are presumed to come from cultural backgrounds that disadvantage them and hinder their chances at college success (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012; Wildhagen, 2015; Stephens,

Townsend, Markus, & Phillips, 2012). Specifically, many first-generation students come from working-class families that value interdependence/community while colleges/universities expect and reward independence (Stephens, Fryberg, et al., 2012; Stephens, Townsend, et al., 2012). Not surprisingly, first-generation students report lower levels of sense of belonging and higher levels of stress and depression than their peers (Stebbleton, Soria, & Huesman, 2014).

Subsequently, first-generation college-goers reportedly experience a cross-cultural value conflict and subsequent culture shock along with feelings of isolation upon their arrival at the unfamiliar terrain of higher education (Burgos-Cienfuegos, Vasquez-Salgado, Ruedas-Garcia, & Greenfield, 2015; Cushman, 2007; Núñez, 2011; Stephens, Townsend, et al., 2012). However, the scholars that adopt an asset-based research do not view cultural differences as weaknesses reducing one's chances of graduating from college. Rather, as Yosso (2005) particularly noted, one's culture, has the capacity to nurture and empower. First-generation Latinx students, in particular, utilize their cultural capital in order to persist towards degree attainment (Núñez & Sansone, 2016; O'Shea, 2016).

Forms of Capital

First-year students do not arrive at college campuses as blank slates. Rather, they come in with a range of experiences and resources, also known as capital, that they acquire from their homes, communities, and primary/secondary schools (Jamieson, 2005; Lara & Lara, 2012; Martinez, 2012; Yosso, 2005). This capital is expanded in college through interaction with various institutional agents and peers (Jamieson, 2005; Museus & Neville, 2012; Núñez, 2011; Rendón, 1994). As such, this section features the (1) cultural capital, (2) social capital, and (3) familial capital utilized by first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports.

Cultural Capital

The scholars utilizing the deficit-informed research use the cultural incongruity for Latinxs with the dominant culture as the justification for their non-persistence. Many of such studies utilize Tinto's (1975, 1978) theory of college persistence according to which students must assimilate to the dominant ideology of the college campus. Specifically, college students must abandon their own cultural identity and break away from their home community in order to persist towards degree attainment. A lack of assimilation leads to dropping out of college (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's work is considered a seminal theory that has been continuously applied to persistence studies through today. Surprisingly, despite Tinto admitting that his theory was developed with the traditional student populations in mind, to this day, scholars utilize this framework with non-traditional students as well, including Latinxs, athletes, and first-generation students.

As assessed by various scholars, the knowledge of people from traditionally marginalized groups does not count as valuable and thus is discounted in the current U.S. society, higher education included (Lara & Lara, 2012; Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; Yosso, 2005). This presumption originated from the work by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) who argued that the knowledge, social skills, abilities, and other forms of the cultural capital of the dominant groups, in particular of those who are White and members of upper and middle classes, are the most valuable in this society. Accordingly, only those who possess this capital will gain social mobility (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). To date, this theoretical framework has been utilized to explain the gaps in educational attainment for racial/ethnic minorities and other non-traditional student groups, such as first-generation college-goers, who are painted as *disadvantaged*, with their cultural capital not recognized as worthy (Lara & Lara, 2012; Yosso, 2005). Yosso

effectively summarizes this trend, stating that as of today, communities of people are divided into those that are deemed as *culturally wealthy* and those that are *culturally poor*. The culture of White, middle class is currently set as the standard with which all other cultures are compared (Yosso, 2005).

Guided by CRT and LatCrit, which is CRT's extension to Latinx population, a group of scholars challenge this particular narrative (Yosso, 2005). Specifically, a large body of literature has been published in recent years that highlights the different forms of cultural capital that racial/ethnic minority people possess and employ in order to navigate the current landscape of higher education (e.g., Cerezo, Lyda, Enriquez, Beristianos, & Connor, 2015; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Von Robertson et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009). In specific, as explained by Yosso et al. (2009), Latinxs rely on the cultural resources of their home communities in order to combat the negative experiences of racism experienced on campus.

According to Tinto (1993), traditional students go through the stages of *separation*, *transition*, and *incorporation* when adjusting from high school to college. Further, their cultural resources remain the same, with their fit into the campus culture being mostly guaranteed (Tinto, 1993). However, the opposite is true for Latinxs who go through a unique transition process, moving through the stages of *rejection*, *community building*, and *critical navigation between multiple worlds* (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; Yosso et al., 2009).

Specifically, in order to instill a sense of belonging on unwelcoming campuses, such as at PWIs, Latinxs develop academic and social counter-spaces that are located both on and off campus (Cerezo et al., 2015; Flores & Garcia, 2009; Garcia, 2016; Núñez, 2011; Von Robertson et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009). Counter-spaces provide a supportive and nurturing environment for Latinxs and other ethnic/racial minorities, in which their knowledge is viewed as valuable

and their experiences are validated (Garcia, 2016; Solórzano et al., 2000). Further, these spaces enable Latinxs to develop friendships with others of the same ethnic identity (Von Robertson et al., 2016). Counter-spaces establish a positive racial climate and challenge deficit views on people of color for students as well as the student affairs staff working within them (Garcia, 2015).

Counter-spaces take on various forms, such as fraternity/sorority organizations, on-campus Hispanic student centers, or courses in Chicano studies (Delgado-Guerrero et al., 2014; Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Garcia, 2015; Garcia et al., 2016; Núñez, 2011; Von Robertson et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009). Some counter-spaces are not formally structured, consisting of just informal interactions among Latinxs seeking out other Latinxs on campus to develop friendships, to share and enjoy culturally authentic meals, and to engage in conversations in their native language (Yosso et al., 2009). These counter-spaces allow Latinxs to exist simultaneously in two cultural worlds of their home community and that of their university/college, playing an important role in their persistence to degree attainment (Delgado et al., 2014; Von Robertson et al., 2016).

Cultural capital of student-athletes. While scholars refer to the concept of cultural capital mostly in studies analyzing the experiences of minorities and first-generation students, it is important to note that other subsets of student population possess their distinctive cultural capital as well. Specifically, the culture of intercollegiate athletics is unique, providing certain benefits to its participants that are not accessible to non-athletes (Beyer & Hannah, 2000; Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Gayles, 2009; Hyatt, 2003). For example, NCAA Division I institutions are required to provide academic support services for student-athletes. As Otto, Martinez, and Barnhill (2019) found, the perceptions of athletic

academic services enhance the college experience of student-athletes. Specifically, the researchers found that the first-year athletes' perceptions of quality of such services influenced their satisfaction, emotional adjustment, and involvement on campus (Otto et al., 2019). The spending on amenities with such services has been gradually increasing in recent years as institutions continue to expand their pool of athletic academic staff, such as tutors, learning specialists, and advisors, in addition to upgrading their academic facilities that are available for use only by student-athletes (Huml et al., 2014).

Through these additional services and facilities, student-athletes get access to specialized programming in order to compensate for the time spent in athletic endeavors away from academics. While the programming is designed to cultivate certain educational outcomes, participation in athletic activities themselves is linked to the development of various positive attributes and abilities, such as leadership, critical thinking, problem solving, and emotional intelligence (Brand, 2006; Comeaux et al., 2014; Sauer, Desmond, & Heintzelman, 2013; Snodgrass, 2015). Notably, studies on experiences of Latinx athletes found athletic involvement to contribute to their persistence to degree attainment as it kept them on-task, challenged them to manage time efficiently, and work hard in courses to maintain grades for athletic eligibility (Bendick, 2017; Guillaume & Trujillo, 2018).

Moreover, according to a study by the NCAA (2015a), 90% of student-athletes reported that participation in college sports had a positive impact on the development and/or enhancement of their teamwork skills, personal responsibility, work ethic, self-confidence, time-management, study skills, commitment to civic engagement, and multicultural awareness. According to Chalfin (2015), when hiring new employees, many companies specifically look for former athletes due to the general belief that athletic participation in college instills these desirable

skills. In fact, Sauer et al. (2013) found that former athletes earned higher salaries than non-athletes during the first 10 years of their professional careers after graduation.

The few available studies on Latinx student-athletes, in specific, also report the aforementioned positive effects of athletic participation on their college experiences and life after graduation (e.g., Bendick, 2017; Guillaume & Trujillo, 2018; Martinez, 2018). Notably, as Guillaume and Trujillo (2018) found that participation in college athletics provided Latinx student-athletes with the opportunity to further discover and develop their ethnic identity. These athletes recognized they were one of few Latinxs on their teams. As they reflected on their cultural backgrounds, they attributed their athletic and academic accomplishments to their heritage. The participants in this study were former Latinx student-athletes who pursued graduate education. As such, the participants in this study attributed their persistence through graduate school to their cultural heritage but also to the previous experiences and skills gained as collegiate student-athletes (Guillaume & Trujillo, 2018).

It is important to note that while collegiate student-athletes possess distinctive cultural capital, it is not easily accessible by everyone. As Hextrum (2018) elucidated, the NCAA's amateurism rules cater to student-athletes from middle- and upper-class families who have access to economic and social capital which then converts to cultural capital. Specifically, Hextrum (2018) found that the NCAA rules hyperregulate the athletic recruitment of athletes from working classes but underregulate the recruitment of those who are more affluent and can take advantage of avenues such as unofficial visits, recruiting agents, and sports camps (Hextrum, 2018). McGovern (2018) reported similar findings in her study on Latina college student-athletes. Specifically, McGovern (2018) found that economic, cultural, and social capital influenced Latinas' youth involvement in sports and subsequent recruitment into the NCAA.

Latinas who came from families with connections to people familiar with the recruiting process and/or resources to afford participation in organized youth sports or involvement with specialized travel teams were more likely to earn an athletic scholarship in college (McGovern, 2018). In other words, the research on college athletes, and Latinxs in specific, points out to an embedded system within intercollegiate athletics that values cultural capital of dominant groups over others (McGovern, 2018). Subsequently, systemic barriers prevent access to students from traditionally underrepresented groups to the NCAA rather than “inherent cultural deficiencies” (McGovern, 2018, p. 165).

Social Capital

According to Yosso (2005), one’s cultural capital has six facets, which are aspirational, familial, linguistic, resistant, navigational, and social. Studies on the student-athlete population particularly describe the forms of *social capital* athletes utilize in order to succeed in college (e.g., Bimper, 2016; Carter-Francique et al., 2015; Clopton, 2012). The literature on college-going Latinxs, including those who are first-generation students, also frequently emphasizes their reliance on a strong network of social support (e.g., Baker, 2013; Matos, 2015; Museus & Neville, 2012; Núñez, 2008; Pérez, 2017). A few recent studies specifically highlight the importance of social capital for Latinx student-athletes (e.g., Bendick, 2017; Guillaume & Trujillo, 2018; Martinez, 2018; McGovern, 2018; Ramos, 2018).

According to Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth model, social capital consists of networks of people and community resources that minority people rely on throughout their lives. Taylor (2011) defines social support as a perception or experience of being valued, loved, and cared for by others. Further, Taylor (2011) splits social support into additional divisions of informational, instrumental, and emotional support (Taylor, 2011). Padgett et al. (2012) further

expand the definition of social capital, referring to it as “the information, values, norms, standards, and expectations for education as communicated to individuals through the interpersonal relationships they share with others” (p. 246).

Social capital of first-generation Latinx students. As discussed throughout the previous sections, the body of literature consistently reports on the importance of social support networks for Latinxs, including those who are first-generation students, when pursuing higher education. In specific, studies highlight the essential role of various on-campus agents including peers, faculty, and staff on the development, engagement, and persistence of college-goers who are Latinx (Baker, 2013; Garcia & Ramirez, 2015; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Hurtado & Alvarado, 2015; Jehangir, 2010; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Lopez, 2005; Museus & Neville, 2012; Núñez, 2011; O’Keeffe, 2013; Rendón, 1994; Strayhorn, 2008; Tett et al., 2017; Torres & Hernandez, 2010; Yosso et al., 2009). For example, Torres and Hernandez (2010) document how having an assigned advisor is linked to higher level of one’s institutional commitment, academic integration, and cultural affinity. Further, Cerezo and Chang (2012) found that association with Latinx peers was a significant predictor of academic success of Hispanic students as measured by college GPA. Therefore, support from various institutional agents is vital for Latinxs.

A study by Museus and Neville (2012) underscore four common characteristics of institutional agents who were identified to have a positive impact on Latinx, Black, and Asian American students. Explicitly, these agents provided holistic as well as proactive support and also shared common cultural backgrounds, experiences, and/or knowledge with their students. Additionally, these agents were authentic in their interactions, showing that they genuinely cared about their students’ success and well-being (Museus & Neville, 2012). Subsequently, agents with these qualities were capable of remedying the challenges Latinxs encountered in their

college journeys (Calderon, 2015). In other words, such agents provide academic and/or interpersonal validation of Hispanic students that allow them to gain confidence in their ability to persist in college while also heightening their sense of belonging within higher education and the particular campus setting (Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón, 1994). Accordingly, such agents can be considered as mentors to students, which research identifies as essential for student development and heightened college and life satisfaction (Castellanos, Gloria, Besson, & Harvey, 2016; Vela et al., 2016). Administrators and staff, as well as peers, can become mentors (Castellanos et al., 2016; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Yosso et al., 2009).

Lastly, it is important to note that institutional agents' role reaches far beyond just providing their students with resources to navigate the college environment. As noted by Stanton-Salazar (2011), institutional agents are also committed to empowering students from traditionally underrepresented groups. Referred to as *empowering agents*, their support and guidance can thwart negative effects of stereotype threat, validate students' sense of belonging at the college/university, and result in heightened intentions to persist (Dowd et al., 2013; Garcia & Ramirez, 2015; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Tovar, 2015). As noted by Garcia and Ramirez (2015), such empowering agents foster change directly to students but also indirectly to their colleagues who then provide support to students and empower them. Thus, social capital is vital for Latinx students' persistence to degree.

Social capital of student-athletes. In many instances, student-athletes rely for support and guidance of the same on-campus agents as their non-athlete peers, which include faculty members, academic advisors, and other administrators and support staff (Carter-Francique et al., 2015; Crawford, 2007; Comeaux et al., 2014; Guillaume & Trujillo, 2018; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Rankin et al., 2016; Scarcella, 2016; Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, & Hannah, 2006). For

example, more than two-thirds of collegiate athletes report that they have a close personal relationship with a faculty member (NCAA, 2016). Furthermore, Umbach et al. (2006) conclude that student-athletes do not differ from their non-athlete peers in the frequency of interaction with faculty. Yet, given the differences in their social capital, student-athletes also rely on an additional group of personnel who is employed to solely work with this subset of student population such as coaches, athletic academic advisors/counselors, and other athletic support staff members (Bendick, 2017; Crawford, 2007; Darvin et al., 2017; Guillaume & Trujillo, 2018; Martinez, 2018; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Ramos, 2018; Rankin et al., 2016; Scarcella, 2016; Traynowicz et al., 2016). As Rankin et al. (2016) found, interactions with athletic personnel and faculty have a positive impact on student-athletes' academic and athletic success.

In particular, coaches play an important role in influencing athletes' academic goals and overall college experience (Bendick, 2017; Crawford, 2007; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Scarcella, 2016). For example, in a study by the NCAA (2016), 81% of all male and 85% of all female Division I student-athletes indicate that their head coach cares about their persistence to degree attainment. Moreover, if faced with an issue or problem on a team, athletes indicate that they would feel most comfortable reaching out for help to their coaches rather than faculty or administrators (NCAA, 2016). Similarly, Crawford (2007) reports that more than 78% athletes state that their head coach and/or assistant coach had a positive influence on their college experience, which is important as it makes them feel valued and belonging at the team and the university/college. Notably, while college coaches have a large impact on the experiences of their student-athletes, some athletes remain in close contact with their past club or middle/high school coaches (Darvin et al., 2017). For example, in one study, several Latina Division I student-athletes indicated they continue communicating with their past coaches who once in a

while check in with them during their time in college (Darvin et al., 2017). In other words, coaching staff, both past and present, can be a difference maker for student-athletes, serving as an important source of support and validation that results in heightened intentions to persist to degree attainment.

Yet, given that the student-athlete group is highly heterogeneous in nature, differences in regard to social capital are apparent among the different subsets of this particular student population. For example, Clopton (2012) found that differences exist in social capital outcomes based on gender and sport type of NCAA Division I student-athletes. In specific, female student-athletes describe having more social networks than male student-athletes. Furthermore, female student-athletes who participate in team sports report higher social capital in comparison to their female peers from individual sports. In contrast, male student-athletes from individual sports report higher social capital in comparison to men from team sports (Clopton, 2012). Similarly, Crawford (2007) conclude that female student-athletes interact more frequently than their male counterparts with non-athlete peers.

Although currently underexplored in literature, differences in social support networks also likely exist among athletes from revenue and non-revenue sports. In a rare study on this topic conducted by Crawford (2007), athletes from revenue sports were more likely to interact with faculty and advisors in comparison to athletes from non-revenue sports. Yet, according to Gaston-Gayles and Hu (2009), non-revenue sport athletes interacted with students other than teammates at higher rates than revenue athletes did. Thus, these findings suggest that athletes from revenue sports rely more on a structured support from faculty and staff while non-revenue athletes instead reach out to their peers. Additionally, counter to other studies on first-generation students, Traynowicz et al. (2016) found that male Division I student-athletes who were first in

their families to attend college interacted more frequently with non-athlete peers and faculty members than non-first-generation student-athletes. Last, as discussed by Crawford (2007), junior, senior, and fifth-year athletes interacted more with faculty and staff in comparison to their first-year and sophomore teammates. This finding ratifies that building trust in institutional agents and establishing on-campus social support networks takes time. Overall, much is still to be learned about college student-athletes in regard to social capital given that they come from diverse backgrounds and possess multiple interconnected social identities that influence their overall college experiences and patterns of behavior.

Familial Capital

While students, and particularly those who are Latinxs, rely on a rich social network of on-campus agents, scholars also emphasize the importance of familial capital on their persistence intentions (Yosso, 2005). Familial capital consists of knowledge and resources gained from one's immediate and/or extended family (Yosso, 2005). Family members empower their youth through their support, guidance, and nurturance (Matos, 2015). As previously mentioned, the literature on first-generation Latinxs highlights the role of one's kin, or *familia*, on their successful educational outcomes in college (Arana et al., 2011; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Matos, 2015).

The familial capital of first-generation Latinx students. Family is one of the most important forms of social capital possessed by Latinx college students. As Cejda, Casparis, and Rhodes (2002) found, 60% of their Latinx participants attending an HSI discussed their family's influence on their educational decisions. Overall, the role of family is complex, especially for first-generation Hispanic students (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). As Gloria and Castellanos (2012) observe, at first, the families of first-generation Latinxs questioned their motives to go

away to college in fears of abandonment. However, their children interpreted these accusations and questions as a form of concern, care, and support for their well-being and used them as a motivation to persist in college. In particular, a theme of strong individual motivation to achieve on behalf of one's family emerged in Gloria and Castellanos' (2012) study, which depicted the importance of strong familial ties for Latinxs and especially those who are first in their families to pursue a college education. Essentially, first-generation Latinxs want to make their families proud, which motivates them to persist towards degree attainment (Jamieson, 2005; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Storlie et al., 2016).

Likewise, Matos' (2015) study links familial influence to Hispanic students' college engagement and persistence. Interestingly, the participants of the study shared narratives of their families motivating them to pursue and persist throughout college in order to get a better chance at life. Students shared descriptions of their parents' sacrifices that allowed them to enroll in college. Subsequently, Matos' (2015) coined a new form of cultural capital of *finishing*, which encompasses Yosso' (2005) notions of *aspirational* and *familial* capital. Aspirational capital refers to one's resiliency to overcome various challenges encountered in order to achieve her/his hopes and dreams (Yosso, 2005). In Matos' (2015) study, Latinxs did not strive to graduate but to *finish* their education, meaning "to rectify all of the wrongs that their parents endured" (p. 448).

The familial capital of student-athletes. While familial capital is a term mostly used by minority students and first-generation college-goers, the influence of family is not limited to only this specific subset of the student body. In particular, as found by Potuto and O'Hanlon (2007), student-athletes, no matter their ethnic/racial background, also depend on their family members for social and emotional support. As noted by Hinderlie and Kenny (2002), while on-campus

agents are important sources of support for student-athletes, they should not challenge or replace the support provided by their families. Rather, institutional staff should encourage students from traditionally underrepresented groups to maintain their close connections with their home community in order to successfully adjust to the culture of the college/university (Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002; Jamieson, 2005; Lara & Lara, 2012). In a more recent research study, Dorsch, Lowe, Dotterer, and Lyons (2016) support Hinderlie and Kenny's (2002) assertions, as they found that academic and athletic engagement by parents positively predicted academic self-efficacy and athletic satisfaction of NCAA Division I student-athletes.

Furthermore, studies on minority student-athletes, such as that of Carter-Francique et al. (2015), indicate that families, and parents, in particular, are an important source of emotional, informational, and appraisal support. In specific, participants of Carter-Francique's et al. (2015) study discussed how their families contributed to their academic success by monitoring their academic progress, emphasizing the importance of academics and a college degree, and providing financial resources. Further, in one of the few studies on Latinx college athletes in specific, Darvin et al. (2017) reports on the importance of parents and siblings in the introduction of Latina athletes into the sport as well as in their subsequent persistent participation that resulted into recruitment to the NCAA Division I athletics. Importantly, some of the Latinas discussed how they were motivated to persist in their college sport in order to help their families financially by having their tuition and fees covered via athletic scholarships (Darvin et al., 2017).

Jamieson (2005) made similar conclusions, positing that earning an athletic scholarship converted into cultural capital for the entire family, not just individual Latina athletes. Specifically, in this study, Latinas turned their athletic talent into cultural capital by earning an athletic scholarship and going to college. Overall, as Jamieson (2005) posit, families are the key

resource for Latina student-athletes to achieve athletic and academic success. In specific, while Latinas accumulate their cultural capital in their families and home communities, they take it with them to college, which serves as a site for this capital's display every day (Jamieson, 2005). Other studies on Latinx student-athletes found similar findings relating to the importance of familial capital for their academic success and persistence in college (e.g., Bendick, 2017; Guillaume & Trujillo, 2018; Ramos, 2018). While the majority of studies on this population only focus on Hispanic female athletes, all of the available studies highlight the use of familial capital regardless of gender (Bendick, 2017; Guillaume & Trujillo, 2018; Ramos, 2018). Therefore, families are indeed an important source of cultural capital for athletes who are Latinx.

Familial influence is profound on first-generation student-athletes as well (Navarro & Malvaso, 2016). In specific, Navararro and Malvaso (2016) found that while first-generation student-athletes did not have aspirations to pursue similar professions as their parents, they were still influential in their career choice. This finding is consistent with other studies on first-generation students that discussed how families, and parents, in particular, are a source of strength and motivation of their children who are first in their families to pursue higher education (Arana et al., 2011; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Storlie et al., 2016; Stuber, 2011).

Student Engagement Services and Activities

As noted in the previous sections, the current body of literature highlights the importance of social support networks consisting of institutional agents and family members on persistence intentions of first-generation Latinx student-athletes. These individuals, however, are not the only sources of validation that result in students' heightened sense of belonging at the institution and confidence in their academic abilities. Today's colleges and universities provide a wide array of student engagement services and activities that can play an important role in their persistence

and academic success as well (Ensign & Woods, 2014; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Kuh et al., 2010). As noted by various scholars, levels of academic preparation and motivation are not the best predictors of whether students persist towards degree attainment (Kuh, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Rather, what students do in terms of student engagement outside of class while in college is more indicative of college persistence than their level of academic skills (Kuh et al., 2010). As Kuh et al. (2010) conclude, with the help of intentional student affairs programming and involvement in educationally purposeful activities, success can be achieved by all students (Kuh et al., 2010). As such, the following sections provide details about (1) measures and (2) definition of student engagement. Further, patterns of student engagement for (3) Latinxs, (4) first-generation students, and (5) student-athletes are described in this section of the literature review.

Measures of Student Engagement

Increasingly, student engagement is widely recognized as an indicator of institutional excellence that is measured by instruments such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) (Axelson & Flick, 2010). The NSSE measures four themes of engagement: (1) academic challenge, (2) learning with peers, (3) experiences with faculty, and (4) campus environment (NSSE, n.d.). All of the themes are associated with their own engagement indicators and high impact practices (see Figure 6 that lists all engagement indicators divided by theme). Many of today's studies comparing student engagement of various student populations analyze data published by the NSSE. All the items on the NSSE were theoretically and empirically tested via quantitative and qualitative methods, resulting in a strong construct validity and high reliability (NSSE, n.d.).

Figure 6. Themes and Indicators of Student Engagement

Theme	Engagement Indicators/High Impact Practices
1. Academic challenge	Higher-order learning Reflective and integrative learning Learning strategies Quantitative reasoning
2. Learning with peers	Collaborative learning Discussions with diverse others
3. Experiences with faculty	Student-faculty interaction Effective teaching practices
4. Campus environment	Quality of interactions Supportive environment

Figure 6. Themes and indicators of engagement as measured by the NSSE. From National Survey of Student Engagement. (n.d.). *Engagement indicators*. Retrieved from http://nsse.indiana.edu/html/engagement_indicators.cfm

Student engagement happens both inside and outside of the classroom (Kuh, 2009). This study, however, intends to focus solely on exploring engagement outside of the classroom, which is captured in the NSSE's theme of *campus environment* and within its indicators of *quality interactions* and *supportive environment* (NSSE, n.d.). The campus environments, which foster student learning and development, are characterized by students interacting with various institutional agents, including faculty, student affairs personnel, and other on-campus staff as well as their student peers (NSSE, n.d.). Furthermore, students have access to a wide array of services and activities that provide them the necessary support to succeed in college academically but also provide opportunities to be involved socially with other students from different backgrounds. All of these interactions are important in fostering students' overall well-being and life satisfaction. Examples of such student engagement services and activities are counseling services, campus events in athletics or performing arts, tutoring centers, and participation opportunities in athletics or theater clubs (NSSE, n.d.).

While many of these activities do not directly result in specific academic outcomes, they are still important as they instill a sense of belonging on campus for those involved (Bok, 2006; Leppel, 2006). Specifically, as Baron and Corbin (2012) posit, extracurricular activity involvement allows students to interact with their peers and overcome the isolation of studying. Additionally, these activities promote the development of various skills (e.g., teamwork and mental toughness) that students may not master in the classroom via traditional teaching methods (Baron & Corbin, 2012; Kuh et al., 2010). Athletic participation, in particular, is believed to generate various positive outcomes such as life satisfaction, happiness, high self-esteem, self-confidence, and sense of achievement, which convert into higher rates of institutional retention and student persistence to degree (Gaston-Gayles, 2009; Leppel, 2006).

As such, the goal of higher education is to prepare students for life after graduation, fostering their knowledge, skills, and overall holistic development (King & Baxter Magolda, 2011). While learning inside the classroom is important for achieving this goal, a multitude of knowledge and skills are attained via experiences through on-campus activities outside of the lecture halls that are coordinated by student affairs personnel (Kuh et al., 2010). Hence, student affairs programming and services that engage students play a vital role in guiding students' holistic development and are an important part of colleges/universities (Reason & Broido, 2011).

What is Student Engagement?

Student engagement is a topic widely discussed in scholarly literature today. Kahu (2013) goes as far to call the term a *buzzword* in higher education. The concept of engagement was introduced in the seminal work of Astin (1984) with his theory of student involvement, according to which highly involved students are more likely to persist and graduate. Astin (1984) defined the term of involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the

student devotes to the academic experience” (p. 518). Examples of such involvement include frequent interaction with faculty and student peers, participation in on-campus student organizations and activities, and spending time on campus (Astin, 1984). Notably, in his previous work, Astin (1975) described how institutional fit plays an important role in student’s level of involvement. Students that feel welcome and can identify with the campus environment are more likely to become involved (Astin, 1975). Overall, high level of student involvement results in student learning and development (Astin, 1984).

