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Diversity among Latino/a College Students and Its Impact on Student Organization Involvement

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DIVERSITY AMONG LATINO/A COLLEGE STUDENTS
AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENT ORGANIZATION INVOLVEMENT

BY

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ABSTRACT

DIVERSITY AMONG LATINO/A COLLEGE STUDENTS AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENT ORGANIZATION INVOLVEMENT

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how differences within Latino/a college students are related to differences in social engagement in their campus. Prior studies have examined the relationship between social engagement and academic achievement for Latino/a college students, but have failed to take into account the diversity within the Latino/a ethnic group. Latinos/as are treated as a homogeneous group throughout most studies, despite documented differences in nationality, immigration status, level of ethnic identity, and other key factors. Furthermore, these differences have been linked to differences in attitudes towards education, college enrollment, academic performance, and ultimately degree completion. This study assessed the relationship between within group differences among Latino/a college students and the level of student organization involvement (SOI) and the level of social connectedness (SCS). A sample of 208 Latino/a college students participated in the study (128 males, mean age = 20.9; 80 females, mean age = 21.4). Statistically significant differences were found between SOI and SCS and immigration generation status, a significant positive correlation between SOI and SCS and level of ethnic identity, and a significant positive correlation between SCS and student profile (employment and grade-point-average). Limitations of the study included a non-experimental design that used self-report measures. Also, certain groups in the sample were underrepresented, leading

to exclusions from some parts of the study. Furthermore, there are external validities related to country of origin, legal status, and computer literacy. Recommendations for future research include further exploration of variability in the experiences of Latino/a college students, understanding the causal relationship between these variables, and exploration of how these factors contribute in significant ways to the overall college experience. Recommendations for colleges and universities include considering Latino/a subgroups in their institutional research, as well as considering these groups when they evaluate the need for specific student services. Finally, the results of this study suggest that Latino/a students would benefit from campus-based opportunities to strengthen their ethnic identities.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Latinos/as, who form the largest ethnic minority group in the United States (U.S. Census, 2010), also represent the largest minority group at four-year colleges and university (Fry & Lopez, 2011). However, though Latinos/as' college enrollment is comparable to other ethnic/racial groups, their degree attainment reveals the contrary. About 23-26% of Latinos/as who started college between 1996 and 2001 attain a bachelor's degree within four years after they started, versus 36-39% of Whites (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). In an effort to increase Latino/a recruitment and retention, a number of leaders from 12 Hispanic-serving institutions collaborated to highlight campus practices that favored Latino/a students, with an emphasis placed on the need to "actively promote Latino/a students' success, and not only their enrollment" (Santiago, 2006). There is a need to increase the percentage of Latinos/as attaining their bachelor's degree.

Given the significant size of the Latino/a population in the U.S., improving academic retention and achievement of Latinos/as in higher education has a national socioeconomic implication. Research shows that generally, degree attainment also equates to greater opportunities to improve socioeconomically (Gloria & Pope-Davis, 1997). This has received special attention in states such as California (Brady, Hout, & Stiles, 2005) and Texas (Murdoch, 2002), where the state government studied the relationship between Latinos/as' educational levels and their local economy. These

studies concluded that there is a positive correlation between Latinos/as' level of education and the state's cash balance. Higher levels of education lead to higher earning power, which help maintain or increase state revenue, while maintaining or lowering state expenditures. Currently, the U.S. economy reflects a need for post-secondary education to move above the lowest levels of employment. About 60% of jobs require postsecondary specialized training (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003). This means that any population with lower levels of college degree attainment will find their job opportunities limited and furthermore restrict the income range of those jobs available to them. For example, the U.S. Department of Education (2002) documented that in 2000, the median annual income for those with a bachelor's degree was over 60% higher than the median income of those with a high school diploma. Those with a bachelor's degree or higher are projected to earn in their lifetime over a millions dollars more than individuals with a high school diploma (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Furthermore, in 2009, the unemployment rate between all persons ages 20-24 was about 19% for those without any postsecondary education versus 9% for those with a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010).

A college education may not be appropriate or preferred by every person in the U.S., as currently only 24.4 % of the U.S. population that are 25 years or older have a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). However, Latinos/as are significantly underrepresented in bachelor's degree attainment with only 13% of those that are 25 years or older, having a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census, 2009). This disparity is significant because of its possible implications on quality of life. Research shows that there is a positive correlation between education, income and health (Benzeval, Taylor, &

Judge, 2000). Furthermore, research suggests a continuous association between family income and medical and mental health (Bassuk, Buckner, Perloff, & Bassuk, 1998; McLeod, Lavis, Mustard, & Stoddart, 2003; Sturm & Gresenz, 2002; Zimmerman & Bell, 2006). And though these appear to be mutually influencing variables, the cycle can be interrupted.

Latinos/as representation in bachelor's degree attainment is also important because there is additional research suggesting that education is a facilitating factor for upward socioeconomic mobility among Latinos/as (Kochhar, 2005). As the Latino/a population, foreign and native, continues to grow, it is important to identify how to empower them economically. Failure to do so can constitute in negative implications to the individual (i.e. mental and physical health and quality of life) as presented above, and also to the local/state government (Kasarda & Johnson, 2006) as it limits their contribution capabilities in forms of taxes and such, as well as potentially increase their utilization of government resources. And while a college degree may not be appropriate or preferred for all Latinos/as, a national survey indicates that Latinos/as perceive it as important for achieving success. According to this survey, about 95% of 850 randomly selected Latino/a parents across the nation believe that it is "very important to them that the children go to college" (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004).

In summary, Latinos/as are the fastest growing ethnic group in the U.S., and their enrollment across college campus is growing at a fast pace. For those who opt to pursue a college degree, success or failure to reach their goal has significant socio-economical implications. Unfortunately, Latinos/as are lagging behind in their ability to complete this

task. Therefore, further research is necessary in order to better understand how to facilitate academic progress leading to increased graduation rate among Latinos/as.

Overview of Factors that Affect Latino/a Academic Achievement

Many variables can contribute to a student's ability to successfully attain a bachelor's degree. Upon a review of the existing literature, six variables appear consistently in relationship to college degree attainment for Latinos/as. The first of these is academic preparedness (Ishitani & Desjardins, 2002). Academic preparedness refers to the educational foundation the student has obtained that will equip them to undertake the rigors of college courses (i.e., reading comprehension, writing ability, mathematical skills). Lack of academic preparedness often prevents or hinders a student's ability to persevere in college. The second variable is economic feasibility (Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996). This refers to the student's ability to afford attending college, or even the perception of not being able to afford it. This is often coupled with the lack of knowledge and access to available funding in order to attend college.

The third variable is the student's commitment (Ishitani & Desjardins, 2002). This refers to the student's internal drive to persist in college, and maintain engagement in the process. The fourth variable involves the environmental conditions in which the student is attempting to complete his or her education (DuBrock, 1999). This refers to whether the student commutes or resides on campus, the physical place and location of the campus/institutions, and whether the physical environment is conducive to learning. Research suggests that students living on campus develop better critical thinking skills, as indicated by differences in mathematical ability (Pascarella, Bohr, Nora, Zusman, Inman,

& Desler, 1993) and have higher academic performance and retention rate than those who commute (Thompson, Samiratedu, & Rafter, 1993). Furthermore, residency status and size of the school also appear to impact students' sense of community (Lounsbury & Beneul, 1996).

The fifth variable is the academic experience, which refers to the classroom and learning experience provided by the faculty and support staff. This is particularly vital for students that may lack academic preparedness or lack academic self-confidence. Finally, the sixth variable is the student's social experience (Braxton & Lien, 2000; Cabrera, Nora, & Casteneda, 1992, 1993; Nora, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1990), which refers to the student's actual and perceived involvement, support, and campus climate.

Note that these variables were not presented in any implied order of importance, since the absence, or the combined deficit, of any one of these variables can be detrimental to retention and degree attainment process (Tinto, 1975, 1993, & 2000).

Statement of the Problem

A significantly large number of Latinos/as are enrolling in college, but not graduating. That is the problem at hand. While retention is an issue for all students, Latinos/as are lagging behind their White peers in the attainment of postsecondary degrees, and particularly in bachelor's degree attainment (Kelly, Schneider, & Carey, 2010). Ultimately, the lack of postsecondary education places Latinos/as at a great socioeconomic disadvantage that has an impact on the entire social structure of the U.S. As described above, there are many variables that affect academic retention. Particularly, what Tinto (1975, 1993, & 2000) refers to as social engagement, is an especially

important variable for Latino/a students. This will be the primary scope of the present study. Tinto (2000) stated:

Involvement is a condition for student learning and retention. Educational theorists such as Alexander Astin, Ernest Boyer, George Kuh, and I have long pointed to the importance of the importance of academic and social integration or what is more commonly referred to as involvement or engagement to student retention. The more students are academically and socially involved, the more likely are they to persist and graduate (pg. 7).

Latinos/as, as a population, appear to place a high value on social support and engagement, but there is not enough research exploring how Latino/a subgroups differ in this context. While the label of Latino/a, or Hispanic, may give the impression of a homogeneous group, nothing could be further from the truth as diversity among Latinos/as has been well documented (Fry, 2006; Passel & Cohn, 2008; Pew Hispanic Center, 2005; Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004; Suro & Escobar, 2006). The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the social engagement patterns, specifically in student organizations, of Latino/a subgroups in the U.S. This information will be useful in providing a platform for providing more specified retention interventions for Latino/a college students, based on their involvement patterns.

While Latinos/as in general may value social support and engagement, it appears that it was only academically beneficial when there was a formal involvement in social activities, but detrimental to academic performance when informally involved (Mayo, Murguía, & Padilla, 1995). This seems to show a positive relationship between the level

of involvement and academic performance, though it does not imply causation or directionality.

However, it is important to understand what role the student's profile plays in relationship to the impact that the student organization has on them. When it comes to Latinos/as, this becomes a complex situation because, as described below, there is not a single particular profile that fits all Latinos/as. Therefore, any approach intended to assist Latino/a students must take into consideration the diverse representations of this population. Otherwise, some conditions believed to be favorable may be detrimental to the development of some students.

Among Latinos/as, the statistics indicate a great wealth of diversity. The most salient differences are place of birth, nation of origin, generational status, and others that extend from these; such as preferred language, ethnic identity, and acculturation level. (Fry, 2006; Passel & Cohn, 2008; Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004).

It should first be considered that Latin America consists of 20 countries spread through North America, South America, and the Caribbean (Fry, 2006). While these countries share many similarities, each country possesses distinctive histories and experiences. For example, Mexico is a Spanish speaking federal republic where about 90% are of Native Indian or Mixed descent and report a 91.4% literacy rate (U.S. Department of State, 2011a). Compare this to Cuba, also a Spanish speaking, but a totalitarian communist state, with about 65% of its population classified as White, and with a government reported 99.8% literacy rate (U.S. Department of State, 2011b).

In regards to nation of origin, there are four countries or regions that are readily identified in the research and the statistics; Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic (in size order). Individuals from each one of these groups have a very different immigration experience and while sharing some common struggles, they also face issues specific to each group. Another variable is place of birth. Latinos/as, particularly in the U.S., may or may not have been born outside the U.S. and that has an impact on their presentation (Fry, 2006; Passel & Cohn, 2008). Those born outside the U.S. (foreign born or first generation Latinos/as) tend to have some differences in terms of language, identity, and values in comparison to Latinos/as born in the U.S. from immigrant parents (second generation) and Latinos/as born to Latinos/as that were born in the U.S. (third+ generations). There are other considerations, such as preferred language, ethnic identity, generational level, and acculturation level.

To believe that these subgroups are identical in cultural experience and social actions would be a mistake. They may share an ancestral influence of White Europeans, particularly Spaniards and Portuguese, however, there are many other unique experiences that allow for distinct cultural differences among the different Latino/a subgroups. Differences in racial/ethnic ancestry, religion, sociopolitical experiences, immigration experiences, and even language must be taken into consideration in order to better understand the values and culture of Latinos/as. And though it would be an extremely challenging task to fully understand all the ways in which these distinctive experiences affect the individual, it is important not to ignore the potential influences.

While the presence of various subgroups of Latinos/as on college campuses is acknowledged, their diversity is often overlooked. This oversight may be as a result of

lack of awareness of within-group differences. Often perceived as a homogenous group, Latinos/as may be treated in an overly simplistic manner. However, the needs of Latino/a subgroups may vary depending on immigration experience, self-perception, ethnic identity, racial identity, sociopolitical background, and generational status. There are certain experiences that tend to be particular to some subgroups. For example, Latinos/as from Puerto Rico and/or of Puerto Rican descent are naturalized U.S. citizens because of the status of Puerto Rico as a commonwealth of the United States. While they may sympathize and be supportive of other Latinos/as that seek naturalization, it is not an issue that affects them directly. On the other hand, Latinos/as from the Dominican Republic and/or of Dominican descent, particularly first generation, need to gain legal status in order to work and study within the government's protection and benefit, hence naturalization issues may be very relevant to them. These differences and their potential impact on academic engagement are discussed in greater detail in Chapter II.

Upon entering college, many Latinos/as enter an environment where their minority status is highlighted, both implicitly and explicitly. Navigating through the social fabric of the college culture successfully will in part determine their ability to successfully complete their degree. The research suggests that one of the ways for Latinos/as to adjust to the college culture, both academically and socially, is through involvement in student organizations. Their involvement in student organizations provides social support and connection to the campus. However, very little is known about the engagement patterns of Latino/a subgroups. Based on the diverse immigration and social experiences of Latino/a subgroups, I propose that there will be some differences in social engagement between groups in a higher education setting.

Theoretical Framework

There are many theories that attempt to explain attrition and retention of college students. In particular, Tinto's College Departure Theory (Tinto, 1975, 1993) suggests that there needs to be both an academic and social component that informs retention. From Tinto's perspective, it is the appropriate engagement of the students in these two areas, as well as good fit between the campus and the student, that will facilitate a successful degree attainment at such higher education institutions. This fit should include academic and social engagement (Tinto, 2006). Creating a good fit between the campus and each individual student is a complex task.

Tinto's theory has been one of the most studied and tested theories in this subject, and regarded as one of the most solid theories regarding attrition (Braxton, Hischy, & McCledon, 2004). Tinto's College Departure Theory focuses on the student's capacity to acclimate into an educational setting. Tinto's theory presents that students arrive into an educational institution with personal and academic attributions, as well as certain goals and expectations. Once there, outcome is affected by the student's capacity to integrate into the college environment. Variables, such as student-faculty interaction, peer group interaction, and extracurricular involvement, play a significant role in facilitating this process (Tinto, 1975, 1993). The research supports the theory and also points to the first college year as most significant for student involvement (Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005; Tinto, 2001, 2006).

Limitations of Existing Research

There are both theoretical and empirical data that support the notion that students' retention is based on the integration of academic and social factors. In support of Tinto's theory (1975, 1993), and particularly the social engagement component, research show that Latino/a college students who feel supported tend to display greater resiliency, self-efficacy, ethnic identity, and well being (Arellano, & Padilla, 1996; Castellanos, 2007; Gloria, Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco 2005; Solberg & Villareal, 1997; Torres, 2004). In addition, being involved in campus activities allowed them to have greater access to information and role models to navigate the academic system (Castellanos, 2007; Falicov, 1998; Gloria, 1997; Segura-Herrera, 2006). Furthermore, there is statistical evidence of the relationship between social involvement and academic achievement (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004).

When looking particularly at Latino/a students' involvement in student organizations, the research also shows a positive relationship with bachelor's degree attainment (Stoecker, Pascarella, & Wofle 1988). As Fisher (2007) outlines, the benefits of Latino/a student involvement in student organizations, ethnically focused or not, include a sense of belonging, higher overall satisfaction with the college, and greater integration into campus life, which is positively correlated with higher academic persistence. Furthermore, involvement provides a source companionship, and access to support, advice, and information (Mira, Myers, Monis, & Cardoza, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini 2005).

However, there is also conflicting research that suggests that Latinos/as, or at least some section of the Latino/a population, do not benefit from this form of social

involvement (Mayo, Murguía, & Padilla, 1995). Mayo and colleagues suggest that is possibly due to the variability among Latinos/as, and therefore these potential differences will be the focus of the present study.

The research cited above shows that different variables affect the level of engagement of various students: type of institution (2yrs vs. 4 yrs); living arrangement (on campus vs. off-campus or commuter); or working conditions (working vs. not working vs. working on campus). What the research does not address is the need to understand how students from the most prominent Latino/a subgroups vary in social engagement. Latinos/as values, cultural perspectives, and even language vary within these subgroups. These variables may eventually affect how Latinos/as choose to become involved.

Research Questions

Based on the problem described above, the following are the research questions posed by the present study:

1. Are there differences in student organization involvement and social connectedness for Latino/a students with different countries of origin?
2. Are there differences in student organization involvement and social connectedness for Latino/a students with different generational statuses?
3. Are there differences in student organization involvement and social connectedness for Latino/a students with different ethnic identities?
4. Are there differences in student organization involvement and social connectedness for Latino/a students with different student profiles (gender, commuter or

resident, college generational status, total of credits taken, numbers of credits currently enrolled, length of college enrollment, grade point average, and number of hours of employment)?

Hypothesis

This study aimed to provide a better understanding of non-academic variables that may impact the involvement of Latino/a college students in student organizations. Tinto's model for academic retention places an emphasis on a good fit between the student and the campus, and the need to consider academic and non-academic components. One of these components is social engagement, which research shows that some Latinos/as tend to benefit from. Research also suggests that the difference between Latinos/as that benefit from social engagement may be due to within-group difference.

Since social engagement has been shown to play an important role for student development and success, it would be beneficial to know if different Latino/a subgroups engage differently in student organizations. This would be particularly important for Latinos/as, as they have been shown have a significantly higher college attrition rate.

It has been documented that U.S. Latino/a diversity exists in terms of nationality, ethnic identity, and generational status. This study explored how these differences affect student engagement through involvement in student organization. Research shows there are differences in academic attainment between Latinos/as descendant from different nationalities. Research also shows that Latinos/as with different generational status report differences in their perceived importance of education. If we expect that these differences

would manifest consistently across the board, we should also expect differences in social engagement between Latino/a subgroups.

Therefore, this study proposed that differences in nationality, ethnic identity, and generational status will also translate in differences in engagement in student organization, as reflected by the hypothesis:

H1a: Student organization involvement will vary by country of origin of Latino/a student(s).

H1b: Social connectedness will vary by country of origin of Latino/a students

H2a: Student organization involvement will vary by generational status of the Latino/a student(s).

H2b: Social connectedness will vary by generational status of the Latino/a student(s).

H3a: Student organization involvement will vary by ethnic identity of the Latino/a student(s).

H3b: Social connectedness will vary by ethnic identity of the Latino/a student(s).

H4a: Student organization involvement will vary by student profile of the Latino/a student(s).

H4b: Social connectedness will vary by student profile of the Latino/a student(s).

Operational Definitions

Country of origin: Defined as the Latin American country of origin identified by the students. This includes those born outside of the U.S. as well as those who were born in the U.S. but whose origin is from a Latin American country up to a third generation.

Nativity of the student, their parents, and their grandparents was requested through the demographic survey. Multiple countries of origin will be allowed and considered in the data as Latinos/as of mixed nationalities. For the purpose of this study, analysis was limited to college students descendant of the following countries: Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Puerto Rico. Individuals who identify as of mixed background including one, or more, of these four countries of origin will also be considered in the study.

Generational status: Defined by the student's, parents' and grandparents' birth place. Students born outside the U.S. will be considered first-generation Latinos/as. Students born in the U.S., and whose parents were born outside the U.S. will be considered second-generation Latinos/as. Students born in the U.S., and whose parents and grandparents were born in the U.S. will be considered third-generation Latinos/as. Generational status was only be based on this criterion, independent of age at which the student, parents, or grandparents arrived to the U.S. Students with parents of mixed generation will be noted, but older generation prevailed (i.e. if one parent is first generation and the other is second generation, student was be assigned to the third generation).

Student Profiles: Defined by the student's answers to the demographic data form, answering questions related to their academic enrollment: gender, commuter or resident, college generational status, total number of credits taken, grade point average, and employment status. College generational status has been defined as whether the student is the first from his immediate family to attend college or if parents graduated from college.

Ethnic Identity: Defined by the student's scores on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992; Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen, Roberts, & Romero, 1999).

Social connectedness: Defined by the student's score on The Social Connectedness Scale-Revised, Campus Version (SCS-R; Lee, Dean, & Jung, 2008; Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001; Lee & Robins, 1995). The SCS-R provides a broad measure of individual belonging and connectedness to the social environment.

Student organization involvement: Defined as the organization(s) listed by the student in which the student has been a member in the previous academic year and the degree of involvement in such organization(s). Students were requested to list and categorize any organization(s) in which he or she is a member of into one of five types- Housing/Commuter, Student Government, Greek, Academic, Ethnic/Cultural, Sports, or other- fill-in. For each organization in which the student is a member, he or she was asked 1) how often the organization met: (1) weekly (2) biweekly (3) monthly (4) less than monthly and 2) to rate degree of involvement using the rubric provided: Did you attend (5) all or nearly all of the programs/activities (4) 3/4 of the programs/activities (3) 1/2 of the programs/activities (2) 1/4 of the programs/activities (1) none or nearly none of the programs/activities. The rates were added to provide a total score for student organization involvement.

Since not all Latino/a college students are involved in student organizations, it is likely that some of the participants in this study may fall into that category. However, these participants may be able to provide insight into possible barriers for involvement in

student organizations. Therefore, an open-ended question was included in the study that asked students why they are not involved.

Assumptions

This study made the following assumptions about the potential respondents: First, respondents were voluntary and willing participants in the surveys provided. Second, respondents answered all questions in an honest, non-biased manner, without any hidden agendas that could manipulate the results. And lastly, respondents understood the criteria set to participate in this study, and self-identify as appropriate participants.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

This chapter presents a detailed profile of Latinos/as in the United States, in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Latinos/as may have different social experiences by subgroups. This profile includes Latino/a demographics, nativity, identifying labels, language spoken, socio economic profile and education related values. Furthermore, I will discuss the impact of acculturation and assimilation on this Latino/a population. I will also present a brief synopsis of the four largest Latino/a groups based on Nationality, as well as the profile of Latinos/as in the States of New York and New Jersey. Finally, the chapter presents an academic profile of Latinos/as in higher education and the variables that appear to affect academic attainment leading to the need to understand Latino/a college student social engagement patterns by subgroups.

Demographics

Latinos/as currently comprise the largest minority group in the United States of America (U.S.) and continues to grow at a faster rate than any other ethnic or racial group (Santiago, 2006). Currently, there are 47 million documented Latinos/as in the U.S., accounting for 15.5% of the population and are expected to grow to 29% percent of the population (or 128 million) by the year 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This

percentage has already been reached and surpassed in states such as New Mexico (44.7%), California (35.9%), Texas (35.6%) and Arizona (29.1%). In addition, Latinos/as already represent a significant constituency in states such as New York with 3.14 million (16.3%), New Jersey 1.36 million (15.6%) and Connecticut with 384 thousand (11%) (Fry, 2006).

Nativity

About 60% of Latinos/as in the U.S. are native-born. In terms of generations, about 40% are first-generation/foreign born, 28% are second-generation Latinos/as and 32% are third-generation and higher. The generational make up of Latinos/as is expected to undergo some changes by the year 2050 and become 33% first, 34% second, and 33% third plus (Passel & Cohn, 2008; Fry, 2006).