The work by Astin (1984) serves as an important foundation for a plethora of studies that have been published in the decades since the publication of this theory. Instead of the word *involvement*, however, today’s scholars more widely use the term *engagement* (Axelson & Flick, 2010). As Harper and Quaye (2009) noted, engagement refers to action while involvement does not. Students can be involved but still be disengaged (Harper & Quaye, 2009). The word engagement also implies interaction with students and institutional agents, rather than mere involvement in campus activities (Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002). Overall, scholars currently utilize numerous, but often times contradicting, definitions of student engagement (Axelson & Flick, 2010; Baron & Corbin, 2012; Kahu, 2013). According to Kahu (2013), researchers focus on either behavioral, psychological, socio-cultural, or holistic perspective of student engagement. In contrast, Baron and Corbin (2012) divide the definitions of student engagement into three categories, with scholars emphasizing either behavioral, cognitive, or emotional component of the concept. Axelson and Flick (2010) summarize the literature by stating that these definitions are frequently “tangled semantically as well as conceptually” (p. 41). As such, student engagement is a complex paradigm.

Yet, in spite of the lack of uniformity in the definition of this concept, student engagement is today widely recognized as a valid construct positively affecting student development, learning, and persistence (Kahu, 2013). As asserted by Trowler and Trowler (2010), “the value of engagement is no longer questioned” (p. 9). Research links student engagement with improvements in outcomes that range from heightened persistence, critical thinking abilities, self-esteem, and accrual of social capital to positive identity formation and overall college satisfaction (Astin, 1975, 1984, 1993; Harper, 2008; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Kuh, 2009; Martin, 2012; Outcalt & Skewes-Cox, 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pike, Kuh, & Gonyea, 2003; Tinto, 1993, 2000, 2005).

Despite the diversity of today’s students, empirical evidence suggests that students’ backgrounds characteristics, such as one’s race/ethnicity, have a limited influence on their level of student engagement and on the types of activities involved (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009; Kuh et al., 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Wilson et al., 2013). In other words, who students are does not matter much in determining what students do while in college (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009). Rather, the type of involvement in student engagement services and activities varies depending on students’ backgrounds *in combination with* the institutional setting, type, and mission (Harper & Quaye, 2009; Kezar & Kinzie, 2006; Manning et al., 2006; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Therefore, as Baron and Corbin (2012) effectively summarized it, *one-size-fits-all* is not an effective approach to implementation of student engagement services and activities.

According to Kezar and Kinzie (2006), institutions that serve particular student populations, such as HSIs and HBCUs, should emphasize activities and services that foster empowerment and leadership development of the student populations they serve in order to enhance their learning

experience. Moreover, it is important to note that student engagement is a *two-way street* (Kuh, 2009). In the original Astin's (1984) theory, the responsibility to become involved depended upon the students' efforts to seek out these opportunities and assimilate into the dominant college culture. However, in reality, both the students and higher education institutions have the responsibility to foster student engagement (Kuh, 2009; Manning et al., 2006; Outcalt & Skewes-Fox, 2002). Particularly, institutions need to expand efforts to create initiatives and programming that place students' identities (e.g., racial or ethnic) at the forefront of the learning process in order to meet their unique needs (Quaye et al., 2009). As Astin (1975) asserted, students who feel comfortable on their campuses are more likely to get involved. Therefore, all colleges/universities need to change their approach to working with students from traditionally underrepresented groups in order to encourage their involvement and validate their belonging on their campuses.

Student Engagement of Latinx Students

Nearly 1 in 3 of first-year Latinx college students did not return to college for their sophomore year in 2016 (NSCRC, 2017). However, as suggested by Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008), if they participate in educationally purposeful activities, they are more likely to persist in college and perform better academically as student engagement has compensatory effects for students from traditionally underrepresented groups. In specific, Kuh et al. (2008) note that while student engagement benefits all students, the benefits are the greatest for minority, first-generation, and academically underprepared students. Minority students who are more involved in formal social campus activities are more likely to persist (Fischer, 2007).

As noted previously, the current climate at many U.S. institutions is unwelcoming to Latinxs who frequently report a lower sense of belonging on college campuses in comparison to

their peers from other racial/ethnic backgrounds (Chang et al., 2011; Fischer, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Locks et al., 2008; Rodriguez et al., 2017).

Subsequently, a wide range of institutional agents that Latinxs meet via engagement in various on-campus services and activities can support Latinxs and make them feel more welcome on these campuses. Specifically, in a study by Kouyoumdjian et al. (2017), Latinxs attributed their college success to services provided by their institutions that included an office for students with disabilities, tutoring, and transfer programs.

By the same token, other studies exploring Latinx student population identified institutional agents and/or resources gained from involvement with student affairs services of academic advising, tutoring, counseling programs, career services, and peer mentoring programs (Berríos-Allison, 2011; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Torres & Hernandez, 2010; Tovar, 2014). An access to these services allowed Latinxs to form a network of supportive individuals who viewed and validated them as students on campuses, thus increasing their sense of belonging, intentions to persist, and confidence in academic abilities (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Importantly, these individuals did not try to change these students. Rather, they allowed Latinxs to remain true to their cultural heritage by accepting and affirming their culture (Garcia & Ramirez, 2015).

In addition to utilization of campus support services, Latinxs participate in various extracurricular activities, such as Latinx-centered organizations, Greek sororities and fraternities, religious organizations, art-specific clubs, and intramural sports (Baker, 2007; Cerezo et al., 2015; Moreno & Bañuelos, 2013). Notably, many studies on student organizations overlap with the literature on peer support (Mercedes, 2013). This is not surprising given that researchers often link strong peer support network with a greater sense of belonging on campus that converts

into higher involvement in student engagement activities and services (Kuh et al., 2006; Musoba, Collazo, & Placide, 2013; Nuñez, 2009). Further, students are able to meet peers from diverse backgrounds through these engagement opportunities, with many of these social encounters possibly developing into long-lasting friendships. As Tello and Lonn (2017) posit, close friends can become part of Latinx *familia* that is highly valued in Latinx culture. Therefore, as particularly noted by Musoba et al. (2013), while institutional staff members provide helpful resources, peer social groups are the true difference maker in instilling a sense of belonging to the institution for Latinx students.

Overall, the level of involvement in these activities by Latinxs varies across institutions. For example, in a study by Young, Rennick, and Franco (2014) conducted at highly selective institutions in California, Latinxs reported the lowest levels of extracurricular engagement among all ethnic/racial groups. However, in another study where data were collected across a wide range of institutional settings including HBCUs, large research institutions, and women's colleges, no significant differences across ethnicity or gender were found (Wilson et al., 2013). Though, students engaged in extracurricular activities at higher rates at the smaller institutions in comparison to the larger universities (Wilson et al., 2013).

Hence, as asserted by Wilson et al. (2013), these variations in *the extent* of extracurricular involvement across institutions can be attributed to differences in institutional cultures and not student characteristics. However, as particularly noted by Baker (2007), *the impact* on students' success by these organizations is dependent upon various factors, which include students' race/ethnicity and gender. For example, Baker (2007) found that involvement in political organizations had a positive effect on academic performance of Hispanic college students while religious involvement had none. Further, sorority and fraternity involvement was detrimental to

the performance of Latinos but not for Latinas (Baker, 2007). Interestingly, while involvement in athletics, as well as co-ethnic organizations, had a negative effect on grades of Latinas, it did not impact grades of Latinxs. Baker (2007) asserts that the discovered variations in Latina and Latino involvement stemmed from different gender role expectations in Latinx culture as Latinas are traditionally expected to fulfill more roles within the home than Latinxs (Sue & Sue, 2016). The role as a student, and even more as a student-athlete, is often times incongruent with the Hispanic families' expectations for women of staying home and raising children (Baker, 2007; Storlie et al., 2016.).

Student engagement at HSIs. Students from traditionally underrepresented groups, such as students of color, are more likely to engage in extracurricular activities on campuses that are welcoming and supportive of their learning and development (Hurtado, Cuellar, & Guillermo-Wann, 2011). The literature on how the setting of HSIs affects student engagement provides mixed reviews (Fosnacht & Nailos, 2016; Nelson Laird et al., 2007). Specifically, Fosnacht and Nailos (2016) only observed a small positive relationship between HSI attendance and student engagement. The observable differences between HSI and non-HSI students were only in a few areas such as higher-order and collaborative learning, with HSIs benefiting more first-year students in comparison to seniors. Interestingly, Fosnacht and Nailos (2016) did not observe any differences in the area of the supportive environment.

Nelson Laird et al. (2007) also explored the role of HSIs on Latinxs in terms of student engagement, satisfaction, and gains in overall development, comparing these outcomes between Latinxs attending HSIs and PWIs. Notably, the authors also examined the same outcomes for African American students attending HBCUs and PWIs. While African American students attending HBCUs reported significantly higher levels in overall development and student

engagement in comparison to their peers at PWIs, Latinxs attending HSIs did not testify of similar positive benefits from their attendance of these institutions. Specifically, while significant positive differences were found in the area of supportive campus environment between HBCUs and PWIs, the study did not conclude the same positive effect for HSIs for Hispanic students (Nelson Laird et al., 2007). Subsequently, the authors concluded that HSIs did not differ much from PWIs in terms of student engagement and development. In contrast, HBCUs served their intended student populations in a better capacity than PWIs by providing them a supportive environment that fostered conditions for high levels of student engagement and subsequent student development (Nelson Laird et al., 2007). The research on Latinx student engagement at HSIs, however, remains limited, with studies expanding the findings of Nelson Laird et al. (2007) warranted for in the future.

Nonetheless, HSIs have the ability to engage students by providing various student engagement activities and services where students have the opportunity to interact with peers of similar ethnic backgrounds as well as get to know various institutional agents that validate them and their culture (Garcia & Ramirez, 2015; Musoba et al., 2013). The HSI setting is particularly beneficial to Latinxs by offering co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities that enable them to develop their salient racial/ethnic identity (Garcia et al., 2016).

Importantly, faculty and staff diversity is an important characteristic of HSI setting. As noted by Dayton, Gonzalez-Vasquez, Martinez, and Plum (2004), employing diverse faculty and staff is beneficial to students because these institutional agents are more likely to have experienced similar challenges when growing up and thus have the ability to connect with their students they serve at HSIs (Dayton et al., 2004). However, the literature provides mixed conclusions in regard to whether the faculty and staff at HSIs truly reflect the demographics of

the student body (Banda, Flowers, & Robinson, 2017; Gasman & Conrad, 2013). Specifically, while HSIs are credited to employ a higher rate of the faculty of color in comparison to PWIs, the actual data in regard to faculty demographics lack in transparency and are hard to access (Banda et al., 2017; Gasman & Conrad, 2013).

Overall, research suggests that the institutional agents that validate and empower students can come from all ethnic/racial backgrounds (Garcia & Ramirez, 2015). Therefore, while the current lack of sufficient diversity in the ranks of faculty and staff at HSIs is troublesome, with the right intentions, these institutions can still instill a sense of belonging and foster various educational outcomes of Latinx students through the activities and services they provide (Maestas et al., 2007). Importantly, HSIs must refrain from offering stand-alone programs for students (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Lara & Lara, 2012). Rather, for the best learning and student development outcomes of Latinxs, these programs must evolve into core structures of the institutions in order to maximize student success (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Lara & Lara, 2012).

Student Engagement of First-Generation Students

When reviewing the available literature, one cannot refrain from noticing a large number of studies about first-generation students that utilize a deficit-based view. The title of Mehta, Newbold, and O'Rourke (2011) study pointedly summarizes it when the authors ask, "Why do first-generation students fail?" (p. 1). Apparently, the reasons are many, ranging from low levels of academic preparedness for college, lack of financial, social, and cultural capital, too many hours spent working, and absence of active coping strategies (Katreovich & Aruguete, 2017; Mehta et al., 2011). According to the research, all of these reasons contribute to the low levels of student engagement of first-generation students in comparison to their peers whose parent(s) graduated from college (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Katreovich & Aruguete, 2017; Mehta et al., 2011;

Pascarella et al., 2004; Pike & Kuh, 2005; Somers, Woodhouse, & Cofer, 2004; Soria & Stebleton, 2012).

Subsequently, scholars assert that colleges/universities need to offer support services that focus on the academic and social integration of first-generation students (Tinto, 2004). As noted previously, the basic presumption of offering student engagement activities and services is that it does not matter who students are but rather what they do while in college (Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Wilson et al., 2013). Therefore, all students, no matter their background inclusive of college readiness and generational status can persist to degree attainment if they participate in educationally purposeful activities, get involved in on-campus events, and utilize the available support services offered by student affairs professionals to meet their specific needs (Kuh et al., 2010).

Interestingly, first-generation students often have a distrust for authority figures on campus, which include advisors and other student affairs personnel as well as faculty members (Longwell-Grice & Longwell-Grice, 2008; Torres, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, & Ruder, 2006). Specifically exploring the experience of Latinx first-generation students, Torres et al. (2006) assert that these students develop some level of mistrust to authoritative figures due to their kindergarten through 12th (K-12) experiences, in which people in authoritative roles, such as administrators and teachers, singled them out and invalidated their belonging in higher education. Subsequently, when in college, the researchers found that these students relied on information from their peers and handouts instead of academic advisors when seeking academic information. The students only decided to see their advisor when they experienced a crisis and information from flyers and peers was no longer sufficient (Torres et al., 2006).

The implications of Torres et al.'s (2006) study are twofold. First, peer support is essential for first-generation Latinx students, suggesting that student engagement activities are important for this student population as they provide an avenue to meet other students on campus. Second, student affairs personnel need to be proactive and initiate contact with first-generation students in order to engage them and provide them the necessary support. These implications support assertions by Tello and Lonn (2017) about cultural expectations of familismo, personalismo, simpático, and fatalismo among many Latinxs that require student affairs personnel to actively engage Latinxs and provide them with safe spaces on campus where they feel comfortable to open up about their concerns. Further, Tello and Lonn (2017) discuss the importance of close friends who are the preferred choice for support and guidance over the formal advice of institutional agents.

As noted previously, many studies on persistence and retention focus on the first year of college. In particular, student involvement in campus activities is most crucial during this time (Tinto, 1999). Overall, research on first-generation students seeks to find what programming efforts lead to higher levels of retention and what patterns of student engagement behavior, or lack of thereof, contribute to student attrition. Contrary to these studies, Demetriou, Meece, Rich, and Powell (2017) explore experiences of *successful* first-generation students that were on the path of graduating and that were of all academic standings and not just first-year students. Half of the participants were minorities. Demetriou et al. (2017) found that all the participants participated in various forms of co-curricular and extracurricular activities, such as being involved in on-campus organizations, engaging in community service, or studying abroad. In regard to the extracurricular activities of choice, half of the participants engaged in organizations that had a religious or a cultural/ethnic affiliation (Demetriou et al., 2017).

Overall, all of the participants in the study participated in at least one extracurricular activity and described at least one relationship with a mentor from ranks of peers, faculty, or campus personnel who positively influenced their college experience (Demetriou et al., 2017). Similarly, Hébert (2017) found that high-achieving first-generation college students from low-income backgrounds were involved in a range of on-campus student organizations, internships, and community service projects. As Hébert (2017) noted, students indicated that these activities allowed them to maintain balance and were enjoyable. In many instances, the participants learned about these opportunities via mentoring through faculty and staff (Hébert, 2017).

Moreover, contrary to other studies' findings, Demetriou et al. (2017) did not find part-time employment during college to detract from college experience of first-generation students. Rather, participants indicated that having part-time jobs was valuable and provided them with many opportunities, such as feeling part of a small close-knit community, developing important life skills, and building a relationship with employment mentor(s). Similarly, Nuñez and Sansone (2016) found that having a part-time job, both on- and off-campus, was beneficial for first-generation Latinx students. Specifically, the participants credited their employment opportunity for mastering transferable skills, building relationships, and carving a sense of community within the university for themselves (Nuñez & Sansone, 2016). Therefore, research deems part-time employment as beneficial to students' college experiences. Once students work more than 20 hours per week, however, such employment may lead to negative academic performance (Pike, Kuh, & Massa-McKinley, 2008).

Overall, the literature on first-generation students supports the notion that this population benefits from student engagement services and activities. While some first-generation students have part-time jobs, these experiences still prove beneficial for many of these students,

especially if this employment opportunity takes place on-campus and allows them to build positive relationships with peers and staff. Persisting first-generation students are members of on-campus organizations or clubs, partake in various programs such as peer tutoring, and interact with institutional agents (Colver & Fry, 2016; Demetriou et al., 2017; Irlbeck, Adams, Akers, Burris, & Jones, 2014; Nuñez & Sansone, 2016).

Student Engagement of Student-Athletes

The debate whether student-athletes receive a sub-par college experience has been prevalent in popular media as well as in the scholarly community since the early days of college sports. To this day, scholars frequently refer to Astin's (1977) findings that suggest that athletic involvement results in on-campus isolation, with student-athletes not having the opportunity to have a traditional college experience of socializing with their non-athlete peers and partaking in on-campus services and activities. Forty years later, numerous researchers find more optimistic trends in student engagement among athletes (e.g., Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, & Banaji, 2004; Crawford, 2007; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009; Rettig & Hu, 2016; Umbach et al., 2006).

Specifically, Umbach et al. (2006) found no differences between athletes and non-athletes in participation in effective educational practices as measured by the NSSE instrument in the areas of level of academic challenge, student-faculty interactions, and active and collaborative learning. Both groups were engaged in these pursuits at comparable levels. However, both female and male athletes reported their campuses provide them with more academic and social support than non-athletes (Umbach et al., 2006). When comparing athletes and non-athletes attending highly selective colleges, Aries et al. (2006) concluded that student-athletes were not isolated from the general student body. Rather, they interacted with their non-

athlete peers for more than 50% of their time and participated in many non-athletic extracurricular groups (Aries et al., 2006).

According to Potuto and O'Hanlon (2007), student-athletes tend to participate in co-curricular and service projects more frequently than non-athletes. However, the researchers stated that this finding is likely because athletic departments sponsor their own programming for this student group and frequently mandate its attendance. As the study by the NCAA (2015a) confirmed, nearly 90% of all student-athletes engage in community service for at least a few hours per year, most likely due to these activities being required as part of team participation.

However, when it comes to participating in on-campus opportunities for all students, only 36% of student-athletes indicated to be members of on-campus clubs and organizations (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Furthermore, 60% of athletes indicated that they could not participate in many on-campus events of their interest, such as speakers, plays, or concerts, due to their time-consuming athletic responsibilities (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Overall, female athletes showed greater interest in curricular and co-curricular activities than male athletes (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Similarly, in the NCAA's (2015a) study, 72% of female and 62% of male NCAA Division I student-athletes indicated their wish to have more time for other activities other than athletics. These desired activities included relaxation and socialization (NCAA, 2015a). Overall, the majority of student-athletes reported socializing with non-athlete peers. However, their closest friends continue to be teammates (NCAA, 2015a). Overall, NCAA Division I athletes spend 38.5 hours on academics, 35 hours on athletics, and 15.5 hours on socializing/relaxing (NCAA, 2015b).

In other words, athletes want to be engaged with their peers and participate in on-campus activities but sometimes cannot do so due to high time demands of their sport (NCAA, 2016;

Rubin & Moses, 2017). As Comeaux and Harrison (2011) posit, student-athletes face the same challenges as non-athletes while in college. However, their sport participation imposes on them additional burdens, especially when it comes to time constraints (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Subsequently, some recent studies still report on the isolation of student-athletes from the general student body and their limited ability to partake in on-campus activities (Huml et al., 2014; Murty, Roebuck, & McCamey, 2014). Some researchers attribute the widespread emergence of academic centers specifically dedicated to student-athletes for their partial isolation from the rest of campus community (Huml et al., 2014; Rubin & Moses, 2017).

Non-revenue sports. While sparse, a few studies examine whether differences in levels of student engagement exist between athletes from revenue and non-revenue sports (Comeaux, Speer, Taustine, & Harrison, 2011; Rettig & Hu, 2016). Overall, the findings are generally inconsistent, resulting in more confusion than clarity about the student engagement patterns of behavior among revenue and non-revenue athletes. For example, a study by Rettig and Hu (2016) compared scores on the NSSE student engagement themes among athletes from revenue and non-revenue sports as well as non-athletes. Interestingly, non-revenue sport athletes reported significantly higher scores than their non-athlete peers in the area of the supportive campus environment. However, the engagement scores did not differ between revenue athletes and non-athletes. The authors attributed this finding to the possibly unsupportive campus climates for high-profile athletes, which did not affect athletes from non-revenue sports who reported a high level of support provided by their campus community. More importantly, non-revenue sport athletes did not differ from their revenue peers in any of the NSSE engagement categories (Rettig & Hu, 2016).

Yet, according to Potuto and O'Hanlon (2007), differences exist in student engagement behaviors among athletes. Specifically, in one study, student-athletes from non-revenue sports expressed more interest in curricular and co-curricular activities in comparison to athletes from revenue sports (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Similarly, Comeaux et al. (2011) found that first-year revenue athletes had higher athletic and lower academic identities in comparison to athletes from non-revenue sports. However, participation in educationally purposeful student engagement activities served as a corrective measure, having a positive influence on their academic self-concept (Comeaux et al., 2011). In contrast, Crawford (2007) found that revenue sport athletes utilized university support services to a greater extent than non-revenue athletes. Thus, Gayles and Hu (2009) simply concluded that the effectiveness of different types of student engagement services likely varies for student-athletes from revenue and non-revenue sports. However, more research is needed so that higher education administrators can develop and offer the types of activities and services that intentionally engage both revenue and non-revenue athletes in order to promote desirable educational outcomes (Gayles & Hu, 2009).

Despite some research suggesting that athletes from high profile sports of football and basketball have higher athletic than academic identities and thus are less involved in campus activities and services (Comeaux et al., 2011), Paule and Gilson (2010) found that student-athletes from non-revenue sports also perceive to be missing out on a variety of such experiences. However, in spite of expressing some negative effects of their involvement in college sports, non-revenue athletes also reported on its benefits, such as having access to student-athlete only tutors and academic facilities, developing time management and other life skills, and building close friendships with teammates. Overall, these athletes expressed that the

benefits of athletic participation outweighed their lost opportunities to partake in traditional student experiences (Paule & Gilson, 2010).

Latinx student-athletes. As of this writing, no research exists that specifically explores the levels and types of student engagement of first-generation Latinx student-athletes. Therefore, this study intends to fill this gap in the literature. The topic warrants further exploration given the research notes that Latinx students frequently work while attending college/university in order to provide for their families and cover their higher education expenses (Santiago, 2011). According to the NCAA (2016c), approximately 16% of female and 18% of male NCAA Division I student-athletes have a part-time job, spending on average 8.8 hours a week working.

Given that most Latinxs participate in non-revenue sports (NCAA, 2017b) that, for the most part, are equivalency sports (Belch, 2010), it is likely that many Hispanic student-athletes must work while in college. Equivalency sports have a set dollar amount to award in scholarships, which forces coaches to divide this amount into many partial scholarships in order to recruit and fill team rosters with as many talented athletes as possible (Belch, 2010). In contrast, all revenue sports are headcount sports that award full scholarships, never dividing one scholarship amount among several athletes (Belch, 2010). Full athletic scholarships encompass tuition, fees, room, board, and textbooks (NCAA, n.d.-d.). Currently, only three non-revenue sports, which are women's tennis, women's gymnastics, and women's volleyball, are headcount sports providing such scholarships (Belch, 2010). In other words, while athletes in equivalency sports may earn full athletic scholarships, it is a rarity. In essence, the majority of student-athletes in non-revenue sports receive an athletic scholarship that only covers a portion of the college cost of attendance, such as textbooks, room and board, and/or percentage of tuition and fees. In fact, some student-athletes do not receive any athletic scholarship amount and must rely

on other financial sources (e.g., federal financial aid or academic scholarships) to be able to afford college.

As previously noted, student-athletes have to balance their dual roles as students and athletes, which limits the number of hours they can possibly spend on engaging in other on-campus activities. Subsequently, athletes that hold part-time jobs have even less time to engage in such activities. Latinxs are more likely to work while in college but, according to research, are also considered a special population benefiting the most from these purposeful student engagement activities (Kuh et al., 2008; Santiago, 2011). Subsequently, this study seeks to provide a better understanding of experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to persistence to degree attainment. The premise of this study is that its addition to the current body of the research will result in a more inclusive picture of persistence for a broader range of students.

Chapter Overview

This chapter highlighted recent literature on first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports. Unfortunately, as of this writing, no studies were published that exclusively focus on this particular subset of the student-athlete population. Therefore, this chapter provided an overview of research of the different identity layers of these students, which include Latinxs, first-generation students, student-athletes, and athletes from non-revenue sports.

In specific, scholars describe experiences of Latinx students, with some being first in their families, to enroll in higher education, who have to navigate unwelcoming, at times even hostile, campus environments where their culture is not valued. This environment results in a low sense of belonging to higher education. Research links high sense of belonging to persistence to

degree attainment. Many first-generation Latinxs attend HSIs where they get to interact with peers of similar ethnic backgrounds and thus can develop a salient ethnic identity. Unfortunately, scholars assert that many HSIs do not fulfill the promise to serve this student population as similar educational outcomes are reported for Latinxs attending HSIs and PWIs.

Student-athletes also experience an unwelcoming campus environment. Due to a history of athletic arms race among institutions, student-athletes face many negative stereotypes about their academic abilities and belonging to higher education. While most attention is focused on revenue sports of football and basketball, non-revenue athletes find themselves on the margins in regard to funding of their athletic endeavors, with some programs even being cut in order to provide more funding to athletes from revenue sports. Yet, these Olympic sport athletes still have to endure all the challenges associated with balancing their dual roles of students and athletes.

While only a small number of college students get the opportunity to participate in the NCAA sports, and especially at the most prestigious and competitive Division I level, many other types of extracurricular activities are offered on college campuses today. These activities along with other student affairs services and programs supplement learning inside the classroom as they engage students and foster their holistic development. Overall, a strong empirical evidence supports the inclusion of student engagement on campuses as it is linked to many positive educational outcomes of students such as heightened persistence to degree attainment.

The various student engagement services and activities allow for students to interact with institutional agents as well as peers who are important sources of personal, academic, and cultural validation. Students from non-traditional groups are often times in need of such validation since their cultures are different from the dominant cultures present at U.S. campuses and thus may not feel like they belong in this realm. Specifically, first-generation, Latinxs,

and/or student-athletes benefit from validation. Validating agents can be found both on- as well off-campus. Importantly, connections with family members and home communities are important in Latinx culture. Latinx students rely on their cultural capital, which includes social and familial capital, in order to persist to degree attainment.

Given the increasing proportion of U.S. population that is of Latinx origin, which is already reflected in the quickly growing number of Latinxs college enrollees, it is likely that student affairs professionals will serve a higher percentage of Latinx athletes from non-revenue sports in the future decades. As this chapter revealed, however, almost no studies currently exist that focus solely on Latinx collegiate student-athletes and/or athletes from non-revenue sports. Therefore, this study intends to fill the gap in the literature by exploring the experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes who participate in non-revenue sports in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to persistence to degree attainment.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Most, if not all, athletic pursuits require meticulous preparation days, weeks, and/or months ahead of the actual day of competition. However, no matter the level and amount of planning of the strategy and time spent in practice and training, the actual game/meet/event usually throws in an element of surprise with unforeseen circumstances. Conducting a qualitative research study is not any different from the world of athletics. As Guba and Lincoln (1985) proclaimed, "...naturalistic studies are virtually impossible to design in any definitive way before the study is actually undertaken" (p. 187). Likewise, Erlandson et al. (1993) asserted that many preplanned decisions may change once the researcher becomes immersed in the actual research process. In other words, the design of qualitative studies is emergent (Erlandson et al., 1993). Nevertheless, it is important for researchers to still prepare for all anticipated situations and lay out the necessary groundwork pertinent to the study's methods and then attempt to execute the plan.