Latinos/as originate from 20 countries in North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean Islands. In 2006, 64.1% of the U.S. Latino/a population was of Mexican origin, followed by Puerto Rican (9%), Cuban (3.4%), Dominican (3.2%), Salvadoran (3.1%), Guatemalan (2%), Colombian (1.8%), Honduran (1.1%), Ecuadorian (1.1%), and Peruvian (1%). All other Latin American countries independently represented less than 1% each of the Latino/a population in the U.S. (Fry, 2006).

As an age segment, Latinos/as are also relatively younger than other racial or ethnic groups in the U.S. Overall, Latinos/as median age is 27, with native-born significantly younger than foreign-born (17 yrs vs. 35 yrs, respectively). In comparison to the median ages of Whites (39 yrs.), Blacks (29 yrs.) and Asians (34 yrs.), Latinos/as fare as the youngest ethnic group in the nation. Projections place Latinos/as ages 15-19 to

grow from 11 million in 2005 to about 16 million by 2020, and become 24% of that age segment (Santiago, 2006; Fry, 2006)

Ethnic Identity

The terms “Latino/a” and “Hispanic” are often utilized interchangeably to describe the presence of Spanish speaking or people of Spanish descent in the United States. This is reflected in the literature as different authors use their preferred label in an effort to best address such a diverse population (Castellano & Jones, 2003). Most authors base their preferences on the historical and political backgrounds of the terms.

In 1977, the “Hispanic” label was adopted by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as a category that included people of Spanish origin. The operational definition of Hispanic is the following: "A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race." (Federal Register, 1978; Trevino, 1986) Hispanic translates to “of or relating to the people, speech, or culture of Spain or of Spain and Portugal” (Hispanic, 2008), which means that any nationality which fits this description could be considered Hispanic. In the U.S. the focus was placed on the Spanish culture’s influence of this population.

There was some dissatisfaction with the term Hispanic because it appeared to only reflect the cultural influences of a dominating culture (Spaniard) over already established civilizations (indigenous) while also excluding the influence of African culture carried over through the slave trade (Hayes-Bautista & Chapa, 1987). Drs. Hayes-Bautista and Chapa argued the “Latino/a” label as a more comprehensive term. Latino/a was derived

from Latin American, and it is supposed to be a term inclusive of “all persons of Latin American origin or descent irrespective of language, race, or culture” (p. 65).

In 1997, The OMB (1997) released a notice revising its categorization to included the Label “Hispanic or Latino/a” as an ethnicity label which could be coupled by race category when collecting data. Neither “Latino/a” nor “Hispanic” makes reference to racial make-up, as defined by the OMB (1977). This was done in order to satisfy the people that preferred either label. However, either one label is rarely used outside the context of the U.S. (Suro, 2006). In actuality, there is a survey that presents that the overwhelming majority of “Latinos/as” believe that people from different countries of Latin America possess “separate and distinct cultures” and do not subscribe to the idea of a homogeneous Latino/a or Hispanic culture (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004, pg. 18). On a separate survey, when asked what label “Latinos” preferred between Latino/a or Hispanic, country of Origin, or American, most Latinos/as preferred to identify themselves by their country of origin followed by American, and Latino/Hispanic being their least favorite (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005; Suro, 2006).

Language

It is important to understand that just as Latinos/as in the U.S. do not share a common country of origin or culture, they also may not share a common linguistic experience. There are monolingual Latinos/as (English only or Spanish only) as well as bilingual (English/Spanish) (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005), this is without taking into consideration Brazilians who speak Portuguese.

The diversity in language used by Latinos/as is correlated to their generational status, with Spanish being the predominant language among first-generation Latinos/as (72%), Bilingual among second-generation Latinos/as (47%) and English among third-generation and higher (78%) (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004).

Language and generational status are directly linked to identification label. Latinos/as whose primary language was Spanish and those who were bilingual preferred to identify by their country of origin (68% and 52%, respectively) versus the Latino/a or Hispanic label or the American label. Conversely, those that preferred English also preferred to identify as American (51%). The same trend is observed in first, second, and third+ generations (68%, 38%, and 57%, respectively) (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004).

Gender

U.S. Census report (2009) documents that while women are enrolling and graduating high school at a larger proportion than men (85% vs. 83.9%), men continue to enroll in college at a larger proportion than women (28.2% vs. 26.7%). However, these findings also show that Latinas are graduating at a much larger proportion than Latinos (15% vs. 10%). There is also research supporting that when it comes to social engagements, there is a gender difference. Latinas emphasize their group membership as Latinas, while Latinos tend to have less positive ethnic identities and tend to be inclined towards groups with values representative of the dominant culture. This was explained as Latinos experiencing opportunities through such activities as sports that provide them with encouragement and support not always granted to Latinas. Consequently, Latinas

tend to seek support through their relationships with other Latinas (Barajas and Pierce, 2001).

State Profiles

The present study will focus on the Latin/a population in the area of New York and New Jersey in order to have a sample of Latinos/as that share similar state demographics. As the statistics cited below indicate, the state-specific Latino/a population varies from state to state. These differences are noted in raw numbers, the percentage of the population they represent and the nation of origin. These differences are likely to have an impact on ethnic identity, acculturation, and social experiences. Therefore, by focusing on states that share a demographic area and share a similar representation of ethnic groups, we lessen the chances of having extraneous variables affect the outcome.

New York

New York has the third largest Latino/a population in the continental U.S., which constitutes 8% of Latinos/as nationwide. New York has a population of about 19.5 million people, with about 16.3 % of Hispanic origin. This contributes approximately a quarter of the states' 25+ yrs age segment that have a bachelor's degree. There is discrepancy between the state's median household income and that of Latinos/as (\$43,543 vs. \$31,490). Latinos/as also represent a significantly disproportionate segment of the below poverty rate in the total population. The state has 14.5% below-poverty rate, of which Latinos/as represent 30.6%. Latinos/as are slightly underrepresented in the labor

force (14.4%) and overrepresented in the unemployment rate (20.5%). Latinos/as are also significantly younger than the rest of the state population (29.8 years vs. 37.1 years). The citizenship status of Latinos/as in this state is 26.9% foreign-born (non-citizens), 13.2% foreign born (citizens), and 59.9% native born. The origin of the nationality of the Latinos/as in the state is as follows 38.3% Puerto Rican, 19.8% Dominican, 9.2% Mexican, and 1.8% Cuban (National Council of La Raza, 2005a; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008a).

New Jersey

New Jersey has the seventh largest Latino/a population in the continental U.S., which constitutes 8% of Latinos/as nationwide. New Jersey has a population of about 8.7 million people, with about 15.6 % of Hispanic origin. Approximately a third of the states' 25+ year age segment has a bachelor's degree. There is a discrepancy between the state's median household income and that of Latinos/as (\$57,338 vs. \$41,849). Latinos/as also represent a significantly disproportionate segment of the below poverty rate for the population. The state has 8.4% below-poverty rate, of which Latinos/as represent 32.3%. Latinos/as are slightly underrepresented in the labor force (13.2%) and overrepresented in the unemployment rate (18.3%). Latinos/as are also significantly younger than the rest of the state population (29.8 years vs. 37.1 years). The citizenship status of Latinos/as in this state is 29.6% foreign-born (non-citizens), 15.5% foreign born (citizens), and 54.8% native born. The origin of nationality of the Latinos/as in the state is as followed: 30.5% Puerto Rican, 9.8% Mexican, 9% Dominican, and 6.3% Cuban (National Council of La Raza, 2005b; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008b).

Socioeconomic Profile

Economically speaking, Latinos/as appear to be at a disadvantage when compared to all other major racial/ethnic groups in the U.S. According to the Pew Hispanic Center (Fry, 2006), almost half (48.4%) of Latinos/as report an income of \$20,000 or less (versus 34.4% of Whites, 43.6% of Blacks, and 32.6% of Asians). Further, 39.7% of Latinos/as report an income between \$20,000 and \$49,999 (vs. 38.1% of Whites, 41.3% of Blacks, and 35.4% of Asians), and only 11.9% of Latinos/as reported an income of \$50,000+ (versus 27.5% of Whites, 15.1% of Blacks, and 32.3% of Asians) (Fry, 2006). Latinos/as are reported as the ethnic group with the second highest poverty rate (21.7% vs. 9.3% of Whites, 25.3% of Blacks, and Asians with a rate of 10.7%) (Fry, 2006).

Latinos/as ages 24-64 years also constitute 22% of nonworking poor and 30% of working poor. This is relevant because, college students coming from working poor families are more likely to be first-generation college students, enroll in part-time status, and hold more negative perceptions about college, which are risk factors for dropping out of college (McSwain & Davis, 2007).

For the most part, Latinos/as' employment are in areas that do not require a higher education degree. Latinos/as are over represented in occupations of construction and maintenance (man), production and transportation, and service (Fry, 2006).

Profile of Latinos/as by Nationality

While most Latinos/as in the U.S. may share communalities, experiencing similar opportunities and obstacles, there are some very marked differences that are unique to each particular Latino/a country. These profiles will highlight some of those differences,

as a way to illustrate how some of these differences in different settings may influence their experiences.

Mexicans

Mexicans are the largest group of Latinos/as in the U.S. with over 30 million in population, and accounting for over 60% of the total Latino/a population in the U.S. About 37% of Mexicans are foreign born, and mostly arrived in the U.S. in 1990 or later. Most Mexicans (62%) are English proficient. Their median age is 25 and less than half (46.5%) are married. The vast majority of Latinos/as of Mexican descent live in the West and South of the U.S. Mexican's level of education is lower than the overall Latino/a population, with 10% vs. 12.9% obtaining a bachelor's degree. The median annual income of Mexicans over the age of 16 is \$20,368, which is comparable to all others U.S. Latinos/as, but about \$8,000 less than the overall U.S. population (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010c).

Puerto Ricans

Puerto Ricans are the second largest Latino/a group in the U.S. with about 4.2 million in population, and accounting for 8.9% of the total Latino/a population in the U.S. While most Puerto Ricans (about 2.8 million) are born in the U.S., those born in Puerto Rico are also considered native born, as Puerto Rico is a territory of the U.S. The majority of Puerto Ricans (80.5%) are English proficient. Their median age is 29 and about 37.3% are married. Puerto Ricans educational level is higher than the Latino/a population overall, with over 16% of those 25 and older holding at least a bachelor's

degree. The median annual income of Puerto Ricans over the age of 16 is \$26,478, which is about \$5000 higher than the median earnings for all other U.S. Latinos, but about \$3,000 less than the overall U.S. population (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). The vast majorities of Latinos/as of Puerto Rican descent live in the Northeast, but are also found in many other states throughout the Nation (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010d).

Cubans

Cubans are the third largest Latino/a group in the U.S. with about 1.6 million in population, and accounting for about 3.5% of the total Latino/a population in the U.S. About 69% of Cubans are born outside the U.S., and most (57.2%) arrived in the U.S. before 1990. Most Cubans (58.2%) are also U.S. citizens. Most Cubans (58.3%) are English proficient. The median age of Cubans is 41 years of age, and about 49% are married. The vast majority of Latinos/as of Cuban descent live in Florida, New York, and New Jersey. Cubans' level of education is higher than the overall Latino/a population level with about 24% of Cubans over 25 having obtained at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 12.9% of all U.S. Latinos/as. The median annual income of Cubans over the age of 16 is \$26,488, which is about \$5,000 more than the median income of all U.S. Latinos/as (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010a).

Dominicans

Dominicans are the fifth largest Latino/a group in the U.S. with about 1.3 million in population, and accounting for about 1.8% of the total Latino/a population in the U.S. About 57% of Dominicans are born outside the U.S., and most (57%) arrived in the U.S.

after 1990. About 48% of Dominicans are U.S. citizens. The majority of Dominicans (53.4%) speak English proficiently. The median age of Dominicans is 29 years old. And about 38.7% are married. The vast majority of Latinos/as of Dominican descent live in the Northeast, with about half (50.6%) living in New York. Dominican's level of education is slightly higher than the overall U.S. Latino/a population, with about 15% having obtained at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 12.9% of all U.S. Latinos/as. The median annual income of Dominicans over the age of 16 is \$20,571, which is slightly less than the median earning for all U.S. Latinos/as (\$21,488) (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010b).

Acculturation and Assimilation

Acculturation, the course of culture learning and behavioral adjustment that takes place with individuals' exposure to a new culture (Berry, 1997), is a phenomenon that affects all minority groups, and the process varies depending on age, generational status, educational level, birthplace, and language (Miranda & Umhoefer, 1998; Phinney & Flores, 2002). There are four main acculturation styles- Integration (coexistence of both cultures, also biculturalism), marginalization (diminishing the dominant and minority culture), separation (favoring the minority culture), and assimilation (favoring the majority culture) (Rudmin, 2003). Due to the variability among Latinos/as, there is no single exclusive acculturation process experience for this group. None-the-less, there are two markers often related to acculturation: nativity (Harker, 2001; Kao, 1999) and length of time in the dominant culture. (Coatsworth, Pantin, McBride, Briones, Kurtines, & Szapocznik, 2002; Gfroerer & Tan, 2003).

In the acculturation process, immigrants often adopt the dominant culture's practices and values while giving up some or all of their original cultural practices and values (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000; Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006). This process is often correlated with, but not exclusively tied to, nativity and time spent in the dominant culture (Kwak & Berry, 2001; Phinney & Flores, 2002). This is particularly the case for Latinos/as born in the U.S., who endorse more American practices than those foreign born, and when born outside the U.S., their endorsement of American practices is correlated with the number of years in this U.S. (Schwartz, Pantin, Sullivan, Prado, & Szapocznik, 2006). Also, language appears to be significant, as the acquisition of the English language is key in the assimilation process; those with a preference for English tend to have more attitudes similar to non-Latinos/as than to Latinos/as with Spanish speaking preference (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004).

However, it is important to understand that the acculturation process in a dominant culture can be affected by living in a community where the minority culture is highly represented (Phinney, 2003; Schwartz, Pantin, Sullivan, Prado, & Szapocznik, 2006). Consequently, Latinos/as who navigate between their home culture and the receiving culture may need to adapt to both cultures, referred to as becoming bicultural.

The bicultural experience acknowledges that individuals do not necessarily have to let go of one's culture of origin to move into the receiving culture (Birman, 1998; Birman & Trickett, 2001). Instead, minority's cultural experience is seen through a bi-linear perspective where culture of origin and receiving culture are in two separate continuums. Like many other minority groups, Latinos/as find themselves having to become avid cultural negotiators (Sanchez, 2006). Biculturalism has been documented

by some researchers as the preferable orientation since it is correlated to positive psychological adjustment and provides a positive coping response within a multicultural society (Chen, Benet-Martínez, & Bond, 2008; Padilla, 2006).

Education

Education-Related Values/Attitudes

It is key to understand that Latinos/as encompass a multitude of cultural experiences and so it is difficult to attach a single set of values or belief system (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005). As a whole, Latinos/as tend to value education and encourage their children to aspire for a college education. Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation (2004) found 95% of Latino/a parents endorsed education as “very important” and more than half of respondents reported believing that young people are unlikely to succeed without a college degree. Overall, most Latinos/as (89%) believe that there are many more opportunities in the U.S. to get ahead and consider education as one of the primary routes. However, Latinos/as also differ along a number of dimensions based on their immigration status, as described below.

Language and generational status are linked to some differences in values and attitudes held by Latinos/as in the U.S. For example, though Latinos/as value education regardless of nativity, a greater percentage of native-born Latinos/as report perceiving a college education as a necessity to succeed, compared to foreign-born Latinos/as (60% vs. 51%) (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004).

Another example that demonstrates differing attitudes between the native-born and foreign-born Latinos/as are their attitudes towards the school's role in the child's

language development. While as a whole, Latinos/as agree on children learning the English language, foreign-born parents also want schools to help children maintain their native language (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004).

One more example is Latinos/as' attitude toward race related issues. While Latinos/as in general are in favor of affirmative action (68%), there is an observable difference between foreign-born and native-born Latinos/as (75% vs. 57%, respectively) (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004). Furthermore, over half of native-born Latinos/as find racial integration beneficial for students, only 38% of foreign-born found it beneficial. However, more than half of foreign-born Latinos/as found racial integration "as not making much of difference", versus 39% of native-born Latinos/as. (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004).

College Enrollment

Latinos/as in general have a different enrollment pattern than other racial/ethnic groups. Close to 58% of the Latinos/as in institutions of higher education are enrolled in two-year institutions, which is significantly higher than Whites (42%), Blacks (47%) and Asian/Pacific Islander (45%) (Cunningham & Santiago, 2005; NCES, 2003). This pattern varies within Latino/a subgroups: Latinos/as of Mexican descent have the highest enrollment rates in two year institutions at 55%, followed by Latinos/as of Cuban descent at 34% and Latinos/as of Puerto Rican descent at 20%. Research shows that Latinos/as enrolling in two year institutions have a lower chance of obtaining any degree (35%) much less a bachelor's degree (5%), which places Latinos/as at an immediate disadvantage in comparison to other groups (55% and 44%, respectively) (NCES, 2003).

Approximately 49% of Latino/a college students are the first generation college students, meaning that they are the first in their families to attend college (NCES, Digest of Education Statistics, 2005, table 205). When compared to 2nd generation college students, first generation college students are less likely to obtain a bachelor's degree (24% vs. 68%). Also, about half of all Latinos/as college students enroll part-time (versus 38% of Whites and Asian/Pacific Islander Students, and 40% of Blacks). And when looking at the 18-24 age bracket, 75% appear to enroll full time versus 85% of Whites and Blacks. An exception within the Latinos/as subgroups is Cubans, which enroll full time at a much higher rate of 90% (Fry, 2002). Also, Cunningham and Santiago (2005) reported that Latinos/as were more likely to live at home with their parents, and less likely to live on campus than their peers.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions

Close to half of Latinos/as in higher education attend Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) (Santiago, 2007). These institutions are categorized as such because they maintain a full time enrollment of Latino/a students of 25% or more, and represent about 6% of the higher education institutions in the U.S. However, about 49% of HSIs are community colleges (Santiago, 2006).

Barriers to Higher Education

There are many different barriers that Latinos/as may encounter in their attempt to obtain a bachelors degree. The primary barrier is economic limitations (Fry, 2004; McSwain & Davis, 2007). Of those that attend institutions of higher education, the vast

majority of Latinos/as (76%) enroll in institutions with a tuition and fees of \$5000 or less. Though, affordability can many times be based on perception coupled with lack of information, it remains as one of the major barriers.

According to Fry (2004), Latinos/as perceive six specific obstacles in relation to higher education (in descending order): (a). The cost of education, (b) the need to work, (c) receiving a poor high school education, (d) attitudes toward a college degree in relation to its necessity in order to be successful, (e) discrimination, and (f) attitudes toward moving away from home to attend college. In addition, there are other factors that affect academic attainment, such as feelings of inadequacy or being out of place (Kamimura, 2006; Rosales, 2006), family responsibilities, discriminatory campus environment, and lack of representation in the faculty and student body (Castellanos et al, 2006; Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004).

Degree Attainment

The National Education Longitudinal Survey (NELS) (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) provided data that place Latinos/as enrolling at the same rate as Whites, and slightly higher than blacks, but with a substantially lower achievement rate. The NELS documented the 1988 to 2002 academic progress of 8th graders. Results showed that Latinos/as were enrolling at the same rate as Whites (82%), but were leaving without a degree at a disproportionate rate (64% vs. 39% of Whites). Results of this survey also showed that only 4% (versus 15% of Whites) of Latinos/as obtained a bachelor's degree through the traditional path and 23.2% completed a bachelor's degree within 6 years after graduating high school (versus 47.3% of Whites). The traditional path refers to the

continuous enrollment in an institution of higher education (within one year after high school graduation), and the completion of a degree within the expected timeframe of 4 years (versus 15% of Whites and 23% of Asians/Pacific Islanders) (NCES 2003-2005; Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004).

Though Latinos/as have made great strides in the past decade or so in terms of enrollment into institutions of higher education, they are still performing at a disproportionately lower rate. (NCES, 2005). Latinos/as, who in 2004 represented 13% of the population and 13% of college students, only obtained 11% of associate degrees and 7% of bachelor's degrees.

Latinos/as also appear to be the ethnic group with the least formal education, as they presented with the lowest percentage of bachelor's degree attainment in comparison to all other major ethnic/racial groups (Fry, 2006). In 2006, of Latinos/as ages 25 and older, only 12.3% had a bachelor's degree or higher, versus 29.9% of Whites, 16.9% of Blacks, and 49.6% of Asian/Pacific Islanders. However, it is important to note that the immigration experience has an impact on these percentages, as foreign-born Latinos/as tend to appear as having lesser degree attainment than native-born Latinos/as. Only about 10% of Foreign-born Latinos/as 25 and older had a college degree in 2006 versus about 15.6% of Native-born Latinos/as. There was also some disparity between degree attainment levels among Latinos/as with different generational status, with third and higher generation Latinos/as having the greatest graduation rate (18.6%) versus first and second generation Latinos/as (15.2% and 16.1%, respectively).

Again, even though there have been major strides in terms of access to college, Latinos/as have really taken very small steps when it comes to degree attainment

(Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006). According to projections reported by Castellanos (2007) and Padilla (2007), only 8-10 of 100 Latinos/as in elementary school will obtain a bachelor's degree.

The Impact of Social Support on Academic Achievement

Prominent academic retention theorists (Astin, 1985; Tinto, 1993) agreed that it is necessary to consider the contribution and interaction of academic and non-academic factors when contemplating academic success. This is particularly the case for Latinos/as students as the research suggests that the lack of educational attainment can be attributed to two primary factors, beyond academic preparedness: (a) where Latinos/as attend college, and (b) their overall college experience (Fry, 2004). Latinos/as that attend community colleges and less selective institutions are less likely to obtain a bachelor's degree. In addition, Latinos/as, who are in more supportive academic and social institutions, are more likely to persist in their degree attainment.

Research points to several additional non-academic factors that affect the degree attainment of Latino/a college students. These include, but not exhaustively: resilience, self-efficacy, ethnic identity, well-being, social support, comfort with the university environment, self-confidence and/or social involvement for various minority status groups (Arellano, & Padilla, 1996; Castellanos, 2007; Fris-Britt & Turner, 2001, 2002; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco 2005; Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 2001; Sedlacek & Adams-Gaston, 1992; Solberg & Villareal, 1997; Ting & Robinson, 1998; Torres, 2004).

While the academic/cognitive component remains highly valuable, it is important to recognize that as students attend college, if they are not able to form a connection to

the campus and are not able to become integrated into the social fabric of the campus, they are likely to be at higher risk of dropping out (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004).

A framework for understanding Latinos/as college student's experience in higher education known as the PSC framework (Psychological, Social And Cultural) (Castellanos, 2007; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000) presents a multi-dimensional approach addressing non-cognitive factors. Tying together self-perceptions, attitudes, social support agents, and familial values (among many others), the PSC framework claims that Latino/a retention can be improved by improving well-being (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005; Castellanos, 2007; Gloria, 1997; Gloria et al. 2005; Gloria & Ho 2003; Gloria & Robison-Kurpius, 2001).

One element of the PSC framework, the social aspect, highlights the need for an appropriate social interaction that is appropriate of the Latino/a student. Research supports that peer support and student organization involvement provide an independent contribution to academic retention of Latinos/as (Rosales, 2006).

Louis Olivas, President of the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education, after addressing the minimal and slow change that Latinos/as have incurred in their attempt to acquire a bachelor's degree, states that a way to improve the enrollment and retention of Latinos/as in higher education is by "applying values central to the Latino/a experience within the academic environment and shifting it to one that respects familiar and essential values" (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007, pg. 379).

One core aspect of many Latinos/as is Familismo, which relates to "loyalty, solidarity, and reciprocity," within the family unit. If we were able to infuse such cultural

values into the campus culture, we could be providing Latinos/as with a “comunidad” were they feel cared for with Familismo (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007).