Subsequently, the following sections of this chapter outline the methods of this qualitative study that sought to explore the experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes who participate in NCAA non-revenue sports in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to persistence to degree attainment. The chapter commences with an explanation of the study's research design. Second, the criteria for selection of participants and site selections are described. Third, the method of data collection and data analyses are detailed. Fourth, the trustworthiness of the study is established. Fifth, the positionality of the researcher is discussed. Last, the delimitations limitations of the study are identified.

Research Design

Customarily, empirical studies employ a research design, which is a collection of procedures for collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Yin, 2014). In other words, a research design joins the data between research questions and study's conclusions (Yin, 2014). Importantly, while the design must fit the problem and research questions of the study, it is also important that the method of inquiry fits the paradigmatic view of the researcher (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Merriam, 2007).

Research is rooted in numerous *paradigms*, which are viewpoints concerning the nature of reality and truth (Glesne, 2016; Merriam, 2007). Every paradigm contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological, methodological, and axiological viewpoints (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2018). Traditionally, scholars distinguish between two major methods of inquiry, which are qualitative and quantitative (Glesne, 2016; Jones & Abes, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). *Quantitative* researchers believe that reality is a stable and objective construct. In contrast, *qualitative* researchers posit that multiple truths exist and are socially constructed by people via their lived experiences (Merriam, 2007). Critical research is one form of educational research that relies on a qualitative method of inquiry. Under this paradigm, educational institutions influence people's lived experiences. However, critical researchers acknowledge that higher education institutions reproduce the existing social systems of power, privilege, and oppression (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Núñez, 2014; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009). Subsequently, the goal of critical theory is to transform the society to become more socially just to people from all social backgrounds (Merriam, 2007).

This study sought to explore the experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes who participate in non-revenue sports in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to persistence to degree attainment. As the literature review chapter detailed, the gap between the educational outcomes of Latinxs with other racial/ethnic groups is a result of long history of systemic oppression of students from this background. Further, a large gap in literature currently exists in regard to experiences of Latinx student-athletes. With only 6% of all NCAA athletes being Latinxs (Lapchick, 2019), their voice is frequently excluded in empirical studies. Hence, grounded in the conceptual framework of LatCrit, this study utilized the critical theory paradigm with the qualitative research methodology and the case study method of data collection in order to empower this particular subset of the student-athlete population.

Latinx Critical Race Theory

The philosophical framework of critical theory will guide this study. Critical researchers posit that social, political, economic, ethnic, cultural, and gender values shape people's lives and result in privilege for some groups while oppressing others (Lincoln et al., 2018). Subsequently, scholars operating under the critical theory paradigm use their studies to uncover the historical and structural systems of power and privilege, challenge the status quo, and empower individuals from traditionally marginalized groups in order to bring change and serve social justice (Glesne, 2016; Jones & Abes, 2011; Kincheloe, McLaren, Steinberg, & Monzó, 2018; Lincoln et al., 2018). Notably, this paradigm embraces a praxis component, with critical scholars believing that their studies should inspire action resulting in a socially just society (Jones & Abes, 2011).

Frequently, critical researchers utilize *standpoint epistemologies*, which are theories of knowledge that give voice to people who have traditionally been excluded and/or oppressed in the society and thus have been forced to operate from the margins (Glesne, 2016). Critical

researchers, however, bring the experiences and perspectives of these individuals to the forefront in their studies (Glesne, 2016). Overall, this paradigm highly values lived experiences of people in shaping knowledge while it acknowledges that multiple realities exist due to the presence of systems of power and privilege and their impact on the construction of knowledge (Dixson & Seriki, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2018).

Prominently, critical theory research exposes the existence of the systems of power and privilege, which as Johnson (2018) asserted, is a vital step in eliminating these power structures. The systems of power and inequality cannot survive without people making them happen. However, one does not have to intentionally participate in the systems by engaging in overt acts of oppression. Not speaking up against the injustices still symbolizes consent and participation (Johnson, 2018). Therefore, critical researchers intentionally aspire to reconstruct the narratives of the dominant groups and expose the existence of the systems of power, privilege, and oppression in order to bring change and serve social justice (Glesne, 2016; Jones & Abes, 2011). Explicitly, this study utilized the conceptual framework of LatCrit, which is an example of a standpoint epistemology.

LatCrit was introduced in 1995 as an extension of the critical race theory (CRT), which acknowledged that racism exists within the U.S. society and has a large impact on the experiences of people of color (Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Tierney, 1993; Valdes, 2014). LatCrit added on CRT by placing Latinx ethnicity at the forefront and expanding the Black-White narrative (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Specifically, LatCrit focuses on additional issues that are central to Latinxs, including but not limited to immigrant status, language, phenotype, and sexuality (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, Villalpando, Delgado Bernal, & Solórzano, 2001).

LatCrit consists of five themes: (1) the centrality of race and racism and intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (2) the challenge of dominant White ideology, (3) social justice commitment, (4) centrality of experiential knowledge, and (5) interdisciplinary perspective (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Specifically, scholars utilizing LatCrit in educational research challenge the narrative of dominant groups concerning meritocracy and colorblindness, positing that not all students experience higher education in the same way. Rather, one's interrelated social identities determine her/his reality (Huber, 2010; Johnson, 2018; Núñez, 2014; Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009). The overall goal of LatCrit scholars is to counter the narrative of the dominant groups and empower and emancipate Latinxs in order to bring positive change and serve social justice (Yosso et al., 2001). This study aimed to accomplish this goal and thus utilized LatCrit as its philosophical framework.

Case Study

This study employed a double-bounded case study method. As Yin (2014) asserted, this method is most relevant for studies that seek to explore in-depth a social phenomenon in its real-world context in order to answer the research questions. A case study is particularly useful for studies where it is difficult to distinguish the phenomenon's variables from their context (Yin, 2014). Overall, the case study method is most appropriate to answer *how* and *why* type of research questions that focus on contemporary events and do not require control of behavioral actions (Yin, 2014). Further, the case study method embraces different epistemological orientations and is well-suited to accommodate the critical theory perspective, which acknowledges that multiple realities exist (Dixson & Seriki, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Qualitative case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic, focusing on a phenomenon defined by clear boundaries, such as social groups, certain time periods,

organizations, or geographic locations (Merriam, 2007; Yin, 2014). The end product of case studies is a *thick description* of the case that unearths new knowledge pertinent to the phenomenon under study (Geertz, 1983). The *new* knowledge constitutes a discovery of a new meaning but at times also involves confirming what is already known about the case (Merriam, 2007). Typically, case studies gather data through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analyses and result in study's conclusions that are holistic and descriptive in nature (Glesne, 2016).

This study employed a double-bounded case study method, in which two cases were compared. Specifically, this study focused on exploring in what ways, if any, the experiences of first-generation Latinx athletes from non-revenue sports vary between HSIs and PWIs. As identified thoroughly in the previous literature review sections, the institutional contexts of HSIs and PWIs vary and result in distinctive experiences for their Latinx students. Therefore, this particular case study design enabled comparison of these experiences between two HSIs and two PWIs. According to Glesne (2016), case studies involving multiple bounded systems result in a search for patterns. Generally, Yin (2014) recommends implementation of multiple-case designs over single-case designs but only if the phenomenon under study and the research questions are a good match for this particular method. Overall, although more time consuming, multiple-case designs result in more powerful analytic conclusions (Yin, 2014).

Participant and Site Selections

Selecting participants as well as research sites is an important step in qualitative research (Erlandson et al., 1993). Researchers must have a clear rationale for choosing the people who will be interviewed, also known as the *units of analysis*, as well as locations of data collection in order to answer the study's research questions (Glesne, 2016; Patton, 2014; Yin, 2014).

Qualitative studies usually rely on a purposeful sample of participants that is small in size in order to explore a selected issue in detail and within appropriate context (Patton, 2014). This study utilized purposeful sampling focusing on the Latinx student-athlete population. Further, multiple sites were selected in order to explore differences between experiences of Latinxs at HSIs as well as PWIs. The following sections describe the specific units of analysis concerning the participant and site selections of this study.

Participant Sampling

In order to select the participants for this study, a purposeful sampling was utilized. Researchers of most qualitative studies select this method as it allows them to explore a certain phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 2007; Patton, 2014). Specifically, researchers select *information-rich cases* that enable them to gain in-depth understanding instead of making empirical generalizations traditionally generated by the quantitative method of inquiry (Patton, 2014). In order to begin purposeful sampling, researchers must first determine the selection criteria that identify the participants who are *key informants* with an extended experiential background in relation to the studied phenomenon and thus able to answer the study's research questions (Merriam, 2007; Patton, 2014; Thorne, 2016). Ideally, the purposive sampling converts into *snowball sampling*, with participants recruiting their peers to take part in the study (Glesne, 2016).

In this study, the primary research question was: What are the experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes who participate in non-revenue sports in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to persistence to degree attainment? Subsequently, the necessary criteria for the study's participants included the following self-identifications: (1) self-identified ethnicity of Latinx, (2) first-generation student status, (3)

participation in an NCAA Division I non-revenue sport, and (4) junior or senior academic standing classification. The following sections provide rationales for why the given criteria are essential to this study. In addition, a brief description of the selected participants follows.

Race/ethnicity. This study purposefully focused on the Latinx population for several reasons. First, while Latinxs constitute the largest and fastest-growing ethnic group in the U.S. today, a large gap remains in their attainment of a college degree in comparison to students from other racial/ethnic groups (HACU, 2018a; Ryan & Bauman, 2016). Specifically, only 15.5% of Hispanics compared to 36.2% of Whites held at least a bachelor's degree in 2015 (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). Second, despite comprising 17% of all undergraduate college students (NCES, 2016b), only 6% of all male and 6% of all female student-athletes participating in the NCAA sports are Latinxs (Lapchick, 2019). Third, the current body of literature that focuses specifically on Latinx collegiate student-athletes is vastly sparse. This gap in literature warrants a need for further scholarly exploration of this particular student-athlete population in order to gain insight pertinent to their experiences. This study and the findings that emerge from data analysis seeks to fill this gap.

Further, it is important to note that Latinxs are a heterogeneous group of individuals with different cultural backgrounds and social identities, which include nation of origin, immigration status, class, gender, language, and religion (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2015; Núñez, 2014). Yet, most studies use the Latinx ethnic category as a proxy variable. In other words, scholars neglect to recognize that myriad of unique cultures exists among individuals who self-identify as Latinx and that there is no universal Hispanic culture. Likewise, this study did not screen for specific backgrounds/national origins (e.g., Chicanos or Puerto Ricans) within the heterogeneous Latinx group, although careful attention was paid to the concept of culture when analyzing the

responses of the participants. This decision was intentional as the Latinx student-athlete population is already small in numbers. Hence, subdividing this population even further would significantly reduce the number of participants meeting the study's criteria, especially at PWIs located in geographical areas with the overall low Hispanic population.

Student-athletes. The second necessary criterion for selection of participants for this study concerned the NCAA student-athlete status. As noted by many scholars, student-athletes constitute a non-traditional student population with a distinct culture, needs, and challenges (Beyer & Hannah, 2000; Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Gayles, 2009; Hyatt, 2003). As of this writing, only 6% of all high school athletes, or 495,000 out of eight million respectively, become collegiate student-athletes that participate in one of the three NCAA divisions (NCAA, 2018d). The NCAA currently sponsors competition in 24 sports, from which 13 sports provide participation opportunities for both women and men (NCAA, 2018a). As of today, the NCAA has more than 1,100 member institutions that are all four-year colleges and universities (NCAA, n.d.-b; NCAA, 2017a). Overall, the longitudinal data reveal favorable graduation rates for students who participate in college sports, with athletes graduating at higher rates than non-athletes since 1993 (NCAA, 2018f). Thus, this study intended to add to the existing and gradually growing literature on this particular subset of the student body. However, due to the heterogeneous nature of the student-athlete population, this study only focused on student-athletes from the NCAA Division I who participate in non-revenue sports.

NCAA Division I. The most competitive level of college sports is the NCAA Division I. This study purposefully focused on student-athletes who participate in this division as they are the most elite collegiate athletes with unique experiences due to the great athletic demands associated with this level of competition in comparison to Division II and III. Only 179,200, or 2% respectively, of all high school athletes will compete at the Division I level while in college

(NCAA, 2018e). While the participation in Division I sports is prestigious and often results in athletic financial aid as well as access to athlete-only facilities, services, and staff, such as tutors and advisors (Huml et al., 2014), it also brings forth some additional challenges. Specifically, as reported in a survey by the NCAA (2016a), Division I student-athletes spend on average 32 hours per week on athletics while in-season, with two-thirds of them spending as much or more time on athletics during the off-season. In other words, the NCAA Division I student-athletes are a unique subset of college students due to the high time demands they face from participation in their sport while also balancing academics as full-time students, which warrants further scholarly examination. Thus, this study intended to further explore their experiences contributing to their persistence to degree given the additional challenges they encounter.

Non-revenue sports. The NCAA sponsors both revenue and non-revenue sports. However, most research either solely focuses on the experiences of athletes from revenue sports of basketball and football or groups all athletes under one proxy category of college student-athletes without differentiating their experiences based on the type and/or revenue/non-revenue status of their sport (Paule & Gilson, 2010). The experiences among the athletes, however, likely vary due to the different distribution of resources among the various teams (Hogshead-Makar, 2011; Osborne, 2014; Paule & Gilson, 2010). Consequently, this study purposefully focused only on student-athletes from non-revenue sports as this segment of the student-athlete population is currently highly under-examined. Additionally, most Latinx student-athletes today participate in non-revenue sports (NCAA, 2017b), which is another important reason for including this particular criterion when selecting participants for this study. Given the already heterogeneous backgrounds of Latinxs as well as student-athletes, it is essential to identify several criteria in order to explore in depth one particular segment of the Latinx student-athlete population.

First-generation students. Another important criterion for selection of this study's participants was the first-generation status. Nearly 50% of all Latinx undergraduate students and 33% of all Latinx student-athletes are first in their families to enroll in college today (NCAA, 2016; NCES, 2015). Yet, research consistently reports on subpar graduation rates of first-generation students in comparison to their peers with parents who attended college (DeAngelo et al., 2011; Warburton et al., 2001). In other words, given the high proportion of Latinxs who are first in their families to pursue higher education, it is important to study this particular subset of the student population in regard to experiences contributing to their *successes* in terms of persistence to degree. Therefore, the goal of this study was to explore experiences of first-generation students nearing degree attainment and thus trailblazing a path to success for others with similar backgrounds.

Junior or senior academic standing. A major focus of this study was to examine Latinxs who persist to undergraduate degree attainment. Therefore, the last integral criterion in the selection of this study's participants was a junior or senior academic standing classification. According to the NSCRC (2017), nearly 27% of students drop out before their sophomore year in college. Subsequently, the chances for students to graduate gradually increase with each year of retention. The students who make it to their junior and senior year of college are the most likely to persist to degree in comparison to students of all other academic standings. Therefore, this study purposefully only sought participants of junior or senior academic standing.

Selected participants. While the goal was to interview a total of 24 participants (6 per research site), only 16 participants volunteered to take part in the study. The most arduous task became finding participants from PWIs given the limited number of first-generation Hispanic student-athletes from non-revenue sports who were juniors or seniors attending these institutions.

Despite numerous attempts to seek out potential participants through gatekeepers as well as via snowball sampling, only two participants volunteered in the study from each PWI. In comparison, six participants from each HSI, which was the original goal, participated in the study (see Table 3 for profile of all participants).

Table 3. Profile of Participants

Participant	Research Site	Academic Standing	Major	Athletic Scholarship (Per Year)	Eligible for Pell Grant	Primary Source of Funding
Star	HSI-I	Junior	Communication	Yes – books	No	Loans
Courtney	HSI-I	Senior	Business Management	Yes – 85%	No	Athletics
Bohemio	HSI-I	Junior	Multidisciplinary Studies	No (previously 90%)	Yes	Pell Grant/Loans
Chiquis	HSI-I	Junior	Criminal Justice	No	Yes	Pell Grant/Loans
Maria	HSI-I	Junior	Psychology	Yes – 100%	No	Athletics
Morgan	HSI-I	Senior	Communications	Yes – 100%	No	Athletics
Guess	HSI-II	Junior	Kinesiology	Yes - \$8,000	Yes	Athletics
Lola	HSI-II	Junior	Exercise science	Yes - \$1,500	Yes	Pell Grant
Elizabeth	HSI-II	Junior	Communication Sciences and Disorders	Yes - \$2,000	Yes	Pell Grant
Alex	HSI-II	Senior	Criminal Justice	Yes - partial	Yes	Pell Grant
Jake	HSI-II	Senior	Criminal Justice	No (previously \$4,000)	No	Parents
Robert	HSI-II	Senior	Criminal Justice	Yes - \$4,500	Yes	Athletics
Joya	PWI-I	Junior	Organizational Studies	Yes – 100%	No	Athletics
Diego	PWI-I	Junior	Exercise Science	Yes – 60%	No	Athletics
Jessica	PWI-II	Junior	Exercise Science	Yes – 10%	Yes	Pell Grant
Michael	PWI-II	Senior	Civil and Environmental Engineering	Yes – tuition and books	No	Athletics

Among the participants, nine of them were women and seven men. Further, seven participants were seniors and nine juniors who varied largely in the academic programs they pursued in their undergraduate studies. Additionally, the majority of participants received some

level of athletic scholarship; however, only three participants earned a full athletic scholarship. Half of all participants qualified for Pell Grant, which served as the primary source of funding for several of the participants' college education, especially when the athletic scholarship amount only covered partial tuition and fees/living expenses. Overall, eight NCAA non-revenue sports were represented among participants: baseball, cross country (men's and women's), soccer (men's), softball, tennis (women's), and track and field (men's and women's). However, to keep the identities of all student-athletes confidential, I intentionally did not identify in which sport each participant participated.

Site Selections

The study was conducted at four institutions, from which two were HSIs and two PWIs. The names of the research sites were kept confidential throughout the study. All of the institutions were purposefully selected for this study because they are doctorate-granting universities. The following subsections include a rationale for selecting this particular Carnegie Foundation classification. Further, a discussion follows in regard to the differences between HSIs and PWIs. Last, a brief profile is provided about each of the selected institutions.

Doctorate-granting universities. All of the selected higher education institutions were classified by the Carnegie Foundation as doctorate-granting institutions. In order for an institution to be classified under this category, it must annually award at least 20 doctoral degrees (Griffin & Hurtado, 2011). This study purposefully focused only on doctorate-granting universities because the majority of the NCAA Division I members, or 63% respectively, are accounted under this classification (NCAA, 2017a). Overall, only 7% of all U.S. institutions are classified as doctorate-granting universities (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2015). Yet, these universities serve large populations of undergraduates, accounting

for 32% of all students enrolled at Carnegie-accredited institutions (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, 2015). Overall, every Carnegie Foundation's institutional type offers a unique learning environment necessitating a certain approach in the delivery of student services and programming (Griffin & Hurtado, 2011). Specifically, students at doctorate-granting research institutions have access to a wide array of student organizations. However, according to Astin (1979), they are less likely to get involved in these activities in comparison to their peers from smaller institutions.

HSIs. Two of the study's sites were doctorate-granting HSIs. HSIs account for only 14.9% of all U.S. non-profit higher education institutions but enroll 63% of all Latinx undergraduate students (HACU, 2018a). Under Title VII legislation, the U.S. Department of Education provides grant funding to eligible HSIs to assist them in developing curriculum and programming implemented with the goal to increase the college attainment of Latinx population (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Some scholars identified the HSI setting as beneficial for the educational outcomes of Latinxs due to high proportion of students, faculty, and staff with the common cultural heritage that converts into heightened sense of belonging, lesser occurrence of stereotype threat, and higher rates of persistence and graduation (Arana et al., 2011; Flores & Park, 2013; Laden, 2001; Laden, 2004; Núñez, 2011; Núñez, 2014). Subsequently, this study purposefully focused on participants attending HSIs. In specific, participants attending two HSI institutions were interviewed.

PWIs. Additionally, two of the study's sites were doctorate-granting PWIs. Unlike HSIs, the designation as PWI is not an official category for any U.S. higher education institution. Generally, scholars use the term PWI to define institutions where White students comprise the largest group of full-time undergraduate student enrollees (Bourke, 2016). For the purposes of

this study, PWIs are defined as all U.S. colleges and universities except for those falling under the federal designation of minority-serving (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Approximately 85% of all NCAA Division I institutions fall under this definition (NCAA, 2017a). Thus, the research site of PWI was purposefully selected in order to explore the experiences of Latinx student-athletes and how they differ from those attending HSIs. Specifically, as demonstrated by various scholars, students of color often perceive the campus environment at PWIs as unwelcoming, even at times hostile (Rankin & Reason, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009). Hence, this study purposefully focused on exploring the differences between PWIs and HSIs in regard to the student engagement services and activities pertaining to Latinx persistence to degree attainment.

Selected research sites. The selected research sites varied in sectors, undergraduate student populations, and athletic departments' characteristics (see Table 4 below for comparison of key characteristics of selected research sites). Most notably, three of the research sites were public universities while one was a private institution. Two of the universities had an undergraduate student population of more than 25,000 students while the other two sites' student body accounted for less than 10,000 students and less than 5,000 students, respectively. While the number of sponsored athletic programs was comparable among institutions, one research site did not sponsor football team. The variations in these key institutional characteristics were due to difficulties securing research sites. Athletic departments were protective of their student-athlete populations. As such, getting permissions granting access to participants from four research sites, two HSIs and two PWIs, became an arduous task.

Table 4. Profile of Selected Research Sites

Research Site	Sector	Undergraduate Student Body	% Full-Time Undergraduate Hispanic Enrollment	Athletic Subdivision	Number of Athletic Programs	Number of Participants
HSI-I	Public	> 25,000	35-40%	D1 FBS	17	6
HSI-II	Public	> 25,000	> 85%	D1	16	6
PWI-I	Private	< 5,000	5%	D1 FBS	17	2
PWI-II	Public	< 10,000	18%	D1 FCS	17	2

Note: The data were gathered from each institution's website. The sources are intentionally not included to keep the names of research sites confidential.

IRB Approval

Before the data collection began, an approval for the research study was granted by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMU-CC). The Human Subjects Research Protocol for Full Board Review was submitted to the IRB along with a copy of the Consent Form (see Appendix C) and the Interview Protocol (see Appendix D). The IRB is an ethics committee that serves the primary duty to protect human subjects. In other words, the IRB reviews all potential risks and benefits for those who decide to participate in a research study at the given institution (Glesne, 2016). The IRB's decisions to grant study's approval is guided by several principles, such as that research participants must be able to withdraw from the study without facing any penalty, must be sufficiently informed in order to decide whether to take part in the study, and must not be subject to any unnecessary risks as research participants (Glesne, 2016).

Furthermore, it is important to note that this study did not take place at TAMU-CC as it would be considered a *backyard research*, which could result in ethical dilemmas as well as biased interpretation of the data by the researcher (Glesne, 2016). Rather, data was collected at

four other universities. However, the gatekeepers at each research site determined that separate IRB approvals were not required to gain access to participants.

Data Collection

Qualitative researchers rely on multiple data-gathering sources in order to produce a rich thick description of the phenomenon from all available perspectives but also to validate and cross-check the findings (Erlandson et al., 1993; Geertz, 1983; Glesne, 2016; Patton, 2014; Thorne, 2016). The process of data collection via multiple sources is known as *triangulation* (Glesne, 2016). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), data sources may be both human, for example being generated from interviews and observations, and nonhuman, such as being tapped by document and record analyses. The triangulation of the data of this study about experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports was gathered via semi-structured interviews, demographic sheets, and online guided questions. In the following sections, a description of the gatekeepers for this study are specified, after which details concerning each method of data collection are described. Last, information pertinent to the member checking, peer debriefing, researcher's reflexivity, and assurance of confidentiality are provided.

Gatekeepers

In order to gain but also to maintain access to participants at all research sites of this study, a contact with appropriate *gatekeepers* was first established (Glesne, 2016). By definition, gatekeepers are the individuals in power to give consent to or prevent access to the research participants and sites (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Gatekeepers also play an important role in negotiating the specific conditions of the agreement with the researchers pertaining to the type of data sources requested and other details (Glesne, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1981). Thus, after

identifying potential research sites meeting the criteria for selection, possible gatekeepers were identified through website directory and subsequently contacted via email. Importantly, 31 research sites were contacted via email, but the majority of the gatekeepers did not respond or refused to grant access to their student-athletes.

Interviews

Once access by gatekeepers to participants was granted, data collection commenced. The primary data-gathering method of this study was semi-structured interviews that either took face-to-face or via FaceTime. All interviews with participants at HSIs took place in person. However, all participants from PWIs were interviewed via FaceTime. With the permission of the participants, these interviews were digitally recorded. According to Dexter (1970), when researchers interview participants, they engage in a “conversation with a purpose” (p. 123). Overall, interviews provide deep insight into people’s perspectives that cannot be obtained through direct observation (Merriam, 2007). As Lincoln and Guba (1980) acknowledge, interviews allow researchers to learn about the past, understand the present, and foresee the future.

Interviews vary in their level of structure that can be classified along a continuum of degrees in overt/covert (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study utilized semi-structured interviews consisting of a mix of questions that were both more- as well as less-structured (Merriam, 2007). Some of the questions were highly structured in order to obtain a certain type of information by all participants. However, other questions provided more flexibility to learn about the unique ways in which the participants define their world (Merriam, 2007). Further, the semi-structured interview format allowed for exploration of new topics that the participants

deemed important in their worldview (Merriam, 2007). Subsequently, an interview protocol with an ordered list of questions was developed prior to the start of the interviews (see Appendix D).

Demographic Sheet

The second data source utilized by the study was a demographic sheet that all participants filled out prior to the interview (see Appendix E). Participants were asked questions about their academic background in areas such as their overall GPA, major, expected date of graduation, and high school(s) attended. Furthermore, inquiries about family's background including the occupation of the parents and ethnic origin were included. Answers to all of these questions provided a necessary demographic profile of each participant as well as produced a rich thick description of the phenomenon to increase transferability of the findings (Geertz, 1983).

Online Guided Questions

In order to triangulate data, the last method of data collection was through online guided questions (see Appendix F). Following the conclusion of interviews, participants were emailed a link to this online survey consisting of several short answer questions. As noted by Frith and Gleeson (2012), this data collection approach provides participants the opportunity to take time to think through, review, and revise their statements. Overall, the online guided questions provided further information on the studied phenomenon. Specifically, participants were asked questions pertinent to their experiences of being a student-athlete, sense of belonging on campus, and advice offered to future Latinx student-athletes. Unfortunately, only five of the participants completed the survey.

Member Checks

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checks are one of the best techniques utilized by researchers to establish credibility. In qualitative research, knowledge is co-

constructed by participants and researchers. Thus, when interviewing participants, it is imperative that the researcher verifies her/his interpretations of the data gathered in interviews with every participant (Erlandson et al., 1993). Data should not be included in the interpretations without being subject to verification through members checks (Erlandson et al., 1993). Member checking takes place continuously throughout as well as after interviews in both formal and informal manner (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Subsequently, in this study, participants were provided with opportunities to clarify the meaning of their responses throughout the interviewing process. Further, after the conclusion of each interview, all participants were sent a copy of a transcript of their interview with a request to provide feedback in regard to the researcher's interpretation of their responses. If directed by participants, all misinterpretations would be corrected. In this study, none of the participants emailed with any requests for changes to their interview transcripts.

Peer Debriefing

A second technique to increase the credibility of this study encompassed peer debriefing. According to Erlandson et al. (1993), a researcher should engage in periodical conversations about the research process with a professional peer not involved in the study. In the debriefing sessions, this individual provides feedback to researcher's ideas and concerns, asks probing questions, probes researcher's biases, and offers alternative explanations (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These sessions keep the researcher honest as the peer plays the role of devil's advocate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Further, peer debriefing allows for the researcher to release any emotions and feelings that could otherwise lead to an inability to think clearly and make good decisions pertinent to the study's methodology and data interpretations (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985). A few individuals assisted with peer debriefing during the duration of the study. These peers were other doctoral students from the program along with one faculty member.