The incorporation of family values in the academic environment may pose a challenge, as it is a great challenge to accommodate every cultural experience. However, student organizations may be able to accommodate for such interaction. Based on the application PSC framework, it is recommended that Latinos/as in higher education become involved with Latino/a based groups and have meaningful interactions with Latino/a peers (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). Of course, given the complexity of the Latino/a ethnic group, it is important to note that it’s the shared experience of “values and behaviors” that allow for students involved to be validated (Gloria & Castellanos, 2003; Segura-Herrera, 2006). Therefore, understanding how different subgroups of Latinos/as interact becomes valuable in order to provide the appropriate support that facilitates such social interaction.

Overall, Latinos/as tend to benefit from social support, as it may provide them access to information, active modeling, examples for coping strategies, and encouragement (Castellanos, 2007; Falicov, 1998, Gloria, 1997, Segura-Herrera, 2006). In addition, “such groups (referring to student organizations) facilitate connectedness, counter normlessness, and the lonely only phenomena, and provide a sense of collective identity.” Furthermore, “...increased individual and group congruity can emerge by developing networks in which students....share resources” (Castellanos, 2007).

A meta-analysis of 109 studies (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004) focusing on the examination of non-academic factors and their relationship to retention and achievement drew the following conclusions: there is a moderate relationship with

retention and social support (defined as the level of social support a student perceives from the institution) and retention and social involvement (extent to which the student feels connected and is involved in campus community). In addition, it was also determined that there was as moderate relationship between college GPA and social involvement and social support.

Based on the results of the meta-analytic study, various recommendations were made by the author(s) to the institutions, two of which I have chosen to present: First, one should determine [the] student's characteristics and needs, set priorities among these areas of need, identify available resources, evaluate a variety of successful programs, and implement a formal comprehensive retention program that best meets their institutional needs. Second, one should take an integrated approach in [the] retention efforts that incorporate both academic and non-academic factors into the design and development of programs to create a socially inclusive and supportive academic environment that addresses the social, emotional, and academic needs of students.

Student Involvement through Student Organizations

One of the possible ways to address the social support needs of Latinos/as students in higher education is through active involvement in student organizations (Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004). According to Soecker, Pascarella, and Wofle (1998), "when entry variables such as academic aptitude, high school grades, and precollege aspirations were controlled for, students' extracurricular involvements were positively related to the completion of the bachelor's degree." This appears to be as a result of factors lead by the student involvement that facilitated academic persistence

including such factors as encouragement, positive social self-concepts (Pascarella & Terenzini 2005), a support network (Kuh, 1995; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), and sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

It is significant to note that much of the literature around student organizations overlaps with the literature on peer support. While in some occasions these terms may be used interchangeably, it is necessary to know that student organizations are one type of peer support. With this in mind, it is also important to understand that peer support research in part informs student organization literature.

Peer support as a factor contributing to academic success has found support in both theory and practice. A student with a strong peer support network is more likely to experience a greater sense of belonging and is likely to become involved in activities that promote academic persistence and achievement (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2006). One way in which the literature suggests that Latinos/as can benefit from peer support is through more “on campus” available exchanges of information as well as emotional support (Rodriguez, Mira, Myers, Monis, & Cardoza, 2003). This appears to be particularly the case of first generation college students that would depend more on their peers than their family members, for support and orientation throughout their college careers (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Grant-Vallone, Reid, Umali, & Pohlert, 2003). A study by Martin, Swartz-Kulstad and Madson (1999), found that college adjustment has a stronger relationship to perceived support from peers and family than to academic ability. This is further supported by research that suggests that peer related support and involvement in student organizations predict higher adjustment of

Latinos/as to college (Mayo, Murguia, & Padilla, 1995; Suarez, Fowers, Garwood, & Szapocznik, 1997).

The more involved and invested the student is on the campus, the more likely the student will perceive the college experience to be positive (Davis & Murrell, 1993). For minorities, (and not Whites) there is a positive relationship between extra-curricular involvement, grades, (Fischer, 2007; Scheneider & Ward, 2003), and college persistence (Gloria et al., 2005). One way to explain it is that Latinos/as with family and friends' support are more likely to finish primary and secondary school (Cheng & Sarks, 2002) and as Latinos/as move onto college, peers become their social support in college (Fischer, 2007; Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005; Tinto, 1993).

However, some differences in involvement have been documented between different student groups. For example, students that live on campus are more likely to be more involved than commuting students (Astin, 1999). According to Astin, students who reside on campus are more likely to be involved with the faculty, student organizations, and other on campus activities. This suggests that students who commute are at a disadvantage in their efforts to stay connected to their respective campus.

There are also differences in the types of organizations in which students become involved (Fischer, 2007). The different types of student organizations are social, academic, political, Greek, athletic, religious, housing and residence, sports and special interests. As Bean (2005) states, "the student's form of social engagement can vary widely depending on the norms, tradition, and values of the student culture" (p. 228). For example, many under-represented students rely on the support of minority based student organizations. Particularly in predominantly white campuses, minority based student

organizations have a positive impact on Latinos/as' academic achievement (Conchas, 2001; Stikes, 1985; Willie, 2003).

Amid all this supportive evidence, there is also some research that suggests that Latinos/as in particular do not always benefit from involvement in student organizations. In some circumstances, involvement is associated with academic decline, without really knowing why (Mayo et al., 1995). In other cases, involvement in certain groups, such as ethnically based student organizations, is associated with difficulties adjusting to their campus as a result of segregation and perception of lack of support and/or acceptance by the non-Latino/a peers, faculty, and the institution (Schneider & Ward, 2003).

The lack of homogeneity among Latino/a samples may help explain the conflictive results seen in these studies. This is very likely, given that Latinos/as as an ethnic group do not present with a single cultural experience. Instead, Latino/a is the figurative label for a multitude of cultural experiences, keeping in mind that colleges are attempting to provide a good fit between the campus and the student. When it comes to social engagement, students will choose to engage based on their cultural experience. This means that in order to have a more predictable engagement pattern for Latinos/as, we would need to better understand how the subgroups within Latino/a groups engage in campus student organizations.

The research in support, or against, engaging in student organizations appears to rely on the compatibility between the profile of the student and the organizations. Given the potential benefits, it would be important to understand how the similarities and differences between the Latino/a student subgroups may affect their involvement pattern. Current limits in our understanding of engagement patterns present a possible barrier to

involvement that could negatively impact social connectedness. According to Tinto (1975, 1993), students' inability to effectively engage socially with their campus contributes to higher attrition rates.

Problem with the Current Literature

Latinos/as have received increasing attention in the literature pertaining to academic retention and degree completion. As the number of Latinos/as entering through the doors of colleges across America has increased, so has increased the interest in helping them achieve their academic goals. However, the literature in general is significantly limited with regard to Latinos/as, as this highly diverse group is treated as a single homogeneous entity.

Diversity within Latino/a college students has been given some consideration, yet most of the literature continues to ignore the potential impact of within-group differences. For example, Crisp and Nora's (2010) comprehensive overview of the literature regarding Latinos/as in higher education is detailed in identifying the most significant factors related to enrollment, retention, and graduation of Latino/a college students. Yet, despite the exhaustive review of the current information, it has failed to fully capture the heterogeneous composition of the Latino/a ethnic identity. The data presented only focused on the overarching label of "Hispanics," without any significant mention of differences that may exist among Latino/a subgroups. Any discussion regarding Latinos/as presented in this manner inadvertently assumes homogeneity in the educational experience of varying Latino/a groups.

While some differences in academic performance among Latino/a subgroups, such as first generation immigrants versus second generation college student graduation rate and differences in degree attainment between Latinos/as from different countries of origin (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010), it is not yet well documented how these differences may influence different aspects of the college experience, such as student organization involvement. Further, comparisons in the existing literature are mostly done between “Latinos/as” and “non-Latinos/as”, which provides little insight to either within-group differences or similarities.

In a qualitative study of Latino/a college students at a Hispanic Serving Institution (Gonzalez, 2013), the results were consistent with the current data (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005; Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004; Suro, 2006). Latinos/as do not label themselves in a homogeneous manner, including the labels “Hispanic,” “Latino/a,” their country of origin, or “Chicano.” This study found that labels were chosen based on perceived connectedness to their roots (i.e., Cuban/Cuban-American), or possible implications of privilege (i.e., Latino/a perceived as less privileged than Hispanic). A key finding in this study was that while Latinos/as believe they share some commonalities with other Latino/a subgroups, they view themselves as significantly distinct in regards cultural norms, dialect, and foods. Furthermore, Latinos/as chose labels on their perceived representation of their set of values.

In summary, most of the literature on Latinos/as college student has grouped all the subgroups under one or two labels, but these do not necessary represent the diversity of these subgroups. Furthermore, the inadvertent omission of the diversity of these subgroups has led to ignoring how differences between subgroups may be connected to

differences in their college experience. This study aimed to demonstrate that there are differences between Latino/a subgroups that should be taken into consideration in the understanding of the Latino/a college experience.

Summary

Latinos/as represent a significant segment of the U.S. population and are currently the fastest growing ethnic group. Latinos/as are also among the lowest educated and have the lowest earning power in the U.S. This lack of education is significantly noted in postsecondary degree achievement; where Latinos/as appear to be lagging behind all other racial/ethnic groups. Though Latinos/as are enrolling in par with Whites, they are not graduating at the same rate.

There are cognitive and non-cognitive factors that affect academic achievement. For Latinos/as, once accounting for academic preparedness, social engagement appears as the next most significant factor affecting academic achievement. However, there is conflicting research in terms of how beneficial (if at all) social engagement may be for Latinos/as. This conflict may be in part because Latinos/as in the U.S. do not share a common experience due to variability in country of origin, generational status, ethnic identity, sociopolitical background, immigration experience, and preferred language, to name a few.

The literature delineates how Latinos/as are not a homogeneous group, and how differences within Latino/a subgroups may have a significant impact on their experiences. However, very little is known about how Latino/a subgroups vary with regards to social experiences in institutions of higher learning.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This chapter provides a description of the participants, methods, and procedures of this study. Included also are descriptions of the instruments used along with their corresponding psychometric data. Additionally, the research design and statistical analyses are presented in correspondence with the stated hypotheses.

Study Design and Statistical Procedures

Design

The design of this study was a non-experimental survey design. All the statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS software. This study involved five groups of students enrolled in 4-year undergraduate programs: (1) Latino/a college students of Mexican descent, (2) Latino/a college students of Puerto Rican descent, (3) Latino/a college students of Cuban descent, (4) Latino/a college students of Dominican descent, and (5) students with mixed origin that included one, or more, of these four countries of origin.

The survey design was used in order to document the degree of student organization involvement. This allowed comparing involvement between the four

Latino/a subgroup college students. In addition, an ex-post facto design was used because the nationality of origin cannot be assigned to group members, nor can their involvement in student organizations be controlled. Participants had already chosen the nature of their involvement.

Selection of Participants

Participants in this study were 18 years old and older, self-identified Latino/a college students of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or Dominican descent. Participants needed to be students in four-year institutions in the states of New York and New Jersey pursuing a bachelor's degree. Participants were recruited by disseminating the link through email (snowball sample), listservs, and the online social network known as Facebook.com. Though the study did not use the Facebook platform to collect data, it facilitated the process of identifying groups possibly appropriate for the study (i.e. Latinos/as in College). Facebook has a search feature that allows for the identification of groups and organizations by using specific key terms such as Latino/a, Hispanic, College/university, Student, state of residence, and alike. By the use of this feature, this study identified groups with self-identified Latino/a or Hispanic college students and invited them to participate in the study. Participants were encouraged to share the link with other groups and individuals they believe would fit the profile of the study. By utilizing online recruitment, the study limits generalizability to students with internet access, but gains access to multiple locations without high utilization of resources. Alternative paper format was made available upon request.