Researcher's Reflexivity

Since the researcher is the primary data instrument in the qualitative method of inquiry, it is important that s/he consistently reflects on own biases, value-laden perspectives, and subjectivities (Erlandson et al., 1993; Glesne, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Keeping a reflexive journal provides this avenue and should be utilized throughout the entire research process on a daily or at least weekly basis (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the reflexive journal is a diary, in which the researcher shares information about the methodological decisions of the study but also about self. Further, just like in peer debriefing, the journal also provides a space for catharsis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As Erlandson et al. (1993) summarized, the credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability of the study will be increased if a researcher maintains such reflexive journal. Subsequently, this technique was employed by the researcher of this study as well.

Assurance of Confidentiality

Abiding by high level of ethical standards is essential when conducting studies. In particular, researchers need to include safeguards to protect all participants against psychological and physical harm. Further, privacy and confidentiality of all participants must be assured (Erlandson et al., 1993). Subsequently, no identifiers linking the participants to this study, including each participant's sport, were included in any sort of published report of the findings. All participants signed a consent form (see Appendix C) assuring them that their confidentiality will be guaranteed. Further, all participants' names were protected, with each of them selecting

their own pseudonym to be used in the study. In addition, all collected data were stored securely with access granted to only the researcher and the chair of the dissertation committee.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a complex process consisting of organizing all information from sources such as interviews, observations, documents, and field notes and transforming them into coherent findings through inductive reasoning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2014). As Erlandson et al. (1993) asserted, data analysis is not a stage but rather an ongoing process or progression. Data analysis utilizes a twofold approach, commencing at the research site during the initial data collection that is later followed by a period away from the site when the researcher carefully unitizes, codes, and categorizes the data as well as dedicates a large amount of time to discovering patterns, identifying themes, and developing as well as labeling categories (Erlandson et al., 1993). This is known as *content analysis*, defined as “data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2014, p. 453). The following sections address these important steps in the content analysis employed in this study.

Unitizing Data

All interviews were transcribed verbatim utilizing the help of Temi software, removing only non-verbal language (e.g., “um”) and repeated use of the exact same words by participants. The unitization of the data then followed. This process requires the researcher to divide each interview protocol into the smallest possible pieces of information that provide some level of understanding about the participant’s experience(s). Every unit must be coherent without any further information needed for comprehension except for a broad understanding of the context (Erlandson et al. 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that

researchers over-include rather than under-include information when unitizing data as it is much easier to reject irrelevant material in comparison to discovering later on that something already discarded was actually relevant. For the purposes of this study, I utilized Dedoose software to unitize data.

Coding

Once all data is unitized, the next step usually consist of coding it. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended that researchers code the data with a designation of (1) the particular source of the data, (2) type of the participant, (3) data's episode, and/or (4) site when more than one location is employed in the design of the study. In this study, when including a quote from a participant as part of Chapter 4, I coded it utilizing three out of the four designation categories. Specifically, I noted the participant (e.g., P1 for participant 1), source of the data (e.g., interview or online guided questions), and the research site (e.g., PWI-I) (see Figure 7 for a prototype of a coded card). However, I did not utilize index cards for coding purposes given my access to Dedoose. In specific, this software allows researchers to unitize and code data at the same time.

Figure 7. Prototype of a Coded Card

P9, INTERVIEW	HSI-II
I mean I always had my advisors, my athletic advisors, to help me out in anything and I guess I just had a lot of support around me. I can't say that I did everything on my own because I didn't, I actually like, you need people to be there for you. I feel like that was really important for me and it just really helped me get through everything.	

Figure 7. A prototype of a coded card.

Categorizing and Discovering Patterns

During the next phase of categorization, the researcher sorts all unitized data into categories based on recurring regularities in content, also known as *patterns* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2014). In other words, identification of relationships between the unitized data are sought (Glesne, 2016). According to Patton (2014), all categories should be evaluated based on *internal homogeneity* and *external heterogeneity*. Internal homogeneity refers to similarity or unity in meaning in the data contained within one specific category. Specifically, the data in one category should fit together well. External heterogeneity refers to dissimilarities between the categories. Specifically, bold and clear differences among categories must be evident (Patton, 2014). In other words, the units marked in Dedoose were carefully evaluated and sorted based on its content, which subsequently resulted in a discovery of various patterns among the collected data.

Identifying Themes

Once patterns are discovered, the researcher can identify *themes* in the data, which is the next step in a content analysis. While a pattern is a descriptive finding, a theme is categorical/topical (Patton, 2014). According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), identification of themes is both a direct result of previous unitization and categorization of data processes as well as the researcher's theoretical understanding of the phenomenon. In order to identify themes, the unitized data may have to be reviewed several times. Researchers should look for repetitions as it is the easiest way to discover a theme (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Yet, not all themes come from a repeated verbatim content. Other strategies involve identifying similarities and differences in the data, noting metaphors and analogies as well as local terms, and looking for certain linguistic connectors made by participants, including *because*, *since*, *as a result*, among many others, as

recommended by Ryan and Bernard (2003). Native speakers frequently employ metaphors, transitions, and connectors to express how they interpret the world around them (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Once themes were identified in this study, the last important step in the content analysis was developing and labeling the specific categories.

Establishing Trustworthiness

All studies get evaluated by their level of credibility and validity, also known as trustworthiness. According to Erlandson et al. (1993), qualitative studies establish trustworthiness through the implementation of techniques that provide truth value via credibility, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. Quantitative researchers refer to these concepts as internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The following sections address all of these concepts in order to explain how this qualitative study ensured that it is deemed as trustworthy.

Truth Value

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), researchers must establish the *truth* of the findings within the context of the study and in relation to the participants. In other words, the findings must be *credible* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As previously discussed, multiple sources were employed to gather data in this study. Specifically, the method of triangulation relying on data collected through interviews, demographic sheets, and online guided questions were utilized. Overall, triangulation is one of the techniques identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to increase the credibility of the study. Furthermore, peer debriefing, member checks, and reflexive journaling were employed to ensure the credibility of this study.

Applicability

The second criterion necessary to establish the trustworthiness of a study is applicability. Applicability refers to an extent to which findings can be applied in other contexts (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Specifically, the research findings must be *transferable* to similar settings and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), this study relied on a thick description, purposeful sampling, and reflexive journaling in order to meet this criterion. In detail, only first-generation Latinx student-athletes from NCAA non-revenue sports were included in the sample of participants. Furthermore, data were obtained through in-depth interviews, demographic sheets, and online guided questions, which resulted in a thick description of the participants and the studied phenomenon. Last, a reflexive journal was kept by the researcher.

Consistency

Qualitative researchers hope to acquire stability, consistency, and *dependability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability is defined as an extent to which study's findings can be replicable by other researchers (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The best technique to ensure consistency of the findings is to create an *audit trail*, which requires the researcher to maintain all adequate records obtained throughout the study (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Subsequently, based on recommendations of Lincoln and Guba (1985), an audit trail consisting of all raw data, including interview notes and other collected documents, reflexive journals, and other materials will be maintained.

Neutrality

The last criterion for establishing a study's trustworthiness pertains to neutrality. Neutrality is defined as researcher's objectivity and awareness of her/his own biases in relation

to the studied phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Several techniques were employed to obtain *confirmability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, as previously noted, a reflexive journal was maintained throughout the study. This tool allowed the researcher to reflect on the methodological decisions of her study but also to explore her own biases pertinent to the studied phenomenon. Furthermore, the researcher engaged in peer debriefing and member checking. Specifically, all participants were emailed a copy of their interview transcript and were asked to provide feedback and to correct any possible misinterpretations of their narratives.

Researcher's Positionality

The primary data instrument of all qualitative research studies is the researcher (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ultimately, each researcher's multiple identities along with personal experiences and life history have a large impact on the study's research process of collecting and interpreting data. Subsequently, in order to increase the trustworthiness of a study and to establish its rigor, every researcher must recognize all of her/his possible biases (Bourke, 2014; Glesne, 2016).

In this particular study, I as the researcher hold both the insider as well as outsider membership status in relation to my study's participants who are first-generation Latinx student-athletes from NCAA Division I non-revenue sports. Precisely, I consider myself to be a partial insider in relation to the participants as I am a former collegiate student-athlete who participated in a non-revenue sport, although it was at the NCAA Division III level. The NCAA Division I places significantly higher athletic demands on student-athletes in comparison to the Division III (NCAA, n.d.-a). Additionally, I currently work as an athletic academic coordinator assigned to several NCAA Division I non-revenue sports, which also makes me a partial insider to the

studied topic and the participants. Specifically, I am partially biased about the role of HSIs in educating Latinxs since I currently work at a HSI located in southern Texas.

However, I am also an outsider in relation to the ethnic background and country of origin of the participants. Specifically, I am a non-U.S. citizen of European descent who grew up in a society that is highly homogenous in terms of the racial/ethnic composition of the population. Therefore, my life experiences of growing up and attending primary and secondary schooling system do not resemble the experiences of my study's participants in this particular regard. Further, while I pursued postsecondary education in the U.S., I did not experience facing systemic racism and negative stereotypes because of my ethnicity. Specifically, as an undergraduate student, I attended a private liberal arts college on the East Coast where the majority of the student body was White. Therefore, I am an outsider to the studied topic and participants in this particular regard.

As noted by various scholars, being an insider as well as outsider to participants and the research topic is both advantageous as it allows for the researcher to have a deeper understanding of her/his own group but also proves challenging in regard to maintaining objectivity (Chavez, 2008; Foster, 2009; Greene, 2014; Innes, 2009; Simmons, 2007). Moore (2015) summarize the recent research literature by stating that both membership statuses provide benefits but also pitfalls. Additionally, Dwyer and Buckle (2009) challenge the dichotomy of the two group statuses, stating that one's membership is fluid and overall highly complex. While one may be a member of a particular group, it does not denote complete sameness or difference if a non-member (Dwyer & Buckley, 2009). Consequently, due to the nature of qualitative inquiry where researchers work closely with participants and are always part of the research process, these individuals are never complete outsiders but also never true insiders as they also carry out

the role of objective researchers. Therefore, researchers occupy a space between (Dwyer & Buckley, 2009), which allows for their qualitative studies to be both trustworthy and rigorous.

Thus, for the purposes of this study, I fully acknowledge my biases in regard to being an advocate of college athletics within the higher education setting and specifically, student-athletes participating in non-revenue sports due to my life history of being both a sport participant as well as an administrator within the sphere of intercollegiate athletics. Furthermore, despite inadvertently benefiting from White privilege, I acknowledge that the systems of power and privilege are indeed real and result in different college experiences and outcomes for students depending on their interrelated social identities, such as ethnicity, race, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, and physical ability.

Delimitations and Limitations

This qualitative study had several delimitations. First, while the study used purposive sampling, it did not include explicit screening for scholarship and non-scholarship status of the participants. However, the experiences of participants may vary because of this element, especially given that non-scholarship athletes are more likely to work and thus have less time to participate in on-campus activities in comparison to their teammates receiving an athletic scholarship. Second, while careful attention was paid to the concept of culture, this study did not screen for specific backgrounds/national origins (e.g., Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban) within the heterogeneous Latinx group. Third, due to the small number of participants, not all non-revenue sports currently sponsored by the NCAA were represented within the study. Fourth, this study purposefully focused on both male and female participants and did not center on exploring issues solely tied to women or men.

In addition, this study has a few limitations. First, contrary to the original intentions with the design of the study, only a limited number of participants attending PWIs volunteered to take part. The original goal was to interview a total of 24 participants, 6 per research site. However, the final sample of participants included 16 participants, from which 12 were attending HSIs, 6 per site, and only 4 came from PWIs, 2 per site. Only five participants completed the online guided questionnaire. While I made conclusions when comparing sources of validation among athletes from both settings, ideally, more participants from PWIs are necessary to explore this phenomenon further. However, as the NCAA demographics depict (Lapchick, 2019; NCAA, 2017b), only a limited number of Hispanic student-athletes participate in college athletics, especially at PWIs located in regions with a small Hispanic population. The odds that these athletes are juniors or seniors, first-generation students, and participate in non-revenue sports further reduces the available participant pool at most institutions. To provide an example, a gatekeeper from one potential PWI research site located in a city with a large Hispanic population concluded that only one current student-athlete met all of these criteria. As such, finding four participants attending PWIs felt like a huge accomplishment. Future studies with this population should utilize a different research design and methods of recruitment to solicit a higher participation rate of first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports.

Second, disparities in characteristics exist among the four selected research sites. For example, three are public institutions while one is from a private sector. In addition, the institutions vary in their athletic subdivisions, conferences, and types of sponsored sports, with one not sponsoring football. The percentage of full-time undergraduate students who are Hispanic and the sizes of undergraduate student bodies vary as well. Ideally, the four selected sites should be similar in these key characteristics as they may influence the experiences of

participants. However, as I learned from my experience reaching out to many gatekeepers, most athletic departments at PWIs are protective of and do not permit access to their Hispanic student-athlete population by researchers. To illustrate, in one instance, the gatekeeper requested to see the interview protocol after which, without further explanation, indicated that his institution is not able to accommodate the request for participants. Athletic departments at HSIs were also protective but securing those sites became a much faster process given that some of the contacted gatekeepers understood the importance of this research given their designation of HSI. In total, 31 research sites were contacted via email, but most of the gatekeepers did not respond or refused to grant access to their student-athletes.

The third limitation concerns the representation of sports within the sample of participants. Overall, eight NCAA non-revenue sports were represented among participants, which were baseball, cross country (men's and women's), soccer (men's), softball, tennis (women's), and track and field (men's and women's). To keep the identities of participants confidential, I do not identify in which sport each student-athlete participated. However, it is important to note that many participants were involved in one specific sport, in particular. This limitation is a result of the aforementioned issues with securing research sites as well as the overall small number of Latinx student-athletes in the NCAA. For example, at PWI-II, both participants played the same sport and Joya helped in recruiting Diego to partake in the study. As both participants attested, they did not know of any other Latinx student-athletes at their institution in any of the other sports who met the criteria for inclusion.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Latinxs continue to be underrepresented in the ranks of college graduates despite increasing in the proportion of U.S. population and undergraduate student body (HACU, 2018a; Krogstad & Fry, 2014). Approximately 6% of Latinxs participate in intercollegiate athletics (Lapchick, 2019), which is one type of student engagement activity linked to increased rates of student persistence to degree attainment (Kuh et al., 2010). However, a paucity of research still exists about the experiences of Latinx student-athletes. Researchers have also overlooked athletes from non-revenue sports and those who are first-generation students. Importantly, Latinx athletes attend HSIs and PWIs. However, it is still unknown whether these two institutional contexts differ in terms of their influence on student engagement. Thereby, the goal of this study was to explore the experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes who participate in non-revenue sports in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to their persistence to degree attainment.

The review of existing literature magnified the importance of campus climate for sense of belonging (Gonzalez & Morison, 2016; Linares & Muñoz, 2011), cultural/social/familial capital for support and empowerment (Arana et al., 2011; Museus & Neville, 2012; Yosso, 2005), and student engagement for persistence to degree attainment (Kuh et al., 2010) of students who are first-generation students, Latinxs, and/or student-athletes. With that noted, this study utilized a double-bounded case method of inquiry, in which 16 participants attending four different institutions, two HSIs and two PWIs, were interviewed. Additionally, participants filled out a demographic sheet and answered online guided questions following the interview. Data were then transcribed and analyzed via content analysis. The next section provides details about the themes and categories that emerged upon data collection and analysis.

Themes and Categories

As a result of data analysis, three themes emerged, with each consisting of four categories (see Table 5 below for an overview of the themes and categories). Specifically, the first theme noted the importance of familial capital, a concept pertaining to the Latinx identity as depicted by many scholars (e.g., Arana et al., 2011; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Yosso, 2005). The second theme largely described cultural and social capital acquired from athletic participation. In contrast, in the third theme, the multiple identities of first-generation Latinx student-athletes intersected and resulted in unique experiences not highlighted previously in the literature.

Table 5. Themes and categories that emerged from data analysis

Theme	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4
Benefiting from a strong foundation of familial capital	The influence of siblings	Financial and emotional support of parents	Immigration status as a source of inspiration	Family's expectation of college completion
Capitalizing on the student-athlete role	Mastery of dual roles at the expense of on-campus engagement	Access to athletic academic support services	Quality interactions with institutional agents	Feeling accepted on campus as student-athletes
Seeking validation from their multiple identities	Finding their Hispanic niche at HSIs and PWIs	Sports as a central part of identity	Embracing Latinx cultural capital in athletic endeavors	Fighting negative stigma about Latinxs through athletic and academic achievement

The first theme *Benefiting from a Strong Foundation of Familial Capital* highlights the importance of support provided by families on persistence to degree attainment of first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports. Specifically, the first category, *The Influence of Siblings*, describes how older brothers and sisters serve as role models for

participants in terms of getting involved in sports as well as for persisting and graduating from college. The second category, *Financial and Emotional Support of Parents*, details the ways parents support participants while in college. The third category, *Immigration Status as a Source of Inspiration*, notes how the past sacrifices families made to immigrate to the U.S. motivate participants to persevere in their studies so they can give back to their families. The fourth category, *Family's Expectation of College Completion*, informs how participants strive to graduate so they can meet their family's expectations of college completion and subsequently make them proud.

The second theme titled *Capitalizing on the Student-Athlete Role* depicts the multitude of ways in which Latinx student-athletes benefit from their involvement in college sports. The first category, *Mastery of Dual Roles at the Expense of On-Campus Engagement*, discusses how athletic involvement serves as a form of acquired cultural capital for participants but it also inadvertently isolates them from the rest of the campus community. The second category, *Access to Athletic Academic Support Services*, describes how the academic support services housed within athletics aid participants in academic success. The third category, *Quality Interactions with Institutional Agents*, discloses that participants build close connections with their athletic advisors and coaches who become an integral part of their support network in college. The fourth category, *Feeling Accepted on Campus as Student-Athletes*, illustrates that athletic involvement contributes to participants feeling welcome on their campuses and asserting a sense of belonging.

Lastly, the third theme of *Seeking Validation from their Multiple Identities* addresses the ways participants discover, reconstruct, and understand their multiple identities in relation to others. The first category, *Finding their Hispanic Niche at HSIs and PWIs*, compares how participants carve out a sense of belonging as Latinxs within the two university settings. The

second category, *Sports as a Central Part of Identity*, points out the saliency of the athletic identity of most participants. The third category, *Embracing Latinx Cultural Capital in Athletic Endeavors*, details how participants utilize their Latinx cultural capital in athletic endeavors and how it contributes to their sense of belonging and persistence to degree attainment. The fourth category, *Fighting Negative Stigma about Latinxs through Athletic and Academic Achievement*, highlights that participants perceive their ability to be a college student-athlete as an opportunity for representing their culture in a positive light and changing the U.S. population's negative perceptions about people of their ethnic group. The following sections of this chapter provide detailed descriptions of these findings.

Benefiting from a Strong Foundation of Familial Capital

All participants discussed the critical role of familial capital for their athletic and academic achievement and persistence to degree attainment in college. Specifically, the following categories emerged from the interviews with participants: (1) *the influence of siblings*, (2) *financial and emotional support of parents*, (3) *immigration status as a source of inspiration*, and (4) *family's expectation of college completion*.

The influence of siblings. All but one participant has at least one sibling. Repeatedly, participants discussed how their brothers and/or sisters have had a major influence on their student-athlete careers. In many instances, their older siblings served as role models inspiring participants to commence playing youth sports. In particular, Star, a middle child growing up with three siblings, reminisced on how she got involved in sports at an early age:

I have one sister that's older than me and she was really good at running like since she was little, and she was kinda like my role model. I was like, 'oh, I want to do it too.' So I started running. (P1, HSI-I, p. 1)

While Star followed her sister's footsteps as a child, she surpassed her older sibling's athletic accomplishments when she became a college athlete. Similar to Star, Robert, who is the youngest of four children in his family, was raised watching his siblings compete in youth sports, which motivated him to follow their footsteps and become an athlete, too. He shared:

My brother, the one that's like three years older than me, he ran cross country and when he was in middle school, he was pretty good at it. So I saw that and I would go to his meets and I guess I kinda got a little bit inspired so I started kind of running with him, things like that. And so when I started running, my brother was district champion so I told myself, 'you have to be district champion.' So I became district champion. So that's kinda how it started and I kinda wanted to be like what he did. (P12, HSI-II, p. 1)

Both Robert's brother and Star's sister inspired their younger siblings to follow their example and participate in sports. Additionally, in Robert's case, his brother's athletic accomplishments motivated him to boost athletic efforts so Robert can match, if not surpass, the performances of one of his older siblings. In other words, the friendly rivalry between the brothers drove Robert to work extra hard to earn an athletic scholarship in college.

The siblings' positive influence extends beyond sports. Specifically, Robert emphasized how his older brothers and sisters' academic accomplishments put a lot of pressure on him to perform in the classroom to earn a college degree. Robert chronicled the following:

I saw them all [siblings] graduate [college] and things like that. So yeah, it's kinda weird like I see a lot of friends who their brothers like don't graduate, they just straight out of high school they'll go into the oil refineries and things like that. So that's their mentality, 'I want to go to the oil refineries,' but me, since I've seen all my siblings go to college and go to work and things like that, that's always kind of... I feel like they played a

major role in that way and setting an example for me.... I don't want to be the letdown brother that doesn't graduate. (P12, HSI-II, p. 3)

Unlike his older siblings, Robert turned his athletic ability into a cultural capital when he earned a full athletic scholarship to attend college. In addition, despite being a first-generation student, Robert has capitalized on having access to older siblings who graduated from college and thus have served as great role models for him in the academic realm.

Morgan shared a similar observation when she discussed how having older siblings who graduated from college provides an immense advantage for first-generation students:

So first-generation... I feel like I have my siblings, you know, maybe if I was the oldest sibling like that would make a difference. But like I saw my brother graduate from college. Like he's a high school teacher, coach now. My sister who is graduating in December.... I have never just like looked at being Hispanic or being like a first-generation as like a setback. (P6, HSI-I, p. 19)

Many of the participants, just like Morgan, came from families where older siblings carved out the way for younger siblings to follow so they can also earn a college degree. In other words, they served as role models for their siblings. As Morgan explicitly described, earning a college degree became an unwritten expectation in her family for all the younger siblings.

Moreover, in some instance, while participants' parents did not possess college experiences, the firstborns became institutional insiders and family role models who were able to offer advice to their brothers and sisters essential for their success in college and persistence to degree attainment. For example, Michael described that being a first-generation student is definitively a disadvantage. However, he credited his older sister for guiding him when he enrolled in college. In specific, Michael shared the following:

If my oldest sister hadn't graduated college, I wouldn't have not known what to do coming in. Like she's the person that set up my advising appointment for me. She set up basically my first semester, like she looked at my degree plan and found out which classes I should be taking and like what time they're offered. And she basically put together my first semester's schedule. And then when it comes to anything else, just being supportive or more mentally and emotionally supportive, doing like physical actions, like helping sign up for FAFSA, understanding what the workload is going to be once you get into school.... (P16, PWI-II, p. 9)

As Michael explained, his sister taught him the basics of college given her experience with higher education as a college graduate. In contrast, Chiquis' sister, her only sibling, did not graduate from college. Nonetheless, she still serves as a source of inspiration for Chiquis:

My mom.... tells me to look at what my sister did. She's just like a year older than me. So she tells me like, 'Do you want to be doing this or do you want to be like her? Do you want to have a college degree and like have an easier life?' She works at the airport. I mean it's a really good job... like it's for the government, but it's just really hard for her to like want to get a higher position because she doesn't have a degree. (P4, HSI-I, p. 3)

As Chiquis described, her family wants her to graduate from college so she can find a well-paying job resulting in a better quality of life and unlimited career opportunities. As such, Chiquis' family draws on the first-generation status to inspire her to persist to degree attainment.

In summary, based on several participants' narratives, having an older sibling provides an advantage for first-generation Latinx student-athletes. In many instances, the older brothers and sisters inspired participants to commence involvement in youth sports, a first step towards becoming collegiate athletes in the future. In addition, the siblings served as role models to them

for pursuing higher education and graduating from college, at times providing instrumental college insider knowledge to their younger brothers and sisters.

Financial and emotional support of parents. In addition to the guidance offered by siblings, participants discussed the financial and emotional support they received from their parents. In specific, every participant experienced some trials and tribulations as a collegiate student-athlete and shared that family support was instrumental in overcoming these tough times. Many of the trying times were a result of financial struggles. For example, Elizabeth disclosed that without her parents' financial support, she would probably not persist through her junior year:

.... when I started [college], I really did struggle with money here because I still had to pay out of pocket even though it wasn't the whole tuition, but I still had to pay out of pocket and that really made me struggle. But they [parents] still continue to pay for my school because they wanted me to get that degree.... I mean if I ever needed anything, if I ever lose the [athletic] scholarship or financial aid, I know that they're going to be there to pay for it because they just want me to finish, honestly. They just want me to get that degree, you know, get my job. Of course, they don't want me to struggle as much as they do, but I think that's the kind of support they have for me. (P9, HSI-II, p. 3)

Elizabeth wanted to go out-of-state to college but ultimately decided to stay and attend a nearby university due to financial concerns. Despite the out-of-state university offering an athletic scholarship, the amount was not sufficient to cover housing and living costs. As such, Elizabeth walked on the team at the local university while relying on her parents' financial support to cover what was left of tuition and fees after financial aid was applied.

Lola also discussed the financial support her family provides but also how it motivates her to do well in her classes and enables her to persist from semester to semester. Specifically, Lola discussed that while her financial aid covered all of tuition and fees, there was not enough money leftover for housing costs this year. However, Lola has been living in an apartment with one roommate and has to pay rent. Consequently, she considered moving back with her family who live in a town near the university. Fortunately, Lola's parents helped her financially so she can stay near the campus, as she does not drive. Lola described:

There was not a lot of money left over from financial aid. I only had less than \$100 so I spoke to my parents and I don't drive... I don't drive so I had to speak to my parents and my dad told me, 'no, stay there, we'll help you out. Don't worry about it. No.' So they... to me, it's like them helping me out... so I have to help them out by getting good grades, you know. I can't let that money go to waste by me not getting good grades because it's a lot of money. College's really expensive. So that's how they [parents] support me a lot and they support me financially.... They're always there for me. (P8, HSI-II, p. 3)

Lola's family supports her by paying for her housing and living expenses. As a result, Lola feels obligated to do well in her classes and persist to a degree as she views potential failure to complete her undergraduate studies as letting her family down for wasting the money they invested in her education. In other words, the financial sacrifices by Lola's family motivate her to persist to degree. Thus, Lola strives to earn good grades as she views being a student as her full-time job.

Likewise, Courtney knows she can count on her family's financial support - not just in undergraduate pursuits but also in graduate school. She shared: "My parents have always helped me out financially and I'm sure they'll continue to help me out financially as I go through

medical school and everything.... like my family always has my back” (P2, HSI-I, p. 4).

Accordingly, as attested by many of the participants’ responses, financial support of family is critical in the academic pursuits of first-generation Latinx student-athletes. In many instances, financial aid and athletic/academic scholarships are not sufficient to cover all college expenses, which include tuition and fees, housing, meals, and other living costs.

Familial support comes in various forms, not just financial. In specific, most participants discussed how their parents and other family members support them emotionally. For example, Bohemio opened up about a rough sophomore year in college during which his family played an important role by encouraging him to continue his studies. As a first-year student-athlete, Bohemio received 90% of full athletic scholarship. However, during his second academic year, Bohemio struggled athletically and academically, dealt with homesickness, and grieved the loss of his grandmother. Subsequently, Bohemio lost his entire athletic scholarship and had to walk on the team as a junior. Yet, Bohemio’s parents did not let him drop out of college and return home. Rather, they encouraged him to believe in himself and continue playing baseball his junior year as a walk-on. Bohemio shared the following:

Like last year that I had like a horrible season, they [his parents] were like, ‘Hey, like it’s okay. I mean it doesn’t matter. You had a bad year, you just got to bounce back.’ Like honestly, like they were there when I was in the ground...I felt like I was just in a hole that I couldn’t like just like get out but my parents never gave up.... It would be so easy for them to just be like, ‘You know what, just come home.’ But no, they’re like, ‘*NO!*’... you gotta stay there. It doesn’t matter. It’s gonna be fine. Just like trust it... like believe that you can do it...we believe in you. It doesn’t matter. So yeah, like they played a big role in my life and also here in college. (P3, HSI-I, p. 3)

Like Bohemio, many other participants discussed the emotional support their families provided when they needed that the most. For example, Jessica credits her mom and dad for her success and persistence in college. She described as follows:

Like when I'm having a bad day, they're the ones that kind of keep me going. I'll just like call them and be like, 'Hey, you know, today it was kinda tough.' And they'll be like, 'You know what, you're out there. We're all proud of you and you're doing what you need to do to be successful.' And that was one of the reasons I've been able to stay so consistent, I guess with my hard work...is because I have like a reminder every day like what I'm working for - my family. (P15, PWI-I, p. 9)

Overall, most participants described how their families wanted them to be happy. As such, parents of the participants did not place unrealistic expectations on their children but rather offered them the freedom to choose their own path while in college. For example, Joya's family hopes he earns a college degree but they will support him unconditionally even if he decides to quit college so he can play his sport professionally. In particular, Joya described:

I even talked to my parents like 'I want to drop out of school. Like I just want to play.' And they were supportive with it. They were like, 'whatever you want, but just make sure it's the right decision. Make sure you think it through, you know, because then you don't want to like regret it, but whatever you want, we support you. You don't want to go to school, then don't go to school and just play. But make sure everything is set, you know, you don't just want to drop out and then be like, okay, where do I go play? You know, you gotta have some sort of balance within all your decisions you make.' But they're very supportive. (P13, PWI-I, p. 3)

In other words, Joya's happiness is the most important in his parents' eyes. As such, his family fully supports all of Joya's decisions as long as he carefully weighs his options, plans his future steps accordingly, and then commits to the decision.

Similarly, Maria's family also supports her unconditionally, wanting her to make decisions for her own happiness and not to please them. For example, she shared that despite her dad not knowing much about a psychology major, he did not pressure her to pursue other options based on future employability or salary prospects. Maria stated: "[Dad]... told me, 'if you like psychology like I know it doesn't give a lot of money, but like study what you like, it doesn't matter'" (P5, HSI-I, p. 9). As such, this type of support Maria describes is important for her persistence to degree.

In summary, participants' narratives revealed the large role their respective families play on their success in college. In specific, parents provided financial and emotional support to participants that have enabled them to persist to degree attainment. Overall, parents displayed unconditional support and love for their children, wanting them to make decisions for their own happiness rather than to meet their family's expectations.

Immigration status as a source of inspiration. Additionally, the majority of participants discussed how the sacrifices their families made to move to the U.S. inspire them to persist to degree attainment. In other words, their family's immigration status has become an important source of inspiration for them. Specifically, some participants mentioned that their parents decided to immigrate to the U.S. because they wanted a better life for their children. Robert noted, "My mom says that she came over here to the U.S. because she wanted us to live better than they were living over there [Mexico]" (P12, HSI-II, p. 8). Likewise, Guess also shared that one of the main reasons for his family to come to the U.S. was so he and his siblings

could have a better future, which includes access to better education. He added, “I always saw the sacrifices my parents would make for me so I knew that I need to go to college” (P7, HSI-II, p. 1). As both participants shared, seeing their family’s willingness to move to a different country just so their children have more opportunities motivates them to apply themselves in their coursework and continue their college education.

In many instances, when family members shared about their past struggles, it provided a new perspective for participants’ own troubles. Guess, in particular, discussed how his dad, who works in a mechanic shop, uses his youth experiences to inspire Guess to work hard. In detail, Guess shared about the days when he finishes a workout in the mornings feeling exhausted. However, his dad occasionally calls him to come home afterward to help him with some chores. Guess narrated as follows:

I will be like very tired, but.... He will be like, ‘I mean you’re just [doing sport] and in school. You have an opportunity. Like when I was your age, I would be working all day. So like there’s no reason for you to be... like complaining because you actually have an opportunity.’ I feel that’s like the biggest advice or like the biggest lesson I’ve learned with him knowing that this is the easy part, like that... there’s an opportunity, a privilege if you can do it. The hard part is just doing the other things in life. (P7, HSI-II, p. 4)

Subsequently, Guess recalls this particular advice from his dad daily and applies it to his pursuits in college. Specifically, Guess illustrated, “Let’s say like I’m stressing about a test, I’ll be like... I mean I’m here like sitting down in the AC [air conditioning], just with the computer. Like... I can’t complain. I just need to do the work” (P7, HSI-II, p. 4). As Guess explained, his parents teach him to be grateful for the opportunities he currently has. While he may at times feel like life is hard, he keeps in mind that others have it worse and that he should not take any

opportunity for granted. Being a college student-athlete is a privilege, which he enjoys only because of his family's sacrifices in the past.

Robert made similar remarks as Guess, stating that his family's decision to move to the U.S. for the benefit of the family is a huge motivation in everything he does. Robert discussed:

Like in anything I do, I'm like treating people with respect or doing certain things a certain way.... or like just work ethic and things like that. Like I know that other people have it worse in other countries and things like that so I make sure to not kind of just go through the motions every day. I kinda see it as motivation, like to do it because I know like there are other people that want to be in my place so that's kinda how I see it. Like being the first-generation kind of motivation. (P12, HSI-II, p. 11)

Overall, Robert views his parents not being college graduates as an advantage rather than an obstacle. His first-generation student status instills in him motivation to succeed, as he knows where his family came from and what they sacrificed so Robert and his siblings can pursue a college education.

Other participants shared similar descriptions of how family's sacrifices are one of their primary sources of motivation. For example, Alex listed her parents as the most important factor to which she attributes her success and persistence in college. She views them as her motivation to "finish college and get that degree so that I can get paid a little higher so that I can help them and hopefully lighten their load back at home" (P10, HSI-II, p. 2). Alex recognizes that her parents sacrificed in the past on her behalf when they immigrated to the U.S. so she can have a better quality of life than they had growing up. In return, Alex wants to financially provide for her family once she graduates from college. In fact, she views a college degree as a window to unlimited opportunities such as a high-paying job. Thereby, Alex persists in her studies so she

can give back to her family in the future. Bohemio made a similar statement about his family. He said his dad has worked hard his entire life to provide for his big family. Once he graduates, Bohemio hopes to step in and let his dad retire. He described:

I feel like I need like to make that money so that I can tell my dad like, ‘Hey dad, you know what, just chill at home. It’s time for us, it’s time for me to take care of you all.’

Like one day, I want to say that like just like make him stop working and like enjoy life with my mom. (P3, HSI-I, p. 5)

Just like Alex and Bohemio, Elizabeth described how much getting a college education means for her family that struggled financially in the past. Elizabeth’s parents were 19 years old when she was born. Her grandparents could not help them financially so they focused on working to provide for her and her siblings instead of going to college. Subsequently, Elizabeth’s parents have always encouraged their children to earn a college degree so they have an easier life than they did. Elizabeth added: “They just want me to continue my education.... because they don’t want me to struggle the way they kind of struggled” (P9, HSI-II, p. 3). Likewise, Morgan’s parents also started their family at a young age. They had her brother at 18 years of age. She narrated: “They pretty much started from the bottom.... I see how hard they work and it’s almost just like an underlying motivation of like, okay, I want to do good because they’ve worked so hard for my siblings and I...” (P6, HSI-I, p. 9). Thereby, many of the participants view their family’s past struggles as a source of motivation to do well in college so they can give back to their family in the future once they graduate and get a well-paying job.

In summary, participants described how their family’s immigration status is an important source of inspiration for them. Specifically, the past sacrifices by family serve as a motivating

factor for participants to pursue a college education so they can get a better quality of life than their ancestors had as well as to give back to their families.

Family's expectation of college completion. In addition to the influence of siblings, financial and emotional support provided by parents, and immigration status as a source of inspiration, many participants frequently discussed being raised by their families with the expectation of college completion, which is one of the reasons for their persistence in college. For example, Michael shared about his dad: "He drilled in me ever since I was little that I'm going to go to college, I'm going to get my degree, I'm going to be successful" (P16, PWI-II, p. 6). As such, there was never a doubt in Michael's mind about pursuing college education. Similarly, Jessica's family also raised her with the expectation to attend and graduate from college. Jessica shared the following:

Like my dad asks me all the time, 'When are you going to finish? We always want you to finish.' He says that all the time, like, 'Get your degree and then after that, you know, we'll see what happens.' I don't know. They really just, my parents really want me to finish and they'll pretty much do anything for me to finish college. (P14, PWI-II, p. 3)

Overall, most of the participants were raised with the belief that a college degree is necessary to improve their quality of life. For example, Star discussed how growing up seeing her parents struggle while caring for her and her five siblings make her motivated to persist to a degree:

Like not that there's anything wrong with that....but like when I was younger, like things were kind of hard....I just don't want to be in a position of struggle like when I'm older. So it kind of just motivates me to like keep pushing, keep going, get through it because I know everything's gonna be okay in the end. (P1, HSI-I, p. 8)

Star believes being a college graduate will allow her to have unlimited opportunities on the job market. In contrast, Maria did not describe her family struggling financially. However, she talked about how she grew up watching her mom work in a job she did not like. However, Maria's mom did not have another employment option as a high school graduate. According to Maria, her mom could have done better if she had a college degree. As such, Maria views this as a motivation to persist in college to degree attainment. She emphasized: "Like I want to do something else, something more [than what her mom does for living], I want to have the opportunity to choose what I want to do and I feel like a better education can give you that" (P5, HSI-I, p. 6).

From the narratives of Star and Maria, college degree is indispensable for success in life as taught them by their families while growing up. Yet, not all participants shared this sentiment. In specific, Jake wants to become a police officer. However, he believes he does not need a criminal justice degree, his current major, for this position. As such, his family plays an important role in his ability to continue college education, as his parents do not let him quit college as they expect him to earn a degree. Jake described:

They [parents] want me to graduate... to have a better life.... Like you can't get hired for much without a degree anymore. Especially like if it's a lower degree. Like you can't do much with it at all. You have to have either a master's or something else to get like a really good position now. (P11, HSI-II, p. 5)

As Jake explained, the value of a college degree decreases over time. Today, having a bachelor's degree may not be enough to get a good job position. Yet, Jake continues his studies to please his family although he believes that he could have already been working in his desired field of law enforcement.

Overall, many of the participants described that their parents have always taught them about the value of college degree despite themselves not having any experience with higher education. As such, some of the participants shared about some challenges stemming from their parents' lack of experience with the U.S. college system. For example, Courtney admitted that her parents could not help her with many decisions concerning enrolling in college. She shared:

They [parents] weren't very helpful when it was, when it came to like choosing a university and what I should look for and how you get into honors college and how you choose your major and how you get like through college in general. They didn't understand it and they didn't know, so I was kinda like on my own in that realm and trying to figure it out, asking advice from all different people because I didn't have my family's advice there. (P2, HSI-I, p. 3-4)

Yet, despite the parents' lack of experience with higher education, the overarching agreement among participants was that their families served as an important reason for their persistence to degree attainment given their expectation of college completion. Thereby, they perceived the first-generation student label as an advantage rather than disadvantage. For example, Morgan talked about how for some people being a first person to go to college is a "big deal." However, Morgan refuses to let this label affect her in any way, as going to college is something she has always been expected to do by her family. She narrated:

That's because of my parents like they never made the excuse and so it's like if they didn't do it, then why was I going to do it?....I just don't let it affect me and just being a first-generation like, you know, like it's cool but.... Like I've known that I was going to do this whether I was the first-generation or not, I was always... 'I am gonna graduate from college.' I was always gonna play [her sport] my four years of eligibility. So yeah,

that's like, that's pretty much it. Like I don't let it be more than what it is. Like that's face value like that. (P6, HSI-I, p. 19)

In other words, regardless of her first-generation status, Morgan was raised by her family with the expectation that she will attend college one day. As such, she never considered other options out of high school. She had her mind set on becoming a collegiate student-athlete.

Importantly, the expectation of college completion consequently ensued in participants' motivation to make their families proud via academic and athletic achievement. As such, the moments of pride stemmed from participants' achievements of becoming collegiate student-athletes. For example, Lola shared: "My parents were really happy. They were really proud of me and they just told me to keep going at it, you know, in Spanish how they say it, '¡échale ganas!' [Give it your all!] That's what I did" (P8, HSI-II, p. 6). The feeling of making their families proud inspires participants to work hard in their sport and studies. For example, Guess highlighted: "They [his parents] usually talk about me and my mom would talk about me to her friends when they go [to see him competing].... Yeah, just showing how proud they are just kind of pushes me forward" (P7, HSI-II, p. 4). Overall, most of the participants shared descriptions of their families being proud of their achievements in college.

In summary, many of the participants described that their families raised them with the expectation to go to college and earn a degree. As such, the first-generation status did not negatively influence their persistence to degree attainment. Rather, despite having a lack of experience with higher education themselves, parents of participants viewed attainment of college degree as vital for a better quality of life than they have had. Therefore, participants were driven to persist to degree attainment to meet their parents' expectations and make them proud.

In other words, participants' families played an integral role on their success and persistence in college.

Capitalizing on Student-Athlete Role

The second theme that emerged from interviewing first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports concerned the ways they capitalize on their student-athlete identity. Four different categories emerged. In specific, participants discussed (1) *mastery of dual roles at the expense of on-campus engagement*, (2) *access to athletic academic support services*, (3) *quality interactions with institutional agents*, and (4) *feeling accepted on campus as student-athletes*.

Mastery of dual roles at the expense of on-campus engagement. As the interviews revealed, most of the participants excel in their dual roles as athletes and students at the expense of engagement in on-campus services and activities. As aforementioned in the first theme, participants rely on their familial capital to persist to degree. In addition, their athletic involvement also serves as a form of cultural capital that participants rely on to navigate the higher education system and assert a sense of belonging on their campuses. In fact, as several participants implied, the actual involvement in intercollegiate athletics has a profound positive effect on their intent to persist. Specifically, being able to compete in NCAA Division I athletics serves as a proverbial carrot on the stick for many of the participants. For example, Jake, a senior, described that he recently considered quitting college after one of his teammates, who could not deal with the pressure from his coach, family, and academics, dropped out. However, unlike his teammate, Jake decided to continue. He explained: "I was like, 'Do I need to be doing this [college studies] for my future job and stuff like that?' It just went back to like, I didn't want to quit athletics so athletics helped me stay" (P11, HSI-II, p. 15). As Jake described, the desire to

use all four years of athletic eligibility as permitted by the NCAA prevented him from quitting. While Jake continuously questions the need to have a bachelor's degree to become a police officer, he decided to forge ahead in his studies so he can compete in his sport during his senior year and exhaust his athletic eligibility.

Similar to Jake, Lola credited her sport as the second most important reason, right after family, for her success and persistence in college. She discussed:

[The sport] keeps me going because I enjoy [the sport] and it's just for four to five years of [the sport]. So it's student-athletes, right? So academics comes first and then the sport. But then if you don't pass your classes, you're not able to [compete in the sport]. And I would like to keep on [competing] as much as I can. So by that I have to pass my classes.

So those things would be what helped me keep going with academics. (P8, HSI-II, p. 6)

As Lola emphasized, participating in a college sport boosts focus on academics, as student-athletes must meet academic benchmarks to maintain their athletic eligibility per the NCAA requirements. As such, Lola is driven to perform well academically so she can continue competing in her beloved sport.

Accordingly, athletic involvement enforces academic focus of student-athletes. In addition, the participation also instills certain skills in athletes that are helpful with their academics. For example, Jessica described that being a collegiate student-athlete has taught her how to prioritize. She explained as follows:

A lot of people's problem when they get to college is that they don't understand that sometimes school comes first and sometimes athletics comes first before you go have fun.... So I'm always the kind of person where it's like if I have something to do and I have an opportunity to go somewhere else, it's like I'm going to do what I need to do

with my school first before anything else happens. Everything comes after school and [sport]. (P14, PWI-II, p. 10)

In other words, due to time demands associated with her student-athlete role, Jessica must find ways to prioritize between the different responsibilities to persist to degree. On a similar note, Robert noted that being an athlete keeps him busy, which positively affects his ability to persist in his studies. Specifically, he has to be intentional with his time, which prevents him from procrastinating. Robert narrated:

I feel like if I was just a regular student just going to class, I feel like I would have maybe too much time on my hands. I wouldn't feel like, as you know, I dunno, like as productive. So I can say [his sport] helped me be persistent in college and passing my classes and things like that, going semester to semester. (P12, HSI-II, p. 8)

Unlike Robert, most of the other participants viewed being busy due to managing the roles of athletes and students as somewhat challenging. Most importantly, the majority of the athletes attributed their busy schedules of juggling athletics and academics as the main cause for the inability to socialize with non-athletes and taking advantage of the various engagement opportunities offered on campus. For example, Courtney stated: "I would have definitely liked taking a part of being in the honors college but like it's a lot more extra work. So like being a student-athlete doesn't really allow me to do that" (P2, HSI-I, p. 7). As such, Courtney's account illustrates the need for athletes to prioritize between the various required tasks and tempting opportunities in terms of student engagement services and activities.

Other participants also described the need to set priorities with their schedule. For example, Alex joined the criminal justice club in the past. However, she ceased her membership due to time constraints. She clarified: "I couldn't handle the club and sports and then study hall

and everything else. So I just had to drop out of the club” (P10, HSI-II, p. 2). Overall, most of the Latinx student-athletes interviewed for this study partake in on-campus activities outside of athletics only on a limited basis, if at all. However, it is not due to lack of interest but more so due to participants’ scarcity of time. As Star pointedly summarized, “Like being an athlete and like having to handle everything at once, like, you know, do everything, it’s *a lot*. And, you know, it’s hard. I’m not going to lie. It is pretty hard” (P1, HSI-I, p. 2). Thereby, to excel in academics and athletics, participants make sacrifices in terms of involvement in student engagement services and activities on campus.

Nonetheless, numerous participants described some level of on-campus involvement. Generally, the choice of activity was intentional as most of the activities related to the athletes’ major and/or future career intentions. For example, Michael, one of the most involved participants in the study, mentioned serving as the president of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers chapter and the events coordinator for the American Society of Civil Engineer’s chapter. In addition, Michael is also a member of the Chi Epsilon Civil Engineering Honors Society. He decided to get involved in these organizations after several of them visited his classes for informational sessions. Michael further added the following about why he joined:

So I just wanted to make a network, to just understand what engineering was and like in a sense, get a feel for everything. I didn’t know what I was really getting into when I first came to college and once I joined those organizations, everything became a lot more clear on what I needed to be doing. (P16, PWI-II, p. 3-4)

Just like Michael, in most cases, participants’ motivation to join clubs stemmed from trying to build their resume by being involved and taking on leadership roles within the organizations. Additionally, a few participants were involved in faith-based organizations and the Student-

Athlete Advisory Committee. By far, however, the majority of participants solely focused on athletics and academics.

While time demands serve as the primary reason for the lack of involvement by participants, Joya provided another explanation. Specifically, he noted that regular Latinx students become members of clubs to make friends and carve out a sense of belonging. However, Latinx *student-athletes* do not need to venture outside of the athletic community to fulfill these needs. Joya specified the following:

For athletes - the sport [makes them feel welcome]. The friendliness of the program, of the people, you know, the coaching staff and everything. If you're not an athlete, there's clubs, you know, there's many clubs, you know, there's a Latin American club, Brazilian club. There's just a few to name it... and you will feel as is... as you are potentially like at home even though you are without your family. You know, they try the best to make you feel very comfortable. (P13, PWI-I, p. 3)

Joya attends a PWI. He feels welcome there as a Latinx and credits his involvement in athletics for his sense of belonging. He believes that Latinx non-athlete students at his university join clubs and organizations, especially those that relate to their cultural heritage, to assert a sense of belonging on campus and feel home away from home. However, he does not participate in these clubs as he found "his family" on his athletic team in his teammates.

Overall, many participants described developing close friendships with their teammates who they now consider part of their family. For example, Elizabeth shared:

You just like create friendships on the team and that kind of helps you get through everything. I know I'm always going to have my parents there, but sometimes you need other people to talk to like friends, teammates, and I feel like my teammates have always

been there too and I've always been there for them as well, so I think that's one thing that I can attribute to my success... (P9, HSI-II, p. 10)

In other words, participants, such as Elizabeth credit their teammates for serving as a source of support and sense of belonging. Thereby, given their already limited amount of free time, many of the participants do not possess the need to venture outside of their athletic community to join clubs and organizations to satisfy their social needs.

Notably, as Morgan expressed, being a student-athlete and staying busy does not necessarily mean that participants get a less desirable college experience. Morgan noted:

I don't feel like I'm missing out on anything. Of course... There are times where like... I can't, I don't know, go around [name of city] on the weekend and go to the [famous tourist attraction]. This is just an example because of [name of sport], but I don't... see it in a negative way. (P6, HSI-I, p. 10)

Morgan described that when she was growing up, she was always competing on the weekends, sometimes playing in eight or nine games in a row. As such, she could not attend many of her friends' events and felt robbed of important experiences growing up. However, in college, Morgan feels like she has her core group of friends who are all her teammates. While she is busy, she enjoys her time being a collegiate student-athlete. Morgan feels welcome on campus as an athlete and has many connections with athletic staff members who serve as her support network.

In other words, based on participants' accounts, despite the challenges in terms of heightened time demands and subsequent constraints to partake in on-campus services and activities, athletic involvement provides many benefits to first-generation Latinx student-athletes. In specific, student-athletes have the ability to cultivate friendships with teammates and make connections with staff members. Further, athletic involvement offers the opportunity to develop

skills and habits that benefit learning in the classroom. In addition, the love of the sport provides the extra motivation to do well academically to maintain athletic eligibility.

Access to athletic academic support services. In unison, participants described how the academic support services dedicated solely for athletes aid them in academic success. In specific, most of the Latinx student-athletes indicated that athletic study hall has been the most helpful on-campus program for their academic success. In fact, every participant mentioned the study hall program or the athletic academic services throughout their respective interview. For example, Bohemio talked about the love-hate relationship he has with study hall. He described:

Honestly, like that [study hall] keeps us on track and it's really helpful. Like you have tutors, you have advisors that tell you.... I mean it's like us talking right now and it's just like a tutor, advisor telling you what to do or why you should do it so... I like every time I have questions or something I just ask them because they know more than me so I think that's... study hall is like really good. Even though sometimes I hate it, like I do, and I don't want to be there.... [but] I do find it really helpful. (P3, HSI-I, p. 5)

Most athletic departments and/or individual teams have study hall policies that require first-year student-athletes to complete a specified number of hours of studying in the athletic facilities every week. Returning athletes with a GPA below a certain requirement usually also have to complete some study hall hours. As Bohemio admitted, he still has to be in study hall as a junior. While he would prefer not having this requirement, he views this program as helpful.

In contrast, Alex no longer has any required study hall hours. This is her first semester without this obligation. In the past, she viewed the program as helpful because it kept her from procrastinating on assignments. However, as Alex admitted, she now struggles: "I'm like all over the place because I don't go in there anymore. Because I keep forgetting [assignments]" (P10,

HSI-II, p. 4). Athletes still can come and utilize the facilities even if they no longer have required study hall. However, as Alex described, she mostly misses the structured time for studying and the accountability and reminders by athletic academic staff that were part of the program.

Overall, participants mostly talked about the academic services housed within athletics and did not take advantage of other campus programs/services available to all students. Courtney described athletics as an all-inclusive entity taking care of all her needs. She commented:

Like athletics, ‘You need a tutor? We will get you a tutor. You need help? We get you help. Need a counselor? We get you a counselor. If you need a nutritionist, like we got you!’ [Laughs.] Pretty much anything and everything. Like everyone just wants to help you succeed. So if you fail within the athletic community, I guess like it’s your fault, like there’s so much help available. It’s insane. (P2, HSI-I, p. 7)

Courtney’s account depicts that collegiate student-athletes possess a unique form of cultural capital as they benefit from a large network of support systems within the athletic department and their individual teams. As such, student-athletes have access to resources viable to their academic success and subsequent persistence to degree attainment.

Many of the participants appreciate the fact that their athletic departments provide academic services that include tutors just for their use. Three out of the four research sites offer this benefit for their student-athletes. However, Jessica has to go to a tutoring center for all students if she needs help in her classes. Jessica commented she would like her athletic department to provide more centralized academic facilities, as well as a set of tutors just for athletes. She stated:

I kinda wish we had that because when I went on a few [recruiting] visits to [another university] they had... like their tutoring center in their study hall was like a pure athletic

building and our study hall is like in the football stadium kind of, which I think is like fine. But like, I think it would be cool if it wasn't. Like if we had one just for athletes, you know, like a building just for athletes like with tutors for us... (P14, PWI-II, p. 5)

As Jessica attested, not every NCAA Division I athletic program provides tutors for just student-athletes. As such, Jessica and her teammates must utilize the academic resources located on campus for all students.

Overall, when available, most of the participants utilize the athletic academic services. Only a few of the athletes discussed taking advantage of campus-wide programs for their academics. Specifically, Star, Chiquis, and Courtney mentioned they have utilized supplemental instruction (SI) sessions. "Like we have SI in our classes and it's only in certain classes and then I'll go to those because they help a lot, like the tests and stuff" (P1, HSI-I, p. 4), Star explained. Moreover, Maria and Star have visited the writing center. Maria described its helpfulness: "When I didn't know English.... I had to like write papers. I would just go to the writing center and they would just help me a lot.... helped me get good grades" (P5, HSI-I, p. 5).

In addition to SIs and the writing center, participants described other available resources on campus. Specifically, Joya admitted his campus offers everything any student needs:

They have counselors, they have people... Like anything you need, they have. Even.... if you're dealing with let's say anorexia, like, there's people to talk to. If you're dealing with big like let's think about big cases, like mistreated at home or like anything you can think of, there's so much to help you for sure. (P13, PWI-I, p. 3)

However, Joya has never taken advantage of any of these services but he knows there is support outside of athletics if he ever needs it. Overall, Morgan pointedly summarized it when she said, "I don't take advantage of probably the resources that I should but I don't need them" (P6, HSI-I,

p. 12). Thereby, participants know about the abundance of services on their campuses offered for all students. However, they largely chose to ignore those resources given that athletics provide them with exclusive services reserved for student-athletes only.

In summary, most of the participants visit the athletic academic facilities if they need academic assistance. While their campuses provide additional resources, they feel comfortable being surrounded by other athletes and feel welcome in this environment. Only few of the participants ventured outside of the athletic community and participated in campus-wide activities, services, and programs. As such, the athletic involvement provides many benefits but sometimes they come at the expense of isolating athletes from the rest of the campus community.

Quality interactions with institutional agents. Overall, in their interviews, participants identified many different individuals from the campus community who have made a positive impact on their lives and who have helped them to persist in their studies thus far. The majority of the individuals were staff members within the athletic department. In specific, almost all participants talked about the staff from the student-athlete academic services' unit, also known as athletic academic advisors [used interchangeably with athletic advisors]. Elizabeth summarized the support from her advisors as essential for her overcoming various challenges. She stated:

I mean I always had my advisors, my athletic advisors, to help me out in anything and I guess I just had a lot of support around me. I can't say that I did everything on my own because I didn't. Like you need people to be there for you. I feel like that was really important for me and it just really helped me get through everything. (P9, HSI-II, p. 10)

As Elizabeth suggested, students benefit from the support of others such as institutional agents or peers. As a student-athlete, Elizabeth has interacted the most with her athletic academic advisor

who has always been there for her. Guess agreed, adding the services offered by student-athlete athletic academic services are indispensable for his academic success. He described:

I think that's the main thing for us [athletes]. You know, just having an advisor just guiding you week by week talking to you about how your classes are going, talking to you about, 'Okay, what are your classes? What are your plans for the next semester?' And just like them sitting with you and for you to express what you want to do, how you feel... I think that contributes a lot because many students, they just, they just crash and they're just like, they just isolate themselves with all the plans they want to do but they don't talk and if you don't talk, nobody's going to hear you out. So having an [athletic] advisor makes a big difference for your academic success. (P7, HSI-II, p. 6)

As Guess described, student-athletes benefit from having an assigned advisor who they can meet with for academic and career advice. In specific, Guess highlighted the fact that he has mandatory weekly meetings with his advisor, which provide him an opportunity to share about anything that is on his mind. Non-athletes, as Guess described, would benefit from a similar support system because some of them do not reach out and interact with any staff for advice.