Procedure

I used surveymonkey.com to create a secure site with an electronic version of all instruments to be used, which consist of the Informed Consent letter, the Demographic Form, the *Student Involvement Survey*, the *Social Connectedness Scale-Revised, Campus Version (SCS-R)* and the *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)*, presented in that sequence. Then, I created a webpage using the online social network known as *Facebook.com*, where information about the nature of the study and the need for participants will be posted. Though *facebook.com* was utilized to identify possible participants, a link was provided directing students to the secure site.

By login into the website and accepting to continue after the viewing of the *Informed Consent/Recruitment letter* (Appendix A), the participant would have agreed to participate in the study. The survey website is designed in such a way as to assure anonymity of the participants. Participants should have been able to complete the measures within 10-20 minutes. There was no link between information collected and *Facebook.com*. All responses were kept confidential. The participants reserved the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Recruitment of the study participants initially consisted of identifying and reaching out to local student organizations with an online presence (i.e. website or Facebook page). Since I am seeking participants of Latino/a descent in college, key terms reflecting this were included in the search (i.e. Latino/a, Hispanic, university, college, Cuban, Dominican, Mexican, Puerto Rican). In addition, the nature of the study and the link to the secure site was shared with professional contacts in college/universities, in hopes that they would further disseminate the information to appropriate participants.

Included in this outreach were academic programs that are known to provide services to Latino/a college students (i.e. Educational Opportunity Fund/Program).

As an incentive, I pledged to make a donation of \$2, with up to a maximum of \$1,000, to the Hispanic Scholarship Fund for every appropriate participant who completes the survey. The Hispanic Scholarship Fund is a nationally recognized organization that provides scholarships and other resources in an effort to promote academic success among Latino/a college students.

Statistical Analysis

The following is the presentation of each hypothesis and the data analysis procedure that were used for each:

H1a and H1b: This study proposed that the country of origin (categorical independent variable with four levels) of Latino/a student will have an impact on student organization involvement (continuous dependent variable 1) and social connectedness (continuous dependent variable 2). A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (One-way MANOVA) was utilized to assess if there are any significant group differences between the four nationalities in their degree of student organization involvement and social connectedness.

H2a and H2b: This study proposed that generational status (categorical independent variable with three levels) of Latino/a student will have an impact on the degree of student organization involvement (continuous dependent variable 1) and social connectedness (continuous dependent variable 2). A One-way MANOVA was utilized to

assess any significant group differences between the three generational statuses in their degree of student organization involvement and social connectedness.

H3a and H3b: This study proposed that ethnic identity (a continuous independent variable) will have an impact on the degree of student organizational involvement (continuous dependent variable 1) and social connectedness (continuous dependent variable 2). Two Pearson Correlations were utilized to assess the relationship between ethnic identity and student organization involvement and social connectedness.

H4a and H4b: This study proposed that academic profile (6 continuous independent variables- gender; commuter or resident; college generational status; total of credits taken; grade point average; and employment status) will have an impact on the degree of student organization involvement (continuous dependent variable 1) and social connectedness (continuous dependent variable 2). A Canonical Correlation was utilized to assess the relationship between these 6 variables and student organization involvement and social connectedness.

Power Analysis

Power refers to the probability that effects are present and have a chance of producing statistical significance in the data analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). There are two errors associated with power: type I (false positive- probability of rejecting the null hypothesis when it should not be rejected) and type II (false negative- probability of failing to reject the null hypothesis when it should be rejected). Power of statistical test is referred to as $1 - \beta$ (type II error). A power analysis was conducted to determine the sample size necessary in this study to obtain a significant result given the research

questions and planned statistical analytic procedures. All statistical power analyses were conducted using the computer software G*Power 3 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007).

The following is the estimated power that was used for each calculation:

Hypotheses 1a, 1b, 2a, and 2b required a One-way MANOVA test. The power calculation for these hypotheses depends on effect size, number of groups, and number of variables. Effect size index refers to the degree to which the phenomenon is present in the population (Pedhazur & Schmelkin, 1991). For MANOVA, a small effect size is .125, a moderate effect size is .2813, and a large effect size is .5 (Guilford, & Frunchter, 1978). The power calculations for these hypotheses assumed a moderate to large effect size and a power of between .80 and .99, requiring between 44 and 76 participants for the sample size.

Hypotheses 3a, 3b, 4a, and 4b required a Canonical Correlation Test. The power calculation for these hypotheses depends on effect size, number of determining factors, and number of predictors. For canonical correlation, a small effect size is .02, a medium effect size is .15, and .35 for a large effect size. (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). For Hypotheses 3a and 3b, there two determining factors and 2 predictors, whereas for Hypotheses 4a and 4b there are two determining factors and 6 predictors. The power calculations for these hypotheses assumed a moderate to large effect size and a power of between .80 and .99, requiring between 108 and 211 participants for the sample size.

In conclusion, this study required an estimated minimum of 211 participants in order for the results to be considered statistically sound.

Measures

Demographic Data Form

The Demographic Data Form (see Appendix B) was used to collect participants' background information: age, gender, place of birth, place of birth of parents, place of birth of grandparents, time living in the U.S., ethnic/racial identifying label, number of siblings, family structure, state of residence, school location, commuter or resident, public or private institution, college generational status, total of credits taken, numbers of credits currently enrolled, when first enrolled in college, grade point average, employment, and membership to off-campus organization(s).

Student Organization Involvement Survey

The Student Involvement Organization Survey (see Appendix C) was used to collect participant's engagement in student organizations: listing of membership to 1 or more student organization(s) within the previous academic year, and their types (Housing/Commuter, Student Government, Greek, Academic, Ethnic/Cultural, Sports, or other-fill in); frequency of programming (how often the organization meets: (1) weekly (2) biweekly (3) monthly (4) less than monthly); degree of involvement (Did you attend (5) all or nearly all of the programs/activities (4) 3/4 of the programs/activities (3) 1/2 of the programs/activities (2) 1/4 of the programs/activities (1) none or nearly none of the programs/activities.). This survey was developed under considerations that research has documented that students engage in these different types of organizations (Fischer, 2007).

The Social Connectedness Scale-Revised, Campus Version (SCS-R)

The Social Connectedness Scale-Revised, Campus Version (SCS-R) (Lee, Dean, & Jung, 2008; Lee, Draper, & Lee, 2001; Lee & Robins, 1995) (see Appendix D) is a self-administered paper and pencil test, which was adapted into an electronic form. The SCS-R provides a broad measure of individual belonging and connectedness to the social environment. It contains 14 items (8-negatively worded items and 6 positively worded items) that reflect subjective awareness of interpersonal closeness and degree of effort in maintaining this closeness with others in a college context. Samples of negatively worded items include, "I feel so distant from the other students." and "I don't feel related to anyone on campus." Samples of positively worded items include, "There are people on campus with whom I feel a close bond" and "Other students make me feel at home on campus." The items on the SCS-R are rated on a 6-point Likert scale. The response range available is from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Higher scores represent higher belongingness and connectedness.

The SCS-R has a reported coefficient alpha of .92 and a test-retest reliability coefficient of .96, over a two-week period. For the SCS-R norming sample, the mean scale score was 88.02 ($SD = 16.82$) and the mean item score was 4.40 ($SD = 0.84$). Cross validation achieved with confirmatory factor analysis with an incremental fit index greater than .90. The authors of SCS-R reported no group differences in scores by gender or race.

The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure

The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) (Phinney, 1992; Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen, Roberts, & Romero, 1999). (see Appendix E) is a self-administered paper and pencil test, which was adapted into an electronic form that provides a measure of ethnic identity to a wide range of ethnic groups and ages. The MEIM contains 12 items which measures ethnic identity by assessing two factors: ethnic identity search and affirmation, belonging, and commitment. Samples of items assessing ethnic identity search include, "I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs" and "I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group." Samples of items assessing affirmation, belonging, and commitment include, "I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me" and "I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to." The items on the MEIM are rated on a 4 point Likert scale. The response range available is from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The preferred scoring is to use the mean of the item scores; that is, the mean of the 12 items for an overall score, and, if desired, the mean of the 5 items for search (1, 2, 4, 8, and 10) and the 7 items for affirmation (3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, and 12). Thus the range of scores is from 1 to 4. The MEIM has a reported coefficient alpha of above .80 and above across a wide range of ethnic groups and ages and a test-retest reliability of .782, $p = 0.0001$. The MEIM has a reported reliability coefficient of .89 for factor one (Ethnic Identity) and .76 reliability

coefficient for factor two (Other Group Orientation). No gender differences were reported by the author.

CHAPTER IV

Results

This chapter provides a description of the participants and the results of the analysis of the data for each research question.

Participants

A total of 236 respondents entered the online survey constructed for this study. From this population group, one respondent declined participation in the study, one respondent was disqualified for being non-Hispanic/Latino/a, 13 disengaged immediately after agreeing to participate in the study, and 12 discontinued the study before any significant data were collected. This left a sample total of 208 participants.

The 208 participants were all self-identified as Hispanic/Latino/a College students. The participants' nationalities were 4 from Cuba, 52 from the Dominican Republic, 33 from Mexico, 16 from Puerto Rico, and 103 from "Other" Latin-American countries. The racial identity question was omitted by 124 of the respondents. Out of remaining 88 respondents, 3 (3.6%) identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native, 1 (1.2%) as Asian/Pacific Islander, 21.4 as Black/African American, and 73.8 as White/Caucasian. Forty-four (21.2%) were first generation immigrants, 156 (75%) were second generation, and 8 (3.8%) were third generation. There were 128 (61.5%)

male respondents and 80 (38.5%) female. The mean age for males was 20.85 ($SD = 2.1$) and 21.42 ($SD = 1.9$) for females.

The respondents were primary residents of New York State (46.2%) and New Jersey State (34.1%). The remaining 19.7% are from 16 other States: 4.3% California, .5% Colorado, 1.4% Florida, 1% Georgia, .5% Idaho, .5% Illinois, .5% Iowa, 1% Maryland, .5% Michigan, .5% New Mexico, .5% North Carolina, .5% Tennessee, 4.8% Texas, .5% Utah, 2.4% Virginia, and .5% Washington. Participants are assumed to be college students in New York and New Jersey, with 45.7% reporting to attend a 4-year private institution and 53.8% reporting to attend a 4-year public institution. The average number of credits reportedly taken by the respondents was 79.35 ($SD = 38.13$). The average grade point average reported by the respondents was 3.05 ($SD = .473$) (no significant gender differences). There were no significance in living arrangement with 102 (49%) of participants commuting to campus versus 106 (51%) residents living on campus. There were 147 (71%) of the respondents were first-generation college students and 61 (29%) were at least second-generation college students. One hundred and forty-seven of respondents reported student organization involvement.

Descriptive Statistics of Measures

A total of 208 participants completed the Social Connected Scale with a mean of 59.995 ($SD = 14.049$). The mean of male participants was 58.664 ($SD = 14.860$). The mean of female participants was 62.125 ($SD = 12.438$). A total of 208 participants completed the MEIM with a mean of 39.408 ($SD = 6.233$). The mean of male participants was 39.593 ($SD = 6.282$). The mean of female participants was 39.112 ($SD =$

6.182). A total of 147 participants completed the Organizational Involvement Survey with a mean of 41.197 ($SD = 23.374$). The mean of male participants was 42.581 ($SD = 24.775$). The mean of female participants was 39.245 ($SD = 21.290$).

Table 1.

Summary of Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Score on the MEIM, SCS, and OrgInv by Gender

| Measure | MEIM | SCS | OrgInv | <i>M (male)</i> | <i>SD (male)</i> |
|--------------------|---------|--------|--------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. MEIM | — | .153* | -.045 | 39.593 | 6.282 |
| 2. SCS | .268** | — | .139 | 58.664 | 14.860 |
| 3. OrgInv | .428*** | .154 | — | 42.581 | 24.775 |
| <i>M (female)</i> | 39.112 | 62.125 | 39.245 | — | — |
| <i>SD (female)</i> | 6.182 | 12.438 | 21.290 | — | — |

Note: Intercorrelations, means and standard deviations for male participants ($n = 128$) are presented above the diagonal, and the intercorrelations, means and standard deviations for female participants ($n = 80$) are presented below the diagonal. For all the scales, higher scores represent higher responses in the direction of the constructs assessed. MEIM = Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure; SCS = Social Connectedness Scale; OrgInv = Organizational Involvement Score. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 2.

Correlations between Descriptive Statistics and Outcome Variables.

| Variables | Outcome Variables | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|------|-------|
| | OrgInv | SCS | MEIM |
| Age | .08 | -.09 | .12 |
| Family Income | .14 | .06 | .21** |
| GPA | .03 | .12 | -.13 |
| Mother's level of Education | .05 | -.04 | -.05 |
| Father's level of education | .11 | .02 | -.02 |
| Employment | .16 | -.10 | -.06 |
| Residential Status (While at school) | .20* | .06 | -.06 |
| College Credits (Cumulative) | .18* | .02 | .15* |
| College Generation | -.01 | -.04 | -.13 |

OrgInv = Student Organizational Involvement; SCS = Social Connectedness Scale; MEIM = Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure; ResVsCom = Residential students versus commuter students; CollegeG= College Generation; CollegeC = College Cumulative Credits; GPA = Grade Point Average. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Statistical Analysis

The following are the results of the hypothesis tests for each of the research questions.

Student Organization Involvement and Social Connectedness By Country of Origin

The first research question explores the relationship between country of origin and level of student organization involvement and social connectedness. I expected that there would be a difference in the degree of involvement and social connectedness between the different groups. The three nationalities considered in the analysis were, Dominican, Mexican, and Puerto Rican. Respondents from other Latin-American countries throughout Central and South America composed the “Other” category and were included in the analysis as a comparison group. Although I originally planned to compare 5 groups (Cuban, Dominican, Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Other), because there were only 4 participants who identified as Cuban, these participants were added to the “Other” category instead.

A One-Way MANOVA was utilized to determine the relationship between country of origin and social connectedness and student organization involvement as the two dependent variables. The analysis determined that there was no significant difference in social connectedness and student organization involvement for participants from different countries of origin, $F(6,284) = .950, p = .46$.

Student Organization Involvement and Social Connectedness By Generational Status

The second research question explored the relationship between generational status and level of student organization involvement and social connectedness. I expected that there would be a difference in the degree of involvement and social connectedness between the different groups. The two groups considered in the analysis were first-generation immigrants, and second-generation immigrants. Although I originally planned to compare three groups (first-generation immigrants, second-generation immigrants, and third-generation immigrants), because of the low number of third generation participants ($n = 8$) participants who identified as third-generation were not included in this analysis.

A One-Way MANOVA was utilized to determine the relationship between generational status as a factor with two groups (first-generation and second-generation immigrants) and social connectedness and student organization involvement as the two dependent variables. The analysis determined that there was a significant difference in social connectedness and student organization involvement for participants from different generational statuses, $F(2, 138) = 4.24, p = .016$, with an effect size of .058. Box's test of inequality was not significant at the $p < .001$ level, $F(6, 53861.59) = 2.10, p = .01$, meeting the assumption that within-group covariance are equal is sustained.

Subsequent univariate ANOVAs were done with each dependent variable to identify which DV was affected by generational group differences. The univariate ANOVA done to determine the relationship between Generation status and Organization Involvement was non-significant, $F(1, 139) = 3.326, p = .07$. The univariate ANOVA done to determine the relationship between Generation status and Social Connectedness was also non-significant, $F(1, 139) = 3.664, p = .058$.

Student Organization Involvement and Social Connectedness By Level of Ethnic Identity

The third research question explores the relationship between ethnic identity and level of student organization involvement and social connectedness. I expected that there would be a difference in the degree of involvement and social connectedness associated with different levels of ethnic identity. The participant's score on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) measured the level of identity.

A bivariate linear regression was utilized to determine the relationship between the level of ethnic identity (as a continuous independent variable) and social connectedness. A bivariate linear regression was also utilized to determine the relationship between level of ethnic identity and student organization involvement. The results indicated that there was a significant relationship between social connectedness and level of ethnic identity, $r(206) = .19, p < .01$. This indicates that participants with higher levels of ethnic identity also identified as more socially connected. The correlation between ethnic identity and social connectedness was .185, with .034 of the variance in social connectedness explained by level of ethnic identity. Also, the analysis determined that there was a significant relationship between student organization involvement and level of ethnic identity, $r(145) = .14, p < .05$. This indicates that participants with higher levels of ethnic identity also identified as more involved in student organizations. The correlation between ethnic identity and social connectedness was .143, with .021 of the variance in social connectedness explained by level of ethnic identity.

Student Organization Involvement and Social Connectedness By Student Profile

The fourth research question explores the relationship between two sets of variables. The set of predictor variables consists of the Latino/a college students' profile (i.e., GPA, employment, college generation, college credit earned, gender, and resident/commuter status). The set of criterion variables consists of the participants' level of student organization involvement and social connectedness. I expected that there would be a difference in the degree of involvement and social connectedness associated with different students' profiles.

A canonical correlation was utilized to explore the relationship between these two sets of variables. The procedure enables us to find a linear combination(s) of the two sets that has the maximum correlation with each other. This study used the SPSS General Linear Model MANOVA F Test to test for significance. Table 3 shows the results of this analysis, which produced one pair of canonical variables, also known as canonical variates or roots. Under the correlation column are the factor loadings between the original variables in each set and their respective canonical variables. The canonical coefficients represent the weights applied to each original variable in creating the canonical variate for its respective set. This study interpreted canonical correlations coefficients of .3 or higher as significant.

A single canonical root emerged. The canonical correlation was .99, which is higher than any other bivariate correlation previously reported. The canonical correlation was statistically significant, $F(8, 139) = 1685.24, p < .001$. The canonical variate was characterized by moderate negative loading on Social Connectedness Scale (SCS) ($r = -.60$) along with a moderate negative loading on Grade-Point-Average (GPA) ($r = -.68$) and a moderate negative loading on employment ($r = -.33$). These results support

hypothesis 4b, that social connectedness varies among Latino/a college students with different profiles. This indicates that employment and GPA positively predict social connectedness in this sample of Latino/a college students. However, there was no significant correlation between SCS and College Generation ($r = -.29$), College Credit ($r = -.23$), Gender ($r = -.12$), and Resident versus commuter ($r = -.11$). There was also no significant relationship between Student Organizational involvement and any of the predicting variables.

Table 3.

Correlations, Standardized Canonical Coefficients, Canonical Correlations, and Percents of Variance between Predictor and Criterion variables.

| Variables | Canonical Variate 1 | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| | Correlation | Canonical Coefficient |
| Criterion | | |
| OrgInv | -.18 | .01 |
| SCS | -.60 | -.62 |
| Predictors | | |
| Gender | -.12 | -.19 |
| ResVsCom | -.11 | -.09 |
| CollegeG | -.29 | -.30 |
| CollegeC | -.23 | -.07 |
| GPA | -.67 | -.57 |
| Employment | -.33 | -.33 |
| Canonical Correlation | .99 | |
| Squared Canonical Correlation | .98 | |

OrgInv = Student Organizational Involvement; SCS = Social Connectedness Scale; ResVsCom = Residential students versus commuter students; CollegeG= College Generation; CollegeC = College Cumulative Credits; GPA = Grade Point Average.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

Academic attainment has been linked to a significant number of factors that contribute to an improved quality of life (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003; Gloria & Pope-Davis, 1997; Hout, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2003; U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). Individuals with higher levels of education are expected to have greater financial stability, greater opportunity for upward mobility, as well a better quality of medical and mental health. This is particularly true for Latinos/as in the U.S. (Kochhar, 2005). For this very reason, the U.S. government, in conjunction with Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation for Education have identified and combined efforts to increase college graduation in the U.S. (Kelly, Schneider, & Carey, 2010).

Latinos/as, the U.S.'s fastest growing and largest ethnic group in the U.S., and have become the largest minority group at four-year colleges (Fry & Lopez, 2011). However, despite advances in four-year college enrollment rate, at 69% of Latinos/as that graduated from high school enrolling the following fall (Fry & Taylor, 2013), they continue to lag in their bachelor's degree attainment rate, representing only 8.5% of bachelors degree conferred in 2010 (Snyder & Dillow, 2012). Nearly 50% of Latinos enrolling in 4-year colleges will not have yet obtained a bachelor's degree after 6 years (Kelly, Schneider, & Carey, 2010). There are many factors which contribute to the attrition rate, including affordability, academic preparedness, and motivation (Ishitani &

Desjardins, 2002; Nora, Cabrea, Hagedorn, & Pascarella, 1996; Nora & Crisp, 2009;). Research supports major theories in that college retention is best explained by a combination of academic and non-academic factors (Tinto, 1975, 1993, 2000). Within non-academic factors, social involvement is highlighted as significant contributor to retention. Social involvement encompasses perceived social support and connectedness to the student and faculty body. According to the literature, social support is connected to resilience and self-efficacy, which are important in persistence towards attaining a bachelor's degree (Arellano, & Padilla, 1996; Castellanos, 2007; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco 2005; Solberg & Villareal, 1997; Torres, 2004).

The problem is that while literature supports the applicability of the academic and non-academic factors model for Latinos/as in college, it continuously refers to Latinos/as as homogeneous ethnic group, with little to no focus on the variability within this ethnic label. Latinos/as are diverse in significant ways including nationality, race, immigration experience, generational status, and the language they speak. These differences have also been linked to differences in attitude towards attitudes towards education, college enrollment, and economical status.

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how differences within the population of Latino/a college students may be related to differences in social engagement. More specifically, this study focused on student organization involvement, which is one aspect of social engagement. The within group differences considered are nationality, generational status, level of ethnic identity, and student profile. These within group differences are assessed in their relationship to the level of student organization involvement and level of social connectedness.

Discussion of Findings

Below is a discussion of the findings in chapter IV for each research question, with the significant findings addressed first. First will be discussed the relationship between the independent variables (IV), student organization involvement and social connectedness, and dependent variables (DV) in the following order: generation status, ethnic identity level, student profile and country of origin. These are presented in relationship to the current literature. This is followed by the limitations of the study, recommendations for future studies, implications for policy and practice, and some concluding statements.

Generational Status

The investigation of differences in organizational involvement and social connectedness for Latinos/as with different generation statuses began with the observation of documented attitudinal differences between Latinos/as of different generational status. Previous research indicated that first generation Latinos/as reported perceiving a college degree as less important than native-born Latinos/as (51% vs. 60%). Accordingly, second generation Latinos/as are more likely to actually obtain a bachelor's degree than first generation (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004). Given the differences in attainment between these Latino/a generational groups, one goal of the present study was to determine whether there were significant generational differences in social engagement and organizational involvement, which are non-academic factors that theory and research points as a contributor towards retention.

The results indicated that there is a small, yet significant difference within the generational statuses in predicting organizational involvement and social connectedness when observed jointly. However, once this composite variable is broken down into two separate dependent variables, the relationship between the IV and the individual dependent variables loses its significance. This may be explained by the loss of power when switching from the MANOVA to the follow-up univariate ANOVAs. Only when the dependent variables are combined does generational status appear to have a significant relationship with the dependent variables. Therefore, I would like to tentatively suggest what might have triggered the significant effect within the MANOVA while acknowledging the need for further research.

The descriptive statistics suggested that organizational involvement and social connectedness change over each generation. There was a decrease in the mean score of student organizational involvement from 48.06 for first generation to 39.62 for second generation. Conversely, there was an increase in the mean scores for social connectedness from 61.69 for first generation to 65.75 for second generation.