Other participants spoke about their athletic advisors in favorable terms. Star meets with her advisor every week to update her about grades. In addition, Star's athletic advisor also helps her with class registration. While Star has another advisor, an academic advisor assigned to her based on the major program of studies, she prefers seeing her athletic advisor instead. "It's just a lot easier because she's [athletic advisor] really understanding" (P1, HSI-I, p. 5), Star explained. She added that her academic advisor helps her figure out what classes she needs to take but nothing more as the advisor never inquires about how she is feeling or how her grades are. Hence, Star has not connected with her academic advisor at all, visiting regularly with her

athletic advisor instead. Because of their many interactions, she now has a strong bond with her athletic advisor.

Based on the participants' narratives, their athletic academic advisors excel in providing academic advice. However, it is not the only reason why participants visit with them. As many participants admitted, they can talk about anything with their advisors, even if it falls outside of the scope of academics. For example, Morgan referred to her advisor as "mom" because she has always been there for her, especially during the first year of college when she, as well as some of her teammates, were homesick. She discussed:

Like she's my mom away from home... My mom because like especially whenever we're going through stuff as a team, like we just go into her office and like bawl our eyes out just because we were just so sad.... like I just know it was very genuine. (P6, HSI-I, p. 13)

Athletic academic advisors are not the only agents from within athletics who have an impact on student-athletes' persistence to degree attainment. In specific, multiple participants discussed the role their coaches have had on their academic success and/or persistence. For the most part, participants described their coaches to be helpful in their academic endeavors.

Michael, in particular, shared positive remarks about his coach when he stated:

He's someone who is really easy to talk to....I feel like he's been very understanding of the fact that I'm a student-athlete. So, he's understood that there are times where studies are more important, than... maybe not more important, but he's understanding that I've got the workload and that I'm involved on campus. So if I tell him, 'Hey, I'm going to be traveling this weekend for this [academic] conference,' we work around it and he's been understanding. He's let me do stuff like that. (P16, PWI-II, p. 4)

As Michael specified, his coach supports him to be involved in other activities outside of athletics, such as participation in various engineering organizations. In addition, his coach wants Michael to excel academically, too, and not just focus on athletics. As such, he accommodates Michael to miss team practices so he can partake in additional extracurricular opportunities for engineering students.

In general, the coaches that have had the most positive impact on their athletes care about their well-being and see them as more than just athletes. Maria provided an example when she mentioned that she can come and talk to her coach about anything. She described:

[Sport]-wise, he's helping me a lot and then personal-wise he cares a lot, too. We can talk to him about anything... Like compared to our last coach because last year she got fired and then we got a new one. So I felt like I couldn't talk to her about anything. But this new coach, you can just go in there and like tell him anything. It just feels like you have somebody else to talk to when you need advice or like when you have any problems, he just helps you. (P5, HSI-I, p. 5)

Maria's team went through some coaching changes in the past. From her experience, not all coaches are supportive and caring. Luckily, she now trains under a coach who is there for her and whom she feels comfortable to reach out to for advice. In contrast, Courtney has connected with her coach since the time he was recruiting her. She appreciated the fact that he had her best interest in mind. Specifically, Courtney described that the head coach encouraged her to take several official visits at other universities prior to her committing to play for him. She explained:

He really like wanted what was best for me, not just like he really wanted me to come here. You know, some coaches are more interested in you just coming here instead of like what's best for your fit. So I guess I just kind of got blessed that way..." (P2, HSI-I, p. 2)

Overall, Courtney views her head coach as an important figure in her life. Despite being a head coach, he is not just focused on winning but truly cares about his student-athletes' well-being and best interests. As Courtney described, her coach is one of the reasons why she is persisting towards a degree.

However, the impact that coaches have on their athletes' persistence intentions is not always positive. A couple of participants shared about negative experiences with some coaching staff that made them question their decision to continue playing their sport and/or pursuing studies at that particular university. In specific, Diego talked about his head coach who has made him feel miserable during his second year of college. After a stellar first-year when he started every game, he suffered an injury as a sophomore after which he struggled to perform well athletically. He chronicled the following:

Like there was one game where we just lost and I think I had only played 10 minutes of the game. And I hadn't even done poorly that game. Like while I was in, I was doing alright, like I was playing alright. But we ended up losing badly that game and it was an important game that we needed to win. And once we got home, our coach sort of went off on a little rant at the team and he specifically told me I was the most disappointing player. And there were also other times where he didn't say it exactly, but he basically alluded to me being like the horrible player. (P15, PWI-I, p. 7)

Diego added that he was feeling low mentally for some time because of the change in treatment he received from the head coach from first to the second year being on the team. Today, looking back, Diego admits that if he had the option to do it all over, he would not choose to come to PWI-II because of the issues with his coach. Diego's experience depicts that coaches have a lot of power. As such, their interactions with the athletes can be a source of empowerment and

validation or discouragement and mental breakdown of their self-worth. In some cases, players decide to quit sports, transfer to another institution, or completely drop out of college because of these negative interactions with their coaches.

In fact, Robert started his studies at another NCAA Division I university. However, he regretted his decision quickly. During the first team's competition, Robert's coach was not happy with the performances of some of his teammates and was cussing them out and acting out of control. Robert stated, "After the first meet, I told myself, 'Man, I don't want to be with this guy anymore' so I was like... I took off" (P12, HSI-II, p. 2). Robert transferred to a university near his home after the first year. When making a decision to transfer, he reached out to some of his high school friends to see how their college coaches were like, as he did not want to work with another coach that would treat him badly. As Robert attested, coaches play a large role in the satisfaction of their athletes, which in turn converts into academic success and persistence, or lack of thereof if the coach treats the athletes poorly.

In summary, participants described developing close bonds with institutional agents from the athletic realm. Specifically, they credited their athletic academic advisors and coaches for supporting them in their academic and athletic endeavors. As such, the frequent interactions with these staff members validated participants' belonging on campus who then strived academically. In other words, athletic academic advisors and coaches became important sources of support to participants' persistence to degree attainment.

Feeling accepted on campus as student-athletes. Many of the participants discussed how the involvement in intercollegiate athletics is one of the main reasons why they feel accepted on their campuses. Specifically, the athletes attributed the act of representing the institution to the outside community for feeling welcome by non-athlete peers and the rest of the

campus community. For example, Robert stated that “being an athlete make[s] me feel like I belong because I put in effort to represent the university” (P12-OGQ, HSI-II, p. 1). Lola added that she feels welcome on her campus because she is part of the athletic program. She specified:

I represent the university when it comes to competitions. Not only competitions but I represent the university outside, like even when I am with my family or wherever I go, I would always carry [name of the university] with me because I am part of the athletic program and I have to make it look good. I think that’s why I would feel more welcome here. (P8, HSI-II, p. 9)

Like Lola, Chiquis perceives herself to be a representative of her team and the athletic department everywhere she goes. Specifically, she noted that students, faculty, and staff are looking up to student-athletes, describing the following:

I just feel like it’s [athletics] something to be proud of and like your professors are proud of it, too. So they, like they recognize you and that you’re trying to be like everybody else. Even if you’re like doing a sport, so like people look up to you as an athlete. I think so that makes you feel like welcome and proud of yourself. (P4, HSI-I, p. 10)

In other words, Chiquis described that faculty and peers recognize that student-athletes manage additional responsibilities due to their athletic involvement. As such, they respect them for the ability to balance the requirements of athletics and academics.

In agreement with Chiquis, Bohemio added that he feels respected because he is an athlete and as such feels welcome on his campus. Bohemio asserted as follows:

Like people know like you are an athlete and they’re like, ‘Oh, he plays [name of sport]...’ They want to know why you playing and stuff like that... they respect you more.

Even if you just have a backpack... it has your name... It's like it's awesome. But yeah, I feel like you own more respect... (P3, HSI-I, p. 13)

The above narratives, including Bohemio's, illustrate that many of the participants feel accepted on their campuses because they are recognized and valued for representing the university through their athletic involvement.

However, the enhanced visibility that comes with the student-athlete role has some negative ramifications. As Courtney explained, she sometimes feels uncomfortable at her campus as she perceives being judged a lot because of her student-athlete status. In specific, Courtney explained that, on a personal level, she feels *welcome* but feels *unwelcome* at the university as a whole. Courtney further explained what she meant via the following example:

...when I tell people I'm a student-athlete, they're like, 'Oh my God, that's so cool. Tell me more about it!' and all that stuff. I've never had anyone like be like, 'Oh you're a student-athlete..' [negative tone], but everyone's always like, 'Oh cool! What sport do you play? Like what do you do?' And I feel like it's because when you meet someone on a personal level, they will feel more inclined to know you, you know, instead of like as a broad general like, 'Oh, you're student-athletes and we are students over here.' It's more, 'Oh, like you're actually really nice and like you're actually like just a normal student, you know, who happens to play sports.' (P2, HSI-I, p. 13)

In other words, Courtney feels that some negative stereotypes exist about student-athletes on her campus. However, when her peers get to know her and/or her teammates on a personal level, they realize that these preconceived notions about student-athletes are just a myth.

Similarly, Star also expressed that student-athletes experience respect but also resentment from some members of the campus community. To illustrate, Star mentioned last year's

controversial student body vote on whether to increase the athletic fee as part of the tuition by a few dollars to raise money for athletics. During this time, Star felt disliked by some of her non-athlete peers because she was an athlete. In specific, she described how she and her teammate felt resentment from her chemistry lab classmates:

I mean everyone knew we were athletes just because like, you know, like our backpack, stuff like that. So no one talked to us like *no one really talked to us* [emphasis] and we would be really confused. Sometimes we tried to ask for help and, literally, no one would help us and we kind of felt like maybe they didn't like us because we were athletes...that was just something like we came to a conclusion. We're like maybe they just don't like us because they think we're like stuck up or something, but really that's not the case. (P1, HSI-I, p. 12)

Students voted against the increase of tuition fee at Star's university. In addition, the vote generated a lot of negative attention for athletics from the student body. As a result, Star perceived other students avoiding interaction with her since they thought athletes receive too many benefits at their expense.

Nevertheless, despite the few comments about the negative experience with some non-athletes during the time of the athletic fee referendum, participants described feeling welcome on campuses by their non-athlete peers. In fact, some of the participants described positive interactions, mostly in the classroom, that in few cases have developed into friendships. For example, Maria disclosed that many people want to be friends with her just because she is an athlete. "I made a lot of friends in my freshman year because of that. They just come up to you, 'You are an athlete?!? Where are you from?' Yeah, it's always the same conversation. [Being athlete] just gives you friends" (P5, HSI-I, p. 8), Maria narrated. Diego echoed Maria's

sentiments about meeting many new people only because of his status as a student-athlete. He described the following:

We do like represent the school and so there's people... that I meet that I wouldn't have probably met if not for athletics because they're coming to support the games....Like there's definitely a lot of students or other people like that I probably wouldn't have met or like they wouldn't have known me if it wasn't being for me being on the [sport] team. (P15, PWI-I, p. 13).

As Maria and Diego described, student-athletes get to interact with many different people on campus because of their student-athlete role. They get recognized by the campus community because of their athletic involvement. As a result, people from the campus community sometimes approach them to start conversations. In some circumstances, these interactions have the potential to develop into close friendships over time.

In summary, participants chronicled that their student-athlete status provides them with acceptance by the campus community. For the most part, the athletic involvement serves as one of the primary reasons why first-generation Latinx athletes feel welcome at their universities and affirm a sense of belonging. In general, the involvement in sports makes non-athletes interested in interacting with the participants, with these connections having the possibility to develop into friendships. However, some negative stereotypes exist about the student-athlete population, which may at times made participants perceive the campus environments as unwelcoming. However, most of the participants have never experienced being treated unfavorably because of their student-athlete role.

Seeking Validation from Their Multiple Identities

The interviews with first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports revealed a final theme regarding the ways they seek validation from their multiple identities. Four categories emerged. In specific, participants shared about (1) *finding their Hispanic niche at HSIs and PWIs*, (2) *sports as central part of their identity*, (3) *embracing Latinx cultural capital in athletic endeavors*, and (4) *fighting negative stigma about Latinxs through athletic and academic achievement*.

Finding their Hispanic niche at HSIs and PWIs. In unison, participants described their campuses as welcoming to them. However, the ways participants carved out a sense of belonging and found their Hispanic niche differed depending on the university's setting. Specifically, student-athletes attending HSIs felt at home on their campuses given they are surrounded by many students who are also Hispanic. For example, Star shared the following:

I just feel like it's really cool.... that there's a lot of other people around you that are like not the exact same but like, you know, that go through the same things and like feel the same way. And, I don't know if it's really like made that much of a difference just because I'm Latina, but everything just feels like it comes easier to me. I feel like I can like fit in easily. Like I don't really ever feel like secluded from anything. Kinda like back in my hometown....there'd be nothing but like White people....but like being here...it's never anything like that. Everyone's so welcoming, so nice and like, I dunno, like just everything just feels right. Like it just feels like home... (P1, HSI-I, p. 9)

As Star narrated, she feels like she belongs on her campus due to its diversity. In particular, she likes that she is now surrounded by many people of her ethnic background, unlike in her hometown community, which was not ethnically and racially diverse.

Overall, many of the participants from HSIs highlighted the fact that a large proportion of students are Hispanic. In addition, Maria added that she feels like she belongs because she is able to speak Spanish freely on campus. She narrated:

I think everyone, everywhere you go, there's someone speaking Spanish and you just feel connected. Like, I don't know, you just, I don't know, you're at Starbucks and something. Somebody talks in Spanish. You just want to jump in that conversation. Like, I dunno, I think everybody feels connected if you like, just the fact of speaking the same language. (P5, HSI-I, p. 7)

The feeling of connectedness among the student body stems from sharing different cultural traditions and customs. Lola emphasized the following:

I don't see why they [Hispanic students] wouldn't feel comfortable or welcome in this campus because it's here in the [name of the region]. It would be different I think if they attend to [a] university that's full of like White people or, or other ethnicities because we know how we are, we understand our traditions, our culture. So we get along and we know more likely how we are, how we communicate and get along. (P8, HSI-II, p. 8)

Overall, participants praised their HSIs for providing opportunities for Hispanics to be involved in different on-campus activities and organizations as well as coordinating various events to celebrate Hispanic heritage. Courtney, in particular, highlighted she feels welcome on her campus because of the different celebrations of her culture. She shared the following:

I love that I have this heritage and culture that is shared within this university because I mean when like Cinco de Mayo and Fiesta come around, like it feels just like home, honestly, because I'm so used to like the Mexican music and the regatta and the dancing

and just everything like that happens at like weddings and stuff just like being transferred, and here at this university definitely makes me feel special. (P2, HSI-I, p. 11)

In other words, as Courtney illustrated, participants attending HSIs feel validated at their universities by the common heritage shared within the campus community.

In contrast, participants from PWIs described being one of few Hispanic students on their campuses. Yet, none of the participants labeled their campuses as unwelcoming to Latinxs. For example, Jessica stated: “I’ve never really felt like an outsider. I’ve never felt like someone is shunning me or doing something to make me feel uncomfortable. I’ve always felt comfortable on campus” (P14, PWI-II, p. 11). Importantly, participants found unique ways to carve out a sense of belonging in these spaces and find their Hispanic niche.

Specifically, all of the participants attending PWIs sought ways to remain connected to their cultures. For example, Joya spends a lot of his free time with his Latinx teammates as well as a few non-athletes who are also Hispanic. He described: “We have some dinners with plates [food] from our home countries, you know, we go to clubs or bars where there is like Latinx music and it’s fun” (P13, PWI-I, p. 7). Likewise, Diego also socializes with all of the Latinxs on his team. In fact, his coaches noticed and made comments to discourage them from talking Spanish during team activities as well as socializing as a Latinx group. Diego explained the following:

...we obviously like hang out together, all the Latinos on the team, and they [coaches] definitely like told us that we need to, like we *shouldn’t be* [hanging out together]. Not that we shouldn’t be so close but we should hang out with the other guys more I guess, like not be just us, like the Latinx group, whatever. Yeah, there’s definitely been times

when we've been like warming up or something and it's just Latinos together cause there's not that many of us and they just like make like jokes about it. (P15, PWI-I, p. 5)

In other words, Diego carves out a sense of belonging by being close friends with other Latinxs on his team. In contrast, Jessica is one of only a few Latinxs on her team. Nonetheless, she shares about her culture with her non-Hispanic teammates. She described:

When I'm in the locker room with my team, I play a lot of Mexican music and they all like it, they think it's pretty cool. A lot of the time, they're like, 'Oh I like this song!' and I'm like, 'Yeah, my mom plays this song all the time.' (P14, PWI-II, p. 10).

In other efforts, Jessica teaches her teammates about the different Mexican dances as well as shares with them food that her mom and dad made when she was growing up.

In contrast, Michael described that he was able to find a Hispanic niche at his university by joining the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers. Specifically, Michael shared that he has been able to learn more about the different Hispanic cultures by being a member of this particular organization. Michael narrated as follows:

I am learning more about the culture from them [the organization] and different Hispanic groups. Whereas I've just been primarily around Mexicans [growing up]. I'm learning more about Puerto Rican culture, Honduran culture, Guatemalan culture, Ecuadorian culture, and just understanding their background, like learning about where they came from... things like that. (P16, PWI-II, p. 10)

As Michael shared, despite attending a PWI, he was able to find a group of fellow Latinxs. Interacting with them has allowed him to learn more about different Hispanic cultures. In addition, he has made many new meaningful connections with his peers.

In summary, all participants described feeling that they belong on their campuses regardless of the university setting. However, the ways participants carved out a sense of belonging and found their Hispanic niche differed between those attending HSIs and PWIs. Participants from HSIs felt welcome as Latinxs due to being surrounded by other Latinxs who spoke Spanish. In addition, HSIs offered many opportunities for Hispanic students to get involved on campus and celebrate their cultural heritage. In contrast, participants from PWIs had to find their own Hispanic niche by, for example, intentionally surrounding themselves with the few other Latinxs on campus and sharing meals and traditions connecting them back to their cultures.

Sports as a central part of identity. Regardless of the university setting, most of the participants consciously identified themselves with the primary role of an athlete, which validated their sense of belonging on campus. For example, Bohemio stated, “I am honestly all about [sport]. That’s my life and like that’s who I am. I’m a [sport] player; that’s me” (P3, HSI-I, p. 4). Bohemio solely views himself as an athlete and hopes to become a professional athlete. However, his salient athletic identity at times interferes with his dedication to academics and willingness to partake in any on-campus services or activities. Specifically, Bohemio described:

I rather just go work out and practice, get better and all that.... It won’t be a distraction to like join a group or something, but like why would I waste my time... not waste my time but like... when I can be at the gym or like practicing to get better? (P3, HSI-I, p. 4)

Overall, the level of athletic identity varied among participants, with a few athletes, such as Bohemio, Joya, and Diego, displaying salient athletic identities. Hence, as self-described, their focus in college is to increase their chances of playing sports professionally upon graduation.

Nonetheless, while the other participants did not have aspirations for professional sport careers, they still identified highly with their student-athlete status.

Overall, only a few of the participants explicitly discussed their identities outside of the athlete role. Morgan, in specific, admitted to viewing herself solely as an athlete during her first year of college. She struggled with her self-worth during that time as she felt treated less by her coaches as a walk-on and did not get much playing time. However, over time, Morgan realized she is more than just an athlete and her athletic scholarship status. Morgan narrated this transformation in thinking as follows:

For a while there, I definitely like I've placed my value on like not being on scholarship. And it was like I was very negative towards myself because I like kind of let it define me.... I was very much like, 'Oh, I am not scholarship, like I'm not worth it.' Now, it's like I could not be on scholarship now, and I'd be like, 'Screw that.' Like I have a way more other qualities besides [name of sport] and that's what makes it easier at the end of the day. But I didn't realize that my freshman year. (P6, HSI-I, p. 14)

In other words, Morgan's identity has evolved throughout her time in college. Today, Morgan still enjoys her sport. However, she explores her other interests and makes conscious efforts for others to view her as more than her sport. In other words, she displays a healthy, balanced identity consisting of different dimensions.

Similarly, Courtney views herself more than just an athlete and has career aspirations outside of athletics. She hopes to attend medical school in the future. As such, she seeks opportunities to socialize with non-athletes and take advantage of the different student engagement services and activities available on her campus. Courtney shared the following:

I'm trying to go to medical school so just the exposure to like the doctors and residents and the medical students is like priceless. Like to get all that knowledge and be around people who are kinda on the same track as you, especially like medical school wise because that's like a whole other level for sure. So being around people who are like-minded in that way is definitely awesome. (P2, HSI-I, p. 5-6)

Overall, it was not only a change in identification with the athlete role that changed over time for some of the participants. In particular, a few of the participants recognized that their passion for the sport has waned as well. For example, Jake discussed how his sport no longer brings him as much joy as it did in high school. He narrated as follows:

I'm not as happy like going to practice and stuff.... like in high school I know that I was like, 'Oh man, like, like let's go!' It's like every day, you know, 'Let's, let's grind it, let's grind it!' But now it's kinda like, you know, like a job. So it's like, 'Oh man, like I gotta get up, oh I gotta practice more.... can't stay up that late studying, I have a practice tomorrow.' It's always like, 'Ugh, I have practice tomorrow. Oh, I have practice later.'.... I think it's like a love-hate thing...I dunno how to explain it, but I mean, I guess I love it so much that I can't like quit. (P11, HSI-II, p. 4)

Jake, a senior, lost his athletic scholarship prior to his final year of eligibility because he did not sign the scholarship renewal agreement by the deadline set by the compliance office. However, he still joined the team as a walk-on despite recognizing that he lost passion for his sport and practices now feel like a joyless job. In other words, Jake still identifies strongly as an athlete and is not ready to let go of this identity. In fact, he admitted he continues his college studies primarily so he can use all of his athletic eligibility.

In contrast, Elizabeth considered not doing sports in college the summer before she began college studies. However, she quickly realized she missed her sport, which made her change her mind and try out for the college team. She chronicled:

That summer was like really hard for me. I was just like, I don't want to do it [sport] anymore. I'm just gonna focus on school. So that's what I planned on doing. And then once, like the summer passed, I was just so miserable, like I felt like there was something missing in my life and that was kind of it. So I just decided to talk to coach and he got me on the team. (P9, HSI-II, p. 2)

Both Jake's and Elizabeth's narratives demonstrate that sports become an integral part of the identity of many student-athletes. As such, it is difficult for them to quit athletics even if the sport does not bring joy to them anymore.

In summary, the athletic role was most salient for the majority of the interviewed first-generation Latinx student-athletes who consciously identified as participants of their sport but did not think much about their other identities, including those pertaining to their ethnicity, gender, and first-generation student status. Only interview questions aiming at the specific non-athletic identities harvested reflections of participants on being Latinx. It was clear that many of the participants never consciously thought about their ethnicity and whether it has influenced their experiences within the college setting.

Embracing Latinx cultural capital in athletic endeavors. Based on participants' narratives, the identities of Latinxs and student-athletes intersect. Thereby, participants shared instances when they utilized their Latinx cultural capital within the athletic setting. In particular, some of the participants attending PWIs discussed the importance of being surrounded by other

peers of a similar cultural background. For example, Robert who transferred to HSI-II from another PWI, reminisced about his first-year in college far away from home. He narrated:

I think it does make a difference [having Latinxs as teammates]. I feel because at the other school, yes, my teammates were cool and they were welcoming, but they were a little bit different than me in the fact that some of them didn't take it as serious as I did, and things like that.... In here, I feel like when we go to hotels and everything, I can talk about to [name of Latinx teammate] about, you know, tamales or certain Mexican food or traditions and he can connect with me, like all of them can. It always kind of feels no matter where, like in Washington [state] or somewhere, it always feels like we have that part of home with us wherever we go and I feel like it makes us closer in a way. So that's what's cool about like having these teammates, you know. (P12, HSI-II, p. 8)

In other words, Robert noticed a difference between the culture of his team at PWI and HSI-II, appreciating the fact that he now gets to interact with other Latinx teammates in a familiar way. Specifically, he highlighted the fact they can bring their culture with them while traveling to other states for competition.

In comparison, despite attending universities with many Latinxs within the student body, several of the participants from HSIs commented on the fact that there are not that many Hispanic student-athletes at their institutions (e.g., Bohemio, Courtney, Star, Chiquis, and Robert). For example, Bohemio acknowledged the following:

It's just hard sometimes. You know, like you don't have a lot of people to like interact with like I don't have the same... Like to talk Spanish too, you know, like you don't have that many people in sports... Is like... there's not much Latinos... Sometimes you don't feel like you're home, you know... (P3, HSI-I, p. 2)

Bohemio feels that Latinxs in his sport bring their culture with them to the activity. In other words, they are passionate about sports and it shows. Bohemio further clarified as follows:

...like we dance and in like practice and stuff like that. We mess around with stuff like that. We like doing the things trying having fun. You know, it's not just like going through the motions.... No, we like to be like, like loud and just lose it. Like I don't see it from people over here. Like I don't see that. So it's kinda hard sometimes just to like... Feel like... Yeah, I can do it too. But like no one will follow me. (P3, HSI-I, p. 11)

In other words, Bohemio believes that Latinx student-athletes have more fun than players of other races/ethnicities when playing their sport. Other participants echoed Bohemio's sentiments about Latinxs being passionate about sports as it is part of their culture. For example, Joya expressed, "It's kinda like runs in the blood kind of, you know, because like Hispanics, we all, I mean pretty much all of us play [Joya's sport], you know, sport. So it's kinda like a thing we do" (P13, PWI-I, p. 1).

Other participants discussed examples of utilizing their Latinx cultural capital in their athletic endeavors. For example, Courtney commented that she is just one of a few Latinxs on her team. As such, she loves to interact with her Hispanic teammates who share the same culture. Courtney narrated the following:

...I love my Latinos, Latinas on the [sport] team because we get each other a lot of times because we can just like share jokes. Like, especially with like the Spanish language, like jokes that are funny in Spanish sometimes aren't funny in English so like I can like share them with them and stuff. (P2, HSI-I, p. 11)

To provide a specific example, Courtney described a funny video that inspired some of the jokes her Latinx teammates and Courtney make during practice. Courtney chronicled the following:

...there's this video and he calls it like 'Cholo fitness' and he's like talking about how Mexican cholos just like doing all this crazy stuff... it's kinda like a gangster. But do you know what like 'más or menos' means? Like when people are like, 'Oooh, más or menos?' So there's a joke in it and he's like doing fitness stuff. He's like, 'Okay, you gotta get your *gluteus más o menos*.' Instead of like *gluteus maximus*. So like, stuff like that, we always say like when we're squatting, like, 'Make sure you get your gluteus más o menos!' Stuff like that. Just little stuff like here and there that just, I don't know, it makes it fun for sure. (P2, HSI-I, p. 11-12)

Generally, most of the participants shared about good experiences interacting with their non-Hispanic teammates. At times, participants even relished on teaching others outside of their ethnic backgrounds about their cultures. However, given the small number of Hispanic student-athletes on most of the teams at both HSIs and PWIs, a few participants admitted experiencing conflicts with teammates of non-Hispanic backgrounds. Explicitly, Chiquis disclosed the following:

We're all really good friends. We're really close [within her unit of the team]. And then when it comes to like [the other unit within the sport], there's more like everybody. But yeah, it's really hard to like talk to different, if that makes sense. It's not being racist.... Even if we did want to talk to them, like they tell us to get more involved and stuff, but it's hard, like it's hard to like put yourself out there when they don't make you feel like you're welcome, you know. (P4, HSI-I, p. 8)

In other words, Chiquis feels close to her teammates who are one specific unit within her sport and where a large proportion of the team are Latinxs. She describes this team unit as *diverse*. However, the other units within her sport is predominately White, and Chiquis does not perceive

them to be friendly towards her. Thereby, based on this account, sharing cultural connections with teammates is helpful for a sense of belonging for Latinx student-athletes.

In summary, participants discussed how they utilize their Latinx cultural capital in athletic endeavors. Specifically, they noted they like to interact with teammates of a similar ethnic background as they share aspects of their cultures. In most instances, regardless of whether participants attend HSIs or PWIs, there are only a few other Latinxs on the athletic teams. Nonetheless, Latinxs speak Spanish, share meals, or make jokes connected to their cultures with those teammates.

Fighting negative stigma about Latinxs through athletic and academic achievement.

In their interviews, many of the participants described being college student-athletes as an opportunity for fighting negative stigmas about Latinxs in the U.S. Specifically, participants admitted hearing many negative stereotypes about Hispanic population, in general, and Latinx student-athletes, in particular. For example, Chiquis commented on people being surprised she performs well in her sport because she is Latina. She narrated the following:

They [spectators] just think like, ‘Oh, White people are really good at [doing a particular sport activity]’ because I’ve seen that a lot at like [athletic competitions] where there’s like a whole team, the whole team is like White and they’re like really fast and they’re like, ‘Oh, they’re just talented’ and then, I don’t know, just like there are like comments like that, it’s like negative comments....It’s like you don’t feel as good as everyone else....Like if you’re not doing as well as everyone else in practice or something, maybe that has like something to do with that [the stereotypes being true]. (P4, HSI-I, p. 9)

Overall, stereotypes, such as the one that Chiquis described, surround participants daily.

However, as Guess noted, they have a *positive* effect on Latinx student-athletes. “Honoring the

culture, all the stereotypes is what drives this culture for better,” Guess shared (P7-OGQ, HSI-II, p. 1). Robert echoed Guess’s sentiments, adding that stereotypes about Latinx culture make Robert work extra hard in his sport. He explained via the following example:

I don’t know why whenever we go represent [athletically] like the fact that we’re, I don’t know, I just feel like the fact that I’m Hispanic or things like that when I go like to [athletic competition events], I just want to, I don’t know, I just want to *show people*.

(P12, HSI-II, p. 11)

Robert’s motivation to *show people* comes from learning about negative stereotypes about Hispanics that circulate within the U.S. Robert further narrated as follows:

I had a teacher....from up north [used to work there]....she would say, ‘Man, like people over there think that we live in huts down here.’ So I would always think like whenever I go up north or go to [compete], I always think like, ‘Man, I kinda want to beat them or show them,’ you know, right? Like we’re just as good as they are, if not better... like the fact that we live down here and also here like this area is like really high in poverty rate compared to the rest of the United States, I think, right?.... So then, I mean I just want to leave them with a good impression, right? (P12, HSI-II, p. 11)

In other words, Robert wants to represent people from his culture in a positive light to the rest of the nation when he travels and competes for his university. He further clarified the following:

I’ll go in like the Facebook comments and people are like, ‘put up the wall’ and stuff like that and people just thinking, you know, that bad people and things like that are coming to the United States and things like that. But what they don’t know... Like, I mean, there’s good people, right? Like my parents came from over there....That’s why when I [compete] sometimes I think about it that I feel like sometimes they think that we’re less

of them a little bit. So maybe when I'm racing I'm like, you know, I want to show them like maybe it will bother them. (P12, HSI-II, p. 12)

As Robert described, he is aware of the current political climate. He feels that people in the U.S., especially those living up north, have a negative perception of immigrant families from Latin America. As such, Robert uses his athletic talent to shed a positive light on people from his predominately-Hispanic hometown, his parents' country of origin, and Latinx culture as a whole. In other words, the stereotypes about and prejudice against Hispanics motivate him to work hard in his sport and prove people wrong.

In comparison, Michael seeks to fight the negative stigma about Latinxs via his academic achievements and by becoming an engineer in the future. He shared: "I just want to set an example. Just show, I guess maybe Hispanics or maybe people that look like me, that it can be done. You can be successful no matter where you come from" (P16, PWI-II, p. 6). He further added:

I just feel like we're large majority of the population, especially in [state] and especially in my field where a very slim majority of the workforce... I think the last statistic I saw about it was Hispanics are like 2 or 3% of like the engineering workforce and like only 1% of engineering professors are Hispanic. So I just want to, I guess show the Spanish community that we are almost the largest minority group in the country, yet we're underrepresented in a really important field. (P16, PWI-II, p. 10).

Michael is aware that only a few Latinxs graduate with an engineering college degree. However, he wants to break the stigma about Latinxs not doing well in engineering and inspiring others to follow his path.

Overall, many participants discussed being motivated to persist to degree by representing Latinxs as a group within the population in a positive light and thus fight the current negative stereotypes about Hispanics in the U.S. This drive to represent further converted into the need to inspire and/or give back to participants' home communities. For example, Lola hopes to help all the people in her community by becoming a physical therapist one day. Lola's grandma who has been having many health issues and had several surgeries inspired her. At one time, Lola's grandma had knee surgery and needed someone to be helping her to bend her leg so her knee could be functioning well. Lola credits this experience for her decision to major in kinesiology in college. She described how expensive physical therapy is. Accordingly, Lola wants to study to become a physical therapist so she can help others for free. Lola explained:

Yeah, I want to help out my family, not only my family, but people, you know, because it's... I don't know, a lot of accidents have been going on and.... they can't really afford paying a lot so I would like to do it like to help them out, you know, so they don't have to worry about money. I would like to help them out financially. And so they can be like healthy with their conditions, like their lifestyle can be healthy. (P8, HSI-II, p. 7)

The inspiration to give back to her community motivates Lola to pursue a challenging major while competing in her sport. Once she graduates, she plans to apply to a graduate school, which is the next step to become a physical therapist. Importantly, Lola does not seek wealth from her education. Rather, her end goal revolves around being able to provide her services free of charge as a means to give back to her predominately-Hispanic community.

Likewise, Bohemio also hopes to inspire and give back to his community by earning a college degree. Specifically, as of the reasons for his persistence to degree attainment, Bohemio views the drive to "prove people that like if I can do it, [then] honestly everyone can do it. Like

I'm the first one in the family and like I'm coming from Mexico, like whatever, like if I, honestly, if I can do it, other people can do it..." (P3, HSI-I, p. 10). As such, Bohemio is motivated to persist to a degree by being a role model to others. Being a second-generation Latinx based on his parents' generational status in the U.S., he views his success as a way to serve as an inspiration for others from his parents' country of origin.

Notably, just like Bohemio, Joya, who is a first-generation Latinx as he was born in another country, spoke about the same level of responsibility to his native country and people from those communities. Speaking on the behalf of friends who come from lower-income countries such as Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama, Joya described that it means a lot to them to obtain a college degree in the U.S. "We're very like disciplined and with.... a great amount of morality, with good morals because our families are depending on us so it's kinda like.... for me, my family's poor so I'm here in order to succeed for them" (P13, PWI, p. 11). Joya further added he is motivated to succeed to make his family proud and provide for them in the future. This sets him apart, however, from his American classmates and teammates. Joya emphasized:

There's only small amount of Americans who go to college who are kind of like us, go to college and want to make their family proud and be successful for them so we can provide better, you know. Most of the Americans, people I know is like they want to be successful for themselves, not their families because their families are already, you know, *okay*. For us, I believe Latinos or any other from second, third world country, it's kind of like... it's an important path to write some sort of positive good history for our culture, for our families, you know, and set a good example, a good standard. (P13, PWI, p. 11)

As Joya pointed out, he noticed a difference in cultural values between him and others who were born and raised in the U.S. Specifically, Joya comes from a collectivist country. As such, he is motivated to persist in college and graduate so he can give back to his family as well as people from his native country. In other words, he wants to succeed not for his own benefit but to help others as well as to serve as an inspiration for young people. He wants to set a good standard so others take the right path instead of the usual steps like gangs and drugs. Subsequently, Joya views U.S. college education as a tool to improve the lives of people in his native country.

In summary, participants painted their ability to be a college student-athlete as an opportunity for fighting negative stigmas about Latinxs in the U.S. by achieving in the classroom and in their sport. This drive to represent Latinxs in a positive light further converted into the participants' need to give back to their communities and to inspire others of similar cultural backgrounds to follow in their footsteps once they graduate from college. As such, participants perceived the attainment of a bachelor's degree as a tool to a wide range of opportunities for themselves as well as for people in their communities.

Summary of Findings

This study provided evidence that first-generation Latinx student-athletes benefited from a strong foundation of familial capital. This capital encompassed siblings, who served as academic and athletic role models, and parents, who supported participants financially and emotionally. In addition, the sacrifices families made to immigrate to the U.S. inspired participants to persist to degree attainment so they can give back one day as graduates. Notably, participants were raised with their families' expectation to go to college and graduate, which was also one of the important reasons for their persistence to degree attainment as these Latinx student-athletes wanted to meet this expectancy and make their families proud of them.

In addition to familial capital, first-generation Latinxs from non-revenue sports also relied on the cultural and social capital acquired by capitalizing on the student-athlete role. Overall, athletic participation served as a proverbial double-edged sword given that student-athletes acquired important skills and habits from athletics transferable to the classroom and life beyond college and developed friendships with teammates who became an essential part of their support network. Additionally, being an athlete motivated participants to maintain their grades so they could remain academically eligible to compete. However, the time demands associated with the dual roles of students and athletes contributed to participants' lack of engagement on campus outside of the athletic community. Nonetheless, Latinx student-athletes benefited from their access to athletic academic support services, which aided them in their academic success through the study hall program and athlete-only tutors. They also acquired social capital from the athletic realm when they benefited from validation and support from athletic advisors and coaching staff. Lastly, the athlete status largely contributed to first-generation Latinxs' sense of belonging on their campuses as they felt accepted and respected by the student body, faculty, and staff as student-athletes.

Overall, first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports sought validation from their multiple identities. The HSI and PWI settings influenced the way participants carved out a sense of belonging and where they found their Hispanic niche on their campuses. However, regardless of the setting, participants consciously identified themselves with the primary role of an athlete, which largely validated their belonging within higher education. Further, participants relied on their Latinx cultural capital within the athletic setting by, for example, interacting with teammates of a similar ethnic background. Lastly, participants perceived their athletic involvement in college as an opportunity to represent their ethnic group

in a positive light by achieving academically and athletically with the hope that these achievements will change the U.S. population's negative perceptions on Latinxs.

In conclusion, Latinx student-athletes largely relied on several sources of cultural and social capital they acquired either from their families or through college athletic involvement. Subsequently, this capital was imperative for their persistence to degree attainment. The institutional setting only played a small role in how participants carved out a sense of belonging on campus. The next chapter discusses these findings in relation to the research questions and conceptual framework.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sought to explore the experiences of first-generation Hispanic student-athletes who participate in NCAA Division I non-revenue sports at HSIs as well as PWIs in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to persistence to degree attainment. The previous chapters highlighted the design of the study, the conceptual framework, review of the literature, the methodological framework, and the findings of the study. This chapter includes a discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions and conceptual framework, implications of the findings for practice, and recommendations for future research. To commence, a brief overview of the study is presented.

Brief Overview of the Study

Latinxs continue to be underrepresented as participants in intercollegiate athletics, which is one type of student engagement activity research identifies as linked to increased rates of student persistence to degree attainment (Kuh et al., 2010). However, almost no studies have been published to-date that explore the experiences of Latinx student-athletes in regard to their student engagement and its role, if any, in validating them to persist to degree attainment. As such, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of first-generation Hispanic student-athletes who participate in NCAA Division I non-revenue sports at HSIs as well as PWIs in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to persistence to degree attainment. The primary research question of this study was as follows:

1. What are the experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes who participate in non-revenue sports in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to persistence to degree attainment?

Ancillary research questions were as follows:

1. What role, if any, do culture and familial connections play in the validation of Latinx student-athletes?
2. How do the sources of validation differ among student-athletes attending HSIs and PWIs?

This study utilized a conceptual framework of LatCrit (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) and validation theory (Rendón, 1994). LatCrit underscores the larger intersectionality of demographics in societal context that influences daily experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes on college campuses today. Validation theory serves as a framework for a solution on how to empower these students and assist them in overcoming the institutional barriers. Guided by these theories, the literature review revealed a lack of studies focusing solely on first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports. As such, the review delivered an overview of research of the different identity layers of these students: (1) Latinxs, (2) first-generation students, (3) student-athletes, and (4) athletes from non-revenue sports. Specifically, the review discussed the role of cultural, social, and familial capital on Latinx students' success and persistence in college.

The philosophical framework of critical theory guided this study. Critical researchers aspire to give voice to people who have traditionally been excluded and/or oppressed in the society and thus have been forced to operate from the margins (Glesne, 2016). Explicitly, the study utilized the conceptual framework of LatCrit. Sixteen participants took part in this study. The participants came from four research sites: 6 from HSI-I; 6 from HSI-II; 2 from PWI-I; and 2 from PWI-II. Potential participants had to self-identify as: (1) ethnicity of Latinx, (2) first-generation student status, (3) participation in an NCAA Division I non-revenue sport, and (4)

junior or senior academic standing classification. The participants were recruited via an email sent by gatekeepers at each respective site, as well as via the snowball technique through which participants recruited their peers to take part in the study (Glesne, 2016).

Before data collection commenced, IRB approval was granted. Data were primarily collected via face-to-face interviews that lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. However, all interviews with participants from PWIs took place via FaceTime. Ancillary data were collected via participants' answers to a demographic sheet and a follow-up online guided questions survey. Next, I transcribed all interviews verbatim utilizing the help of Temi software, removing only non-verbal language (e.g., "um") and repeated use of the exact same words by participants. Subsequently, I unitized and coded all data with the use of Dedoose and then discovered patterns and subsequently identified themes and developed categories. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, I utilized several methods, such as member checking, peer debriefing, and reflexive journaling.

Discussion of Findings

The studies on student engagement experiences of NCAA student-athletes continue to utilize the Black-White narrative despite Latinxs being the largest and fastest-growing ethnic group in the U.S. that has been gradually gaining entry within college athletics (Flores, 2017; HACU, 2018a; Lapchick, 2019). This study expanded the limited literature on first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports and demonstrated athletic participation to be beneficial for their persistence to degree attainment. Specifically, Latinx student-athletes who participated in this study built a support network from their teammates, athletic advisors, and coaches. However, given the time demands of their sport, most of the student-athletes did not engage outside of the athletic community on their respective campus. Moreover, first-generation

Latinxs relied on their cultural and familial capital to persist to degree attainment. Additionally, while the student-athletes perceived all campuses as welcoming, the setting of the university, HSI or PWI, made a difference in the strategies Latinxs utilized to carve out a sense of belonging and to find their Hispanic niche on campus. The following sections address each research question and discuss the findings as they relate to the conceptual framework and literature.

Primary research question. *What are the experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes who participate in non-revenue sports in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to persistence to degree attainment?*

As the narratives by first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports elucidated, athletic participation has the properties of a double-edged sword. On one side, participants painted athletic involvement as time-consuming. For example, Star described managing athletics and academic all at once as “it’s a lot and...it is pretty hard” (P1, HSI-I, p. 2). As a result, most of the participants attributed their hectic schedules, rather than lack of interest, as the primary reason for their limited participation in on-campus student engagement services and activities. While some participants were involved in major-related clubs, SAAC, or faith-based organizations, for examples, most of the Latinxs were unable to find time in their busy schedules to participate in student organizations outside of athletics.

This finding is consistent with the available literature on college student-athlete population depicting them as challenged by balancing their dual roles of students and athletes (e.g., Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; NCAA, 2015a; NCAA, 2016; Rubin & Moses, 2017). Subsequently, the time-consuming athletic involvement resulted in the isolation of athletes with the rest of the student body and subsequent low participation in on-campus events and activities (e.g., Adler & Adler, 1985; Astin, 1977; Huml et al., 2014; Rubin & Moses, 2017). Importantly,

some past studies did not find significant differences in student engagement among athletes and non-athletes (e.g., Aries et al., 2004; Crawford, 2007; Gaston-Gayles & Hu, 2009; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Rettig & Hu, 2016; Umbach et al., 2006). As such, the conclusions remain mixed. Nonetheless, this study extends the available literature by providing information about the student engagement of first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports, a population currently overlooked in empirical research.

On the other hand, athletic participation provided participants with a multitude of benefits that compensated for the challenges it brought. Specifically, participants described utilizing athletic academic support services and attributed them to aid in their academic success. Supported by literature, these services play an indispensable role on persistence to degree attainment and enhance the overall college experience of student-athletes (Hazzaa, Sonkeng, & Yoh, 2018; Otto et al., 2019), especially for those athletes from ethnic minorities (Ridpath, 2010). However, some athletes may rely on them too much as they believe they *must* have these services in order to maintain eligibility, persist, and graduate (Ridpath, 2010). Spending time in these athlete-only centers may also hinder athletes' ability to connect with faculty and participate in on-campus organizations, and thus may have an isolating effect on athletes (Huml et al., 2014). In this study, participants were aware of other support services on campus available to all students but did not have the need to seek them out given that athletics provided them with everything they needed. As Courtney summarized about athletics, "Like everyone just wants to help you succeed. So if you fail within the athletic community, I guess like it's your fault, like there's so much help available" (P2, HSI-I, p. 7). As such, this study supported Huml et al.'s (2014) findings, as most participants did not describe developing connections with faculty and

preferred utilizing student-athlete only tutoring, advising, and study hall housed within the athlete-only academic facilities to aid with academic challenges.

As such, first-generation Latinx athletes identified their athletic advisors and coaching staff as important sources of support and tapped them as one of the reasons for their persistence to degree attainment. In other words, these institutional agents from the athletic setting became valuable social capital of participants (Taylor, 2011; Yosso, 2005) and served as validating agents who empowered them by providing guidance and support to navigate the college environment (Rendón, 1994). Consistent with validation theory, athletic advisors and coaches frequently interacted with their student-athletes and continuously validated their belonging at the institution and on the athletic team. Subsequently, this validation resulted in heightened feelings of acceptance, belonging on campus, and competence for Latinx athletes (Linares & Muñoz, 2011; Rendón, 1994). In agreement, other studies reported on the positive influence of coaches and athletic academic advisors on student-athletes' college success (Bendick, 2017; Crawford, 2007; Darvin et al., 2017; Guillaume & Trujillo, 2018; Martinez, 2018; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007; Ramos, 2018; Rankin et al., 2016; Scarcella, 2016; Traynowicz et al., 2016). Thereby, while some scholars view athletic involvement as an isolating activity (Astin, 1977; Huml et al., 2014; Murty et al., 2014), the findings of this study suggest that the "athletic silo" positively contributes to persistence to degree attainment of first-generation Latinx athletes from non-revenue sports due to the access to validating staff members.

In general, participants attributed their membership on athletic teams for carving out a sense of belonging on their campuses. Specifically, they described their teammates as an important source of support who they considered members of their extended *family*, a concept important for college success and persistence of first-generation Latinx students (Arana et al.,

2011; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Matos, 2015; Sue & Sue, 2016; Tello & Lonn, 2017). For example, Elizabeth chronicled, “You just like create friendships on the team and that kind of helps you get through everything.... I think that’s one thing that I can attribute to my success [in college]” (P9, HSI-II, p. 10). Developing friendships with teammates was particularly important for Latinx student-athletes who attended the PWIs. As Joya described, Latinx non-athletes joined clubs to meet others of similar cultural backgrounds to feel home away from home. This concept is known as *counter-spaces*. Counter-spaces provide a supportive and nurturing environment for Latinxs to develop friendships with others of the same ethnicity (Garcia, 2016; Solórzano et al., 2000; Von Robertson et al., 2016). However, Latinx student-athletes found their family in their teammates. This finding is consistent with previous studies that depicted how close bonds among teammates are important sources of support for student-athletes (Bendick, 2017; NCAA, 2015b; Paule & Gilson, 2010; Ramos, 2018).

Additionally, athletic involvement, an extracurricular activity itself, served as a proverbial carrot on the stick for many of the first-generation Latinx athletes who described sport participation as a motivating factor for maintaining their grades and persisting to degree attainment. The passion for their sport and the opportunity to compete in college athletics kept participants motivated to do well in classes and persevere through difficult times while in college. In an agreement, previous studies on experiences of Latinx athletes found athletic involvement to contribute to their persistence to degree attainment as it kept them on-task, challenged them to manage time efficiently, and work hard in courses to maintain grades for athletic eligibility (Bendick, 2017; Guillaume & Trujillo, 2018). Thereby, as attested by results of this study, among all student engagement services and activities offered on campuses, athletics had the most influence on persistence of first-generation Latinx student-athletes.

Additionally, participants highlighted that being a college athlete taught them various skills warranted for academic success. Most notably, participants described acquiring the ability to multi-task, prioritize, and manage time through athletic involvement. In other words, this finding confirms that student-athletes attain certain cultural capital stemming from their athletic role, a concept traditionally used when describing the ways racial/ethnic minority students navigate the current landscape of higher education (e.g., Cerezo et al., 2015; Solórzano et al., 2000; Von Robertson et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009). As reported by numerous scholars, participation in athletic activities is linked to the development of various positive attributes and abilities, such as leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence (Brand, 2006; Comeaux et al., 2014; Sauer et al., 2013; Snodgrass, 2015). Thus, given the limited number of NCAA Division I spots on athletic teams (NCAA, 2018d), the entry to this exclusive “club” provides access to unique forms of capital not readily available to non-athletes. Based on their accounts, Latinx student-athletes benefited greatly from this capital as it positively contributed to their persistence to degree attainment.

Importantly, participants generally noted that athletic involvement made them feel accepted on their campuses by their peers and the rest of the campus community. As such, they felt welcome at their universities and affirmed a sense of belonging which remains central for persistence to degree attainment. This finding is consistent with literature highlighting that athletes from non-revenue sports report higher perceptions of supportive campus environments in comparison to athletes from revenue sports (Rettig & Hu, 2016). Overall, while the participants noted that some negative stereotypes exist about the student-athlete population, as previous studies highlighted (e.g., Paule & Gilson, 2010; Simons et al., 2007; Wininger & White,

2015), most participants in this study have never experienced being treated unfavorably because of their student-athlete role.

Lastly, despite the limited free time inhibiting their ability to participate in all that their respective campus offers in terms of student engagement services and activities, participants did not feel like they had a less desirable college experience because they were student-athletes. For example, Morgan stated, “I don’t feel like I’m missing out on anything” (P6, HSI-I, p. 10). This finding is consistent with research by Paule and Gilson (2010) who reported that while athletes from non-revenue sports wished to be more involved on campus, they expressed that the benefits of athletic participation by far outweighed their lost opportunities to partake in traditional student experiences. Among the benefits, student-athletes listed having access to student-athlete only tutors and academic facilities, developing time management and other life skills, and building close friendships with teammates (Paule & Gilson, 2010). Latinx student-athletes from this study provided much of the same conclusions.

In summary, first-generation Latinx student-athletes capitalized on their involvement in intercollegiate athletics where they asserted a sense of belonging through connections with teammates and staff. As such, participants stayed mostly siloed within this community. That is, they intentionally sought help and validation within this setting and rarely utilized other student engagement services and activities available to them on campus. However, participants did not pin their hectic lifestyles as student-athletes as taking away from their college experience. Rather, they attributed a large portion of their success and persistence in college to their sport, teammates, athletic support services, and athletic staff. As such, the role of athletics for the persistence of degree attainment of first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports was immense.

Ancillary research question #1. *What role, if any, do culture and familial connections play in the validation of Latinx student-athletes?*

As the participants' narratives revealed, first-generation Latinxs utilize various facets of cultural capital (Yosso, 2005) to succeed in college, in their academic pursuits and also within the athletic setting. Explicitly, participants intentionally surrounded themselves with other Latinxs on their teams and communicated in Spanish when allowed by coaching staff. For example, Bohemio shared: "...like we dance and in like practice and stuff like that. We mess around with stuff like that. We like doing the things trying having fun" (P3, HSI-I, p. 11). However, given the small number of Latinx student-athletes (Lapchick, 2019), regardless whether they attended a HSI or PWI, most participants lacked access to teammates of the same ethnicity. Thereby, participants found ways to share aspects of their cultures, such as preparing meals or making jokes connected to their heritage, even with non-Hispanic teammates in order to remain connected to their cultural backgrounds. In other words, under the guise of LatCrit (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Torres, 2011), Latinx student-athletes relied on their cultural capital to persist to degree attainment.

Moreover, familial capital, which is one form of cultural capital (Yosso, 2005), was instrumental for participants' persistence to degree attainment. Briefly, familial capital refers to knowledge and human resources drawn from students' immediate and/or extended family (Yosso, 2005). More specifically, participants described their older siblings as role models inspiring them to get involved in sports at a young age and later motivating them to enroll in college and persisting to degree attainment. For example, Robert stated, "I feel like they played a major role in that way and setting an example for me.... I don't want to be the letdown brother that doesn't graduate" (P12, HSI-II, p. 3). In some cases, siblings provided participants with

instrumental insider knowledge that helped them navigate the unfamiliar college environment. These findings are consistent with other studies that depicted parents and siblings as important for introducing Latinxs to sports and then helping them to enroll in college (Darvin et al., 2017; Jamieson, 2005).

Besides siblings, other family members positively contributed to persistence to degree attainment of participants. Specifically, parents provided them with financial and emotional sustenance and displayed unconditional support and love for them, wanting them to make decisions for their own happiness rather than to meet the family's expectations. As such, participants arrived in college with familial capital that empowered them and facilitated their success in college despite this environment being embedded with institutional practices based on White ideology (Carnevale et al., 2013; Gaston-Gayles et al., 2018; Marina & Holmes, 2009; Núñez, 2014; Johnson, 2018). A large body of research established the importance of familial capital for Latinx students' persistence to degree attainment (Arana et al., 2011; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Matos, 2015), as well as for student-athletes' success in college (Dorsch et al., 2016; Hinderlie & Kenny, 2002; Jamieson, 2005; Lara & Lara, 2012; Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007).

Additionally, participants highlighted that their family's immigration status served as an important source of inspiration for them. Specifically, the past sacrifices by family motivated participants to pursue a college education so they could get a better quality of life than their ancestors had as well as to give back to their families. For example, Guess shared, "I always saw the sacrifices my parents would make for me so I knew that I need to go to college" (P7, HSI-II, p. 1). This finding exemplifies Matos' (2015) *finishing capital*, a combination of Yosso's (2005)

familial and aspirational capital. In other words, participants wanted to achieve their degrees on behalf of their families.

Moreover, participants discussed being raised with their family's expectation of college completion, which they also tapped as one of the reasons for their persistence in college. For example, Michael shared about his dad: "He drilled in me ever since I was little that I'm going to go to college, I'm going to get my degree, I'm going to be successful" (P16, PWI-II, p. 6). As such, this study's findings add to the list of literature (e.g., Arana et al., 2011; Jamieson, 2005; O'Shea, 2016; Stuber, 2011) that contradicts the deficient view cast on first-generation students, and those who are Latinxs in particular, for their family's lack of support and encouragement for their college studies (e.g., Mehta et al., 2011). Notably, the first-generation status was a source of strength and motivation rather than detriment of obtaining a college degree for participants in this study. Specifically, participants emphasized that their families expected them to finish college and continuously reminded them of how proud they were of them for being college student-athletes.

Lastly, participants employed their student-athlete status as an opportunity to fight negative stigma about Latinxs in the U.S. by achieving success in the classroom as well as in their sport. They acknowledged hearing many negative stereotypes about their ethnic group, not a surprising finding given the current tense political climate in the U.S. targeting refugees and immigrants, making some Latinxs feel like they do not belong (Barba, 2017; Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera, & Krogstad, 2018; Peñaloza, 2018; National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, 2017). Therefore, participants described the urge to leave others with a good impression every time they represented their team. For example, Robert stated: "I just feel like the fact that I'm Hispanic.... when I go like to [athletic competitions] I just want to *show people* (P12, HSI-II, p. 11).

A common cultural value among Latinxs is *familismo*, which refers to family unity inclusive of those in extended family and community (Sue & Sue, 2016; Tello & Lonn, 2017). As such, many of the participants were motivated to persist to degree because of their drive towards giving back to their communities and inspiring other Latinxs to follow their example. For instance, Joya described, “I believe Latinos or any other from second, third world country.... it’s an important path to write some sort of positive good history for our culture, for our families, you know, and set a good example, a good standard” (P13, PWI, p. 11). This finding is consistent with studies depicting first-generation Latinxs as motivated to make their families proud and to give back to their communities (Jamieson, 2005; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Storlie et al., 2016).

In summary, culture and familial connections played an important role in the validation of first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports. Specifically, participants relied heavily on their cultural capital, which most notably included familial capital. Participants’ families provided them with much-needed guidance, support, motivation, and inspiration, which helped participants in persisting towards degree attainment. Moreover, this study provided evidence that Latinx student-athletes utilize their cultural capital not only in academic endeavors but also within the athletic setting.

Ancillary research question #2. *How do the sources of validation differ among student-athletes attending HSIs and PWIs?*

While all participants perceived their campuses as welcoming, the setting of the university influenced the ways through which first-generation Latinx student-athletes carved out a sense of belonging and found their Hispanic niche on campus. Specifically, student-athletes attending HSIs felt at home on their campuses given they were surrounded by many students

who were also Hispanic and who spoke Spanish. In addition, these HSIs offered many opportunities for Hispanic students to get involved on campus and celebrate their cultural heritage. For example, Courtney emphasized, “I love that I have this heritage and culture that is shared within this university because I mean when like Cinco de Mayo and Fiesta come around, like it feels just like home” (P2, HSI-I, p. 11).

Interestingly, contrary to the finding of this study, some scholars criticize HSIs for not properly serving Latinx students (Calderon, 2015; Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Fosnacht & Nailos, 2016). However, in agreement with this study, other researchers found the environment of HSIs beneficial to Latinx students’ academic performance (Flores & Park, 2003). Specifically, this setting fostered participants’ ability to assert a sense of belonging as they felt a sense of shared cultural identity with other members of the campus community (Arana et al., 2011). To illustrate, Lola described the following about her HSI: “I don’t see why they [Hispanic students] wouldn’t feel comfortable or welcome in this campus.... we know how we are, we understand our traditions, our culture. So we get along...” (P8, HSI-II, p. 8). Not surprisingly, research finds ethnic identities of Latinxs as less salient for those attending HSIs in comparison to PWIs given the high proportion of students of similar ethnic backgrounds at HSIs (Arana et al., 2011; Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Núñez, 2014). Not surprisingly then, many of the participants from HSIs did not explicitly discuss their ethnic identity in their narratives as they considered it a norm to be surrounded by others who looked like them and who shared similar cultural values.

In comparison, given the lack of other Latinx students, faculty, and staff on these campuses, participants attending PWIs had to find their own Hispanic niche to assert a sense of belonging in this environment. As such, participants intentionally surrounded themselves with the few other Latinxs on their campuses with whom they shared meals and traditions connecting

them back to their cultures. Often, they also conversed in Spanish. In most cases, these Latinxs were teammates. However, one participant, in particular, carved out a sense of belonging by joining the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers. The behavior of seeking others Latinxs refers to the aforementioned concept of counter-spaces, which provide Latinxs with a supportive space validating their belonging on campus (Cerezo et al., 2015; Flores & Garcia, 2009; Garcia, 2016; Núñez, 2011; Von Robertson et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009).

Overall, participants attending PWIs described their campuses as welcoming to them. In general, most of the participants from PWIs did not chronicle experiencing discrimination or prejudice due to their ethnicity. For example, Jessica emphasized, “I’ve never really felt like an outsider. I’ve never felt like someone is shunning me or doing something to make me feel uncomfortable. I’ve always felt comfortable on campus” (P14, PWI-II, p. 11). As such, this study contradicts findings of other scholars suggesting that campuses of PWIs are unwelcoming and even hostile to minority students (Rankin & Reason, 2005; Von Robertson et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009).

It is important to note that, regardless of the university setting, most of the participants consciously identified themselves with the primary role of an athlete, which validated their sense of belonging on campus. Unless specifically asked, participants did not discuss their ethnicity, gender, and first-generation student status. Therefore, while Guillaume and Trujillo (2018) found that athletic participation provided Latinx student-athletes with the opportunity to discover and develop their ethnic identity, participants in this study did not credit their sport involvement with such effect on their identity. This finding was even more surprising for participants attending HSIs, a type of institutional setting that Garcia et al. (2016) found beneficial for Latinx students because it provides co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities for them to develop their

ethnic identity. Nevertheless, the saliency of athletic identity may be one of the reasons why participants felt welcome on their campuses, especially at PWIs that are typically perceived as unwelcoming to minority students (Rankin & Reason, 2005; Von Robertson et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009).

In summary, the sources of validation differed slightly among first-generation Latinx student-athletes attending HSIs and PWIs. Specifically, participants at HSIs took advantage of their institutions where they found many other Latinxs within the campus community and where they could take advantage of the multitude opportunities to celebrate Hispanic heritage. In contrast, participants attending PWIs had to search hard to find other Latinxs on their campuses. While important for them to socialize with others of a similar cultural background, participants at PWIs still felt like they belonged at these campuses, most likely due to their salient athletic identity and membership within the athletic community. However, regardless of the institutional setting, athletic involvement served as an important factor in the validation of first-generation Latinx student-athletes within the higher education sphere as the majority of participants primarily identified with their athlete role.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study demonstrated that athletic participation in NCAA Division I sports is beneficial for persistence to degree attainment of first-generation Latinx student-athletes as it provided them with a sense of belonging and validation within the higher education realm. Specifically, first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue sports utilized a support network from their teammates, athletic advisors, and coaches to persist to degree attainment. Additionally, sport participation motivated them to maintain their grades and instilled in them skills such as time management, multi-tasking, and prioritizing. However, given the time

demands of their sport, most of the student-athletes did not engage outside of the athletic community with the rest of the campus. Moreover, first-generation Latinxs relied on their culture and familial capital to persist to degree attainment. Additionally, the HSI and PWI setting made a difference in the strategies Latinxs utilized to carve out a sense of belonging and where they found their Hispanic niche on campus. Based on these findings, I offer the following three recommendations for practice:

1. *Staff from athletic departments should collaborate with other student affairs professionals to provide a holistic learning experience of Latinx student-athletes.* As this study's findings depicted, first-generation Latinx athletes relied mostly on the services and staff housed within the athletic setting. For example, participants preferred interacting with their athletic advisors and coaches rather than their academic advisors and faculty. While most of the athletes admitted they were aware of the multitude of services and activities on campus, they mostly did not utilize them given their needs were, for the most part, satisfied within the athletic community where they asserted a sense of belonging and cultivated friendships with teammates. While literature links sense of belonging with heightened persistence to degree intentions of college students (Cheng, 2004; Hausmann et al., 2007; Hausmann et al., 2009; Morrow & Ackermann, 2012; O'Keeffe, 2013), which athletics clearly instilled in participants in this study, student-athletes should still be encouraged to utilize the available student engagement opportunities on their campuses. While athletic staff validates Latinx student-athletes, other student affairs divisions specialize in offering services beneficial to first-generation Latinxs, such as activities allowing Latinxs to further develop their ethnic identities or gain valuable skills and experiences for certain career fields (e.g., STEM fields). As Comeaux (2018) noted, collaboration and coordination between stakeholders from athletic and academic divisions are necessary to

facilitate the academic success of student-athletes. As such, athletic departments should collaborate with other divisions on campus to coordinate programming where first-generation Latinx student-athletes venture outside of the athletic community and take advantage of these valuable learning opportunities that will foster their holistic development, a goal of college education (King & Baxter Magolda, 2011).

2. *Athletic staff should encourage the utilization of cultural and familial capital by Latinx student-athletes.* The findings of this study highlighted the importance of cultural and familial capital on persistence to degree attainment of first-generation Latinx student-athletes. For example, participants spoke Spanish with their teammates, inserted their cultural traditions and values in their daily athletic and academic pursuits, and stayed connected with their families whom they relied on for support, guidance, and inspiration. As such, it is recommended that athletic staff continues encouraging, rather than discouraging, utilization of this cultural and familial capital by Latinx student-athletes. For example, coaches should allow Latinxs to communicate freely with others on their teams in Spanish as it is an integral form of cultural capital for these students. By encouraging such behaviors, Latinxs will be able to remain true to their cultures and perform at their best, both in the classroom and on the field. This recommendation is particularly important for athletic staff working at PWIs where there are not that many Latinxs within the student body. As such, close bonds with teammates of similar ethnic identity are a form of a counter-space, which allows them to exist simultaneously in the two cultural worlds of their home community and that of their college campus (Delgado-Guerrero et al., 2014; Núñez, 2011, Von Robertson et al., 2016; Yosso et al., 2009). In other words, athletic staff should not try to assimilate Latinx student-athletes into the dominant college culture and strip them of their cultural backgrounds. Rather, the staff should empower these

students by providing them guidance and support on how to navigate the college environment while utilizing their cultural, familial, and social capital.

3. *The NCAA should offer resources, such as handouts, websites, and informational videos, for prospective and current student-athletes in Spanish.* Currently, a large proportion of Latinxs in higher education are first-generation students (NCES, 2015) but only 16% of NCAA athletes self-identify as such (NCAA, 2016). Additionally, many Latinxs students come from families of immigrant parents (Flores, 2017) who may not speak English. Interestingly, this study found that older siblings of participants served as institutional insiders who helped participants in navigating the recruiting system and becoming collegiate athletes as well as transitioning from high school to college. This study's findings also pinpointed the large role families play in persistence to degree attainment of first-generation Latinx student-athletes who often reached out to their parents for advice, inspiration, and guidance. As such, it is recommended that the NCAA begin offering all of their informational videos, handouts, and websites not only in English but also in Spanish so more families of Latinx athletes can guide them through the K-12 pipeline to college athletics and where they subsequently persist to degree while exhausting all of their athletic eligibility.

Future Research

A paucity of research on experiences of any subset of Latinx student-athlete population currently exists despite the continuing fast growth of this ethnic group within the U.S. (HACU, 2018a). As such, additional studies pertinent to this student-athlete demographic are warranted. To gain insight into Latinx student-athletes' experiences, I offer the following five recommendations for future studies:

1. *Utilize all methods of inquiry to expand the available research on experiences of Latinx student-athletes as it pertains to their persistence to degree attainment.* Research is rooted in numerous paradigms (Glesne, 2016). Certain paradigms are associated with quantitative methods while others fall under the umbrella of qualitative research; some combine both approaches in mixed methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Research designs must fit the problem and research questions of the study along with, and importantly, the paradigmatic view of the researcher (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Merriam, 2007). Given the gaps in the literature on Latinx student-athletes, it is recommended that researchers utilize all three methods of inquiry when studying this student-athlete demographic and all of its subgroups (e.g., female and male athletes, revenue and non-revenue sports, scholarship and walk-on athletes). The most recent studies on this population, like this one, utilized qualitative methods given the need for in-depth understanding of Latinx student-athletes' experiences as not much is known about this population. As the available literature slowly expands, quantitative and mixed methods scholars should join qualitative researchers and contribute to expanding the knowledge so athletic departments can continue improving the ways they serve this population. It is important to note, however, that given the currently limited number of Latinx student-athletes, quantitative researchers may experience some difficulties to obtain generalizable information given they need a large randomized, sample of participants to make such conclusions.

2. *Examine the educational pipeline of Latinx student-athletes, specifically focusing on the athletic aspect of their experiences.* As Cameron (2012) theorized, disruptions along the educational pipeline are one of the reasons for the low representation of Latinxs within the NCAA sports. Overall, Latinxs lag behind in attainment rates of bachelor's degrees in comparison to students of other races/ethnicities (HACU, 2018a). Moreover, the majority of

Latinxs enroll at 2-year colleges (HACU, 2018a) rather than 4-year institutions, which sponsor NCAA Division I sports and offer athletic scholarships (NCAA, n.d.-c). Thus, intercollegiate athletics have the power to extend the educational opportunities for Latinxs if they do not encounter any disruptions along the educational pipeline. As such, longitudinal research focusing on exploring experiences of Hispanic student-athletes in middle and high school, along with their transitions to higher education inclusive of transferring from 2-year colleges to 4-year institutions, are warranted.

3. *Employ asset-based lens in future studies on Latinx student-athletes.* As suggested by scholars, systemic barriers prevent access to students from traditionally underrepresented groups to the NCAA (Hextrum, 2018; Martinez, 2018; McGovern, 2018). Specifically, as Hextrum (2018) pinpointed, the NCAA's focus on amateurism caters to student-athletes from middle- and upper-class families who have access to economic and social capital which then converts to cultural capital. Importantly, this study provided evidence that Latinx student-athletes rely on their own cultural capital to navigate these systems and persist to degree attainment. Thus, future studies should utilize asset-based lens when exploring the experiences of Latinx student-athletes rather than portraying their cultures with a deficit lens.

4. *Examine the differences in experiences of Latinx student-athletes with non-athletes.* This study provided evidence that athletic participation is beneficial for Latinx student-athletes as it contributes to their persistence and success in college. However, to further explain the role of athletic participation for Latinx college students, future studies should interview both *athletes* and *non-athletes* to compare their student engagement experiences and sense of belonging on various institutional types. Such study design will provide more clarity about whether athletic involvement isolates Latinx athletes from the rest of the student body or whether the campus

climate, especially at PWIs, discourages Latinx students' use of on-campus services and activities.

5. *Disaggregate the existing NCAA demographic data of student-athletes by institutional type to evaluate what role, if any, HSIs play in providing opportunities for Latinxs to participate in intercollegiate athletics.* In spite of the rapid growth of HSIs in the U.S. (HACU, 2018a), a paucity in research exists in regard to the role these institutions play in fostering educational opportunities for Latinx student-athletes in comparison to institutions of other types, most notably HBCUs and PWIs. Specifically, as of 2018, 8% of all NCAA Division I, 13% of Division II, and 5% of Division III members were HSIs (NCAA, 2017a). Notably, HSIs constitute the second largest institutional type in the NCAA, surpassing the number of all other minority-serving institutions in the membership (NCAA, 2017a). In other words, HSIs outnumber HBCUs as members of the NCAA. However, unlike with HBCUs, to this date, research specializing on intercollegiate athletics at HSIs is nonexistent. As HSIs continue to increase in the proportion of higher education institutions, it is imperative that we gain a better understanding about the role these colleges and universities play towards achieving social justice and equity within intercollegiate athletics and serving Latinxs student-athletes.

Final Thoughts

As Latinxs continue to increase in the proportion of U.S. population and college student bodies, more of them will eventually find themselves to be competing in the NCAA as student-athletes. Therefore, it is important to expand the Black-White narrative present in most studies on intercollegiate athletics by learning about the lived experiences of Latinx student-athletes in terms of their persistence to degree attainment. As such, this study provided some insight about student engagement experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes from non-revenue

sports, to this date one of the most overlooked sub-groups within athletics by scholars. The results of this study are promising in terms of the benefits that athletic involvement had on Latinxs' persistence to degree attainment. As such, this study's findings highlighted the winning combination of the social and cultural capital Latinxs gained via sport participation with the cultural and familial capital Latinxs acquired from their families, communities, and cultural heritage and brought with them to college. It is my hope that other scholars will follow my footsteps and further expand the available literature to provide spaces to hear the voices of Latinx student-athletes. Just like the participants, I hope other scholars will have the courage to "¡échale ganas!" [give it their all!] so social justice and equity within intercollegiate athletics can be achieved in the future and where Latinxs can strive.

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Appendix A: Sport Participation of Latinxs in NCAA Divisions: 2015-2016

	NCAA DIVISION I				NCAA DIVISION II				NCAA DIVISION III			
Sport	All Races/Ethnicities		Latinx %		All Races/Ethnicities		Latinx %		All Races/Ethnicities		Latinx %	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Baseball	10,430	0	7.2%	0.0%	10,660	0	7.4%	0.0%	13,465	0	5.2%	0.0%
Basketball	5,472	4,990	1.6%	2.6%	5,450	4,920	3.3%	4.3%	7,762	6,680	3.0%	3.4%
Beach Volleyball	0	758	0.0%	5.9%	0	121	0.0%	7.4%	0	30	0.0%	0.0%
Bowling	0	283	0.0%	4.9%	0	223	0.0%	4.9%	4	93	0.0%	4.3%
Cross Country	4,799	5,947	8.1%	5.8%	3,679	3,897	10.6%	9.9%	5,934	6,114	5.9%	5.1%
Equestrian	2	701	50.0%	3.3%	0	102	0.0%	1.0%	13	554	15.4%	1.1%
Fencing	389	403	5.1%	5.5%	28	54	7.1%	14.8%	230	264	6.1%	11.0%
Field Hockey	0	1,795	0.0%	2.0%	0	741	0.0%	1.8%	0	3,496	0.0%	1.6%
Football	28,380	0	2.7%	0.0%	19,484	0	3.2%	0.0%	25,796	0	4.9%	0.0%
Golf	2,941	2,176	3.1%	3.9%	2,470	1,561	3.4%	4.9%	3,265	1,556	1.7%	2.9%
Gymnastics	304	1,058	6.3%	4.8%	0	130	0.0%	6.9%	16	314	0.0%	1.9%
Ice Hockey	1,633	855	1.0%	0.8%	185	98	0.0%	1.0%	2,284	1,336	1.4%	1.2%
Lacrosse	3,139	3,344	2.3%	2.0%	2,504	2,320	3.2%	3.1%	7,803	5,711	1.9%	3.2%
Rifle	126	164	4.8%	4.3%	21	15	0.0%	0.0%	16	15	12.5%	6.7%
Rowing	1,378	5,653	3.3%	5.0%	52	498	3.8%	12.2%	913	1,318	4.7%	4.9%
Rugby	70	213	11.4%	10.8%	44	87	11.4%	4.6%	50	72	4.0%	18.1%
Sailing	268	0	6.0%	0.0%	14	0	0.0%	0.0%	176	0	3.4%	0%
Skiing	152	168	2.0%	1.2%	71	81	0.0%	0.0%	194	187	1.0%	0.5%
Soccer	5,877	9,144	11.8%	7.0%	6,635	7,336	15.1%	9.2%	12,291	10,878	11.0%	6.5%
Softball	0	6,042	0%	9.5%	0	5,991	0%	8.2%	0	7,646	0%	5.4%
Squash	199	151	2.5%	1.3%	0	0	0%	0.0%	289	255	3.1%	6.7%
Swimming	3,721	5,479	3.9%	3.3%	1,500	1,853	5.9%	4.9%	4,234	5,024	5.0%	3.6%
Synchronized Swimming	0	44	0.0%	15.9%	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
Tennis	2,644	2,910	5.7%	4.6%	1,749	2,067	7.6%	5.7%	3,691	3,954	6.0%	4.9%
Track, Indoor	10,094	12,817	4.8%	4.1%	5,826	5,921	5.2%	5.0%	9,300	8,142	4.4%	3.4%
Track, Outdoor	11,066	13,136	5.6%	4.2%	7,189	7,104	8.3%	7.5%	10,077	8,808	5.1%	4.1%
Triathlon	0	0	0%	0.0%	0	16	0%	12.5%	4	5	25.0%	20.0%
Volleyball	394	5,239	4.1%	4.1%	467	4,968	20.6%	5.4%	1,038	6,911	9.1%	4.4%
Water Polo	574	665	5.7%	9.3%	147	208	12.9%	9.1%	293	263	10.9%	15.2%
Wrestling	2,501	0	7.3%	0.0%	1,946	0	7.6%	0.0%	2,628	0	6.6%	0%

Source: National Collegiate Athletic Association. (2017b). *Sport sponsorship, participation and demographics search*. Retrieved from <http://web1.ncaa.org/rgdSearch/exec/main>

Appendix B: NCAA Division I HSIs by State

State	Institution Name	Sector	FTE UG % Latin@	Conference	Division
AZ	University of Arizona	Public	25.1%	Pac-12	I-FBS
CA	California State University-Bakersfield	Public	55.8%	Western Athletic	I
CA	California State University-Fresno	Public	50.2%	Mountain West	I-FBS
CA	California State University-Fullerton	Public	41.9%	Big West	I
CA	California State University-Long Beach	Public	40.3%	Big West	I
CA	California State University-Northridge	Public	46.5%	Big West	I
CA	California State University-Sacramento	Public	30.8%	Big Sky	I-FCS
CA	Saint Mary's College of California	<i>Private</i>	25.8%	West Coast	I
CA	San Diego State University	Public	30.7%	Mountain West	I-FBS
CA	San Jose State University	Public	26.5%	Mountain West	I-FBS
CA	University of California-Irvine	Public	26.4%	Big West	I
CA	University of California-Riverside	Public	39.7%	Big West	I
CA	University of California-Santa Barbara	Public	26.3%	Big West	I
FL	Florida Atlantic University	Public	25.7%	Conference USA	I-FBS
FL	Florida International University	Public	66.1%	Conference USA	I-FBS
IL	University of Illinois at Chicago	Public	30.7%	Horizon League	I
NJ	Fairleigh Dickinson University-Metropolitan Campus	<i>Private</i>	32.1%	Northeast	I
NJ	Saint Peter's University	<i>Private</i>	41.8%	Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference	I
NM	New Mexico State University-Main Campus	Public	55.2%	Western Athletic	I-FBS
NM	University of New Mexico-Main Campus	Public	46.9%	Mountain West	I-FBS

NV	University of Nevada-Las Vegas	Public	27.1%	Mountain West	I-FBS
TX	Houston Baptist University	<i>Private</i>	33.3%	Southland	I-FCS
TX	Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi	Public	48.5%	Southland	I
TX	Texas State University	Public	36.1%	Sun Belt	I-FBS
TX	The University of Texas at Arlington	Public	27.0%	Sun Belt	I
TX	The University of Texas at El Paso	Public	82.7%	Conference USA	I-FBS
TX	The University of Texas at San Antonio	Public	53.6%	Conference USA	I-FBS
TX	The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley	Public	91.0%	Western Athletic	I
TX	University of Houston	Public	31.9%	American Athletic	I-FBS
TX	University of the Incarnate Word	<i>Private</i>	57.7%	Southland	I-FCS

Note: This information was generated through cross-analysis of data from HACU (2018b) and NCAA (2018b, 2018c) databases.

Appendix C: Consent Form

Trailblazing a Path to Success: Experiences of First-Generation Latinx Student-Athletes

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. If you decide to participate in this study, this form will also be used to record your consent.

You have been asked to participate in a research project studying Latinx student-athlete involvement in on-campus programs and activities. The purpose of this study is to explore experiences of first-generation Latinx student-athletes who participate in non-revenue sports in regard to student engagement services and activities as it pertains to persistence to degree attainment. You were selected to be a possible participant because you are a senior, first-generation Latinx, NCAA Division I student-athlete participating in a non-revenue sport.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer a series of questions regarding your experience with on-campus services and activities. You will be also asked to fill out a short demographic questionnaire. Overall, this study will take approximately one hour, during which you will be interviewed in person. The session may be audio recorded.

What are the risks involved in this study?

The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, your participation will be important in identifying on-campus services and activities beneficial to first-generation Latinx student-athletes, possibly resulting in improvement and/or introduction of new programming for future generations of student-athletes at your institution.

Do I have to participate?

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi or your university of attendance being affected.

Who will know about my participation in this research study?

This study is confidential. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only Nikola Grafnetterova, the researcher, and Dr. Rosa Banda, the chair of the dissertation committee, will have access to the records.

If you choose to participate in this study, you may choose to be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only Nikola Grafnetterova and Dr. Rosa Banda will have

access to the recordings. All recordings will be kept for three years following the conclusion of the study and then erased.

Whom do I contact with questions about the research?

If you have questions regarding this study, you may email Nikola Grafnetterova, the researcher, at nikola.grafnetterova@tamucc.edu or Dr. Rosa Banda, the dissertation chair, at rosie.banda@tamucc.edu.

Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?

This research study has been reviewed by the Research Compliance Office and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Research Compliance Office, at (361) 825-2497 or send an email to “IRB@tamucc.edu”.

Signature

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in this study. You also certify that you are 18 years of age or older by signing this form.

_____ I agree to be audio recorded.

_____ I do not want to be audio recorded.

Signature of Participant: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed Name: _____

Appendix D: Interview Protocol Questions

1. How did you get involved in sports?
2. How did you decide that you wanted to play sports in college?
3. Why did you choose to attend this university?
4. Share with me about your family's response to your decision to play sports in college.
5. Do you feel that your family is currently supportive of your decision to play sports? If so, how?
6. What role, if any, does your family play in your ability to continue your education?
7. Other than your sport, are there any other activities on campus you are involved with? If so, how often do you participate in them? If none, why not?
8. Why did you decide to take part in these activities in specific?
9. If you were not playing sports in college, are there other activities or services you think you would be part of? If so, which ones and why?
10. Are there any activities or services that the university currently doesn't have that would be beneficial to you? If so, what are they?
11. Are there any **off-campus** activities that you are regularly involved in and that play an important role in your life? If so, what are they?
12. What on-campus services and programming do you find helpful for your academic success?
13. Are there any campus personnel, such as staff, faculty, or administrators that you feel you connect with? And if so, what has it been like?
14. In general, what was the most difficult experience of your college career and why?
15. Can you recall a time when you wanted to quit college? If so, why and how did you decide to continue?

16. What are three things to which you attribute your success and persistence in college? And why?
17. Share with me about your experience of being Latinx college student-athlete at this university.
18. What makes Latinx students feel welcome on your campus?
19. What makes Latinx students **not** feel welcome on your campus?
20. Do you feel that being student-athlete make you feel more or less welcome on your campus?
Please explain.
21. Is there anything that I did not ask you about today but you think is important for me to know in relation to this study? Is there anything else you would like to mention?

Appendix E: Participant Demographic Sheet

Gender: _____

Academic standing: JR SR 5th YEAR

Expected date of graduation: _____

Plans after graduation: _____

Major: _____

Overall (cumulative) GPA: _____

Sport: _____

Do you receive athletic scholarship? YES NO

 If yes, what is the yearly amount/percentage? _____

Do you receive academic scholarship? YES NO

 If yes, what is the yearly amount/percentage? _____

Do you qualify for Pell Grant? YES NO

What is the main financial source funding your college education and living expenses?

List the top three reasons why you chose this university to attend:

List previous colleges/universities attended (if any):

Do you currently have a job(s)? YES NO

 If yes, how many hours per week do you work? _____

Your hometown: _____

High school(s) attended: _____

Sport(s) played in high school: _____

Your family's ethnic origin: _____

Were your parent(s) born in the United States? YES NO

If not, where? _____

What is your family's ethnic origin?

Mother: _____

Father: _____

Do you consider yourself first-, second-, or third-generation Latinx? _____

Do you have any siblings? YES NO

If yes, how many? _____

If yes, are you the oldest, middle, or the youngest child? _____

What is the occupation(s) of your parent(s)? _____

What are your goals after you graduate college? _____

Please select a pseudonym to be used for your name throughout the study: _____

Appendix F: Protocol for Online Guided Questions

1. What specific piece(s) of advice would you give to future student-athletes who identify as Latinx/Latina so that they can be successful in their college studies?
2. As a participant in a non-revenue sport, do you perceive your experience to be different from that of athletes in revenue sports as it relates to benefits, support, and overall treatment by faculty and staff? If so, why? If no, why not?
3. What, if anything, makes you feel like you belong here on this campus?
4. What, if anything, makes you feel like you **don't** belong here on this campus?