Without assuming causality, and keeping in mind that these differences are non-statistically significant, this appears to show a negative relationship between feeling connected and seeking organizational involvement for first and second generation. This may indicate the need for further exploration with greater statistical power to determine if in fact social connectedness increases for 2nd generation immigrant Latino/a college students while student organization involvement decreases. This would be in contrast with some prior research, which has found support for a positive relationship between student organization involvement and social connectedness in Latinos/as college students

(Hurtado & Carter, 1997). However, the findings of the present study are consistent with Schneider and Ward (2003), who also found a negative relationship, which in part has been explained by the type of student organization in which the student may become involved (i.e. ethnocentric). These dynamics should be further explored to determine if, and how, these may be linked to generational status.

Ethnic identity

Research shows that Latinos/as do not conform to a single ethnic identity label (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004). These labels often represent a set of cultural values that the individual feels strongly about. Further, the strength or level of ethnic identity can vary, as captured in the present study. Variability in level of ethnic identity has been associated with the acculturation progress, in which a minority groups, such as Latinos/as, negotiate cultural values and behaviors that they may adopt to a greater or lesser extent. This process varies depending on characteristics such as age, generation status, birth place and language (Miranda & Umhoefer, 1998; Phinney & Flores, 2002). Latinos/as vary in all of these characteristics, so varying levels of ethnic identity are expected. As differences in values also translate into differences in practices (Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000; Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006), this research question explored whether varying levels of ethnic identity translated to differences in student organizational involvement and social connectedness.

In the present study, level of Ethnic identity was also found to have a significant positive relationship with level of student organization involvement, thus confirming my hypothesis that student organization involvement varies among Latinos/as with different

levels of ethnic identity. For this sample, Latino/a college students with a stronger sense of ethnic identity were found to have a greater level of involvement in their campus. My findings are consistent with previous research that identified student involvement as significantly related to factors closely related to positive ethnic identity including sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997) and positive social self-concept (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Furthermore, research supports that student organization involvement facilitates a sense of “collective identity” (Castellanos, 2007), which is part of the individual’s identity.

Level of ethnic identity was also found to have a significant positive correlation with social connectedness, thus supporting my hypothesis that the social connectedness varies among Latinos/as with different levels of ethnic identity. For this sample, Latino/a college students with a stronger sense of ethnic identity as measured by the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992; Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen, Roberts, & Romero, 1999) were found to have a greater sense of social connectedness to their campus. This is supported by previous findings that document positive cultural identity negotiation with better psychological adjustment and more positive coping response within a multicultural experience (Chen, Benet-Martínez, & Bond, 2008; Padilla, 2006).

Student Profile

When considering variations within the Latino/a subgroups, previous studies have found that many of these are already linked to difference in academic attainment. When it comes to gender, Latinas outperform Latinos in graduation rate (Barajas & Pierce,

2001). Differences are also observed in working students, whereas working Latino/a college students have a higher dropout rate (McSwain & Davis, 2007). Latino/a First-Generation college students are also lagging significantly in bachelor's degree completion when compared to Latino/a 2nd generation college students (24% vs. 68%) (NCES, Digest of Education Statistics, 2005). Another difference linked to differences in graduation rate is whether the student commutes versus living on campus.

These listed above are considered non-academic factors, as the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship of non-academic factors with student organization involvement and social connectedness. However, the research also presents a mixed picture of the impact on social involvement on academics. Some researchers have found social involvement as positive for the college experience (Davis & Murrell, 1993) and positively correlated with college persistence (Gloria et al, 2005). However, in some instances, student organizational involvement has been recorded as contributing to academic decline. Therefore, the present study included two markers, grade point average and cumulative college credits, to further investigate the relationship between these factors.

This study found that grade-point-average (GPA) and employment have a significant positive relationship with social connectedness, thus in part confirming my prediction. The connection between academic markers and social connectedness has been supported by many researchers (Astin, 1985; Fry, 2004; Lotkowski, Robbins, & Noeth, 2004; Tinto 1993). My findings are consistent with previous studies, further supporting the relationship between social connectedness and academic performance. The findings of a positive relationship between employment and social connectedness are interesting

due to findings in previous research of a negative relationship between employment and academic performance (Fry, 2004). In addition, working has also been found to limit students' availability to for educational related activities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). However, research also has suggested that part-time on-campus employment has a positive impact on student development, including both academic and non-academic factors (Astin, 1993; Choy & Berker, 2003). Although the present study did not distinguish between on-campus and off-campus employment, this may suggest that for Latino/a college students, working may contribute to their development of social connectedness to their campus, while keeping in mind that number of hours at work, on-campus vs off-campus, and financial need may impact whether the student will in fact benefit (Choy & Berker, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Nora & Crisp, 2009).

One factor that was not significant in the canonical correlation at the recommended level of .30, but was close at .29, was college generational status. Being careful not to interpret this as a significant finding, its important mentioning that the disparity in the number of subjects representing first and second+ generation college students (147 vs 61) may have contributed to less than robust findings.

Country of Origin

This study began with the observation based on previous research that Latinos/as from different countries show differences in academic attainment. The present study focused on countries of origin that are most common in New York and New Jersey, which include Cuba, Dominican Republic, Mexico and Puerto Rico. The existing data on these four groups shows that Cubans, with 24% holding at least a bachelor's degree, as

the most educated of the Latinos/as. Cubans are followed by Puerto Ricans with 16%, Dominicans with 15%, and Mexicans with the lowest attainment of bachelor's degrees at only 10 percent. Given these differences in academic performance between different Latinos/as' countries of origin, I wanted to explore whether these differences also extended to their level of student organizational involvement and social connectedness. A fifth group of "Other" Latinos/as was added as a significant number of students from other countries of origin also participated in the study. Unfortunately, it was not possible to include Cubans in the present analysis, as the response rate from this group was low

The results of this study failed to show that there were any significant difference in student organizational involvement and social connectedness for Latino/a students from different countries of origin. It did not make any difference what were countries of origin, as their level of student organizational involvement and social connectedness did not vary much from group to group, including the "other" category. This indicates that difference in social engagement are not explained by differences in country of origin, and that other factors should be explored in explaining this phenomenon.

Limitations

This study has a few limitations that should be considered in the interpretation of the findings. First, this study used a non-experimental design, in which the independent variables could not be randomly assigned to the subjects. This increases vulnerability to confounding variables and limits the ability to deduce causality between the independent and the dependent variables.

Second, this study made use of a self-report survey. Consequently, the measures are limited to respondent's perceptions and cannot be deemed objective observations of the respondent's behavior or attitudes. Nonetheless, self-report surveys can provide great insight and important information about the respondents' perceptions and experiences.

Third, the sample size for some parts of the study may also be considered a limitation. The total number of subjects was 208, meeting the estimated number of cases necessary for a statistically sound study. However, certain groups were under represented or excluded from the study, as it was the case for the country of origin Cuba and the 3rd Generation immigration status Latinos/as.

Fourth, because of the great variability of the /a population across the nation, this study focused on students who self-identify as attending colleges in the New York and New Jersey areas, which presented threats to external validity, but allowed for a more commonly shared college experience.

Variability also extends to legal status of immigrant students. It was also possible that undocumented immigrant students to have different patterns of social engagement than other students. However, this study did not request information regarding immigration status. Also, since student loans are generally limited to students who are U.S. citizens, the number of undocumented students in this study was likely to be low.

Furthermore, external validity is limited to students with computer literacy and access to the internet, as it was distributed using the web-based survey service [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) and disseminated the web link through email (snow ball sample), listservs, and online social networks including Facebook and Twitter. The survey did not utilize the Facebook platform to collect the data, instead, a link was provided connecting

users anonymously to the online survey service. Therefore, Facebook privacy concerns did not affect the study. Computer literacy and access to the online survey should not be obstacles to most college students in the U.S. A 2010 survey reports that about 85% of Latinos/as of ages 18-29 have access to the Internet, and this number jumps to 91% for Latinos/as with some college (Livingston, 2010). In addition, a portion of this study focuses primarily on the three prominent Latino/a subgroups in New York and New Jersey (Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans). This includes respondents of mixed background that include these four countries of origin (identified as Mixed). This restricted external validity.

Fifth, this defined social engagement and social connectedness as participation in student organizations on their respective campuses. However, on-campus organizations are not the sole source of social engagement. Because the focus of this study was particularly on campus related engagement, it is not possible to extend these findings to participation in other community organizations.

Lastly, self-reported measures are limited to the respondent's view of self and or personal circumstances and are also vulnerable to self-enhancement bias. In addition, this study explored correlation between variables, but did not address causation. For the significant findings regarding differences in patterns of social engagement, further research should be done to determine the reasons for those differences.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the information provided by this study can be utilized to practice and guide future research.

Implications and Recommendations

The limited research on how the variability of Latinos/as in the U.S. may be related to differences in values and behavior makes this study relevant and of importance. This study contributes to the knowledge and understanding of the diverse experience of an ethnic group who are anything but homogeneous. In this case, we are able to document that there are some differences between Latinos/as college students and their social experience in college. Though limited in explaining causality, it has the potential to inform ways to improve the social component of retention as proposed by Tinto's theory. Further than just simply demonstrating the relationship between different factors, this study hopes to assist in increasing academic attainment for Latinos/as through the understanding how different Latino/a subgroups share or differ in their experience of social involvement and connectedness. College administrators may be able to use this data to help inform policies and develop programs aimed at increasing social engagement of Latino/a college student, while taking into consideration the similarities and differences within a very diverse ethnic group.

Academic institutions could begin by developing an accurate profile of the Latino/a population in their campus, which would provide a general understanding of the diversity present under this larger label. Then, areas of interest related to academic retention could be monitored to assess potential within group differences. This may help focus attempts to determine the types of support or resources should be available for the Latino/a subgroups that are present. For example, in this study I found that first generation immigrant Latinos/as are likely to have a lower level of social connectedness than second generation immigrant Latinos/as. Based on this information, an institution

could decide study the possible impact of this difference on academic persistence and determine whether to allocate resources to help strengthen the first generation immigrant Latino/a students' connectedness level to the institution. Furthermore, institutions should make an effort to provide a culture that foster a healthy ethnic identify development process for Latino/a college students, as the results of this study indicate that levels of ethnic identity are positive related to social connectedness. Lastly, given the positive relationship between working status and social connectedness, institutions could develop programs that would assist students engage in work experiences.

Future Research

The findings of this study provide implications for research on student organization involvement and social connectedness of Latino/a college students. It sets a base for the exploration of variability in experience of Latino/a college students. This study found support for a significant relationship between student organization involvement and social connectedness and generational status, level of ethnic identity, GPA, and employment status. It would be important to replicate this study, as to increase the credibility of the findings of this study. Furthermore, future studies should attempt to address the limitations in sampling that may have led to distortion(s) in the outcome. It would also be important to formulate a study design that further explores the relationship between these variables in terms of causality. Ideally, future studies would contribute in understanding why these relationships exist, and how these interactions contribute in significant ways to their overall college experience.

Theory and practice of higher education retention has sought to develop the appropriate strategies to increase success rate among college students. In Tinto's theory, retention is obtained through an effective combination of academic components and social components. The current research on the application of theory of strategies for Latino/a college student retention neglected to take into consideration how the variability within the Latino/a ethnic group may impact their educational performance.

Consequently, theory on academic retention for Latino/a college students should be developed under the notion that the social component is experienced in different ways by different Latino/a subgroups. Any intervention to increase social connectedness to the campus that does not consider the variability of experiences within the Latino/a subgroups may turn to be ineffective, or may neglect to meet the needs of certain subgroups. Therefore, further research should be conducted focusing on more effective ways to reach Latino/a subgroups, in particular working students, first generation, and students with low a level of ethnic identity.

Finally, it would be important to investigate if there are other facilitating or protective factors for those Latino/a college students who report low to no student organizational involvement in their campus, yet continue to report being socially connected to their campus. Understanding how they develop and maintain social connectedness to the campus, or perhaps substitute this need, can provide insight into how to better support this segment of the population.

Conclusions

Latinos/as lag behind in completion of bachelor's degree despite a significant increase in college enrollment within the last two decades. Several factors are considered when explaining college retention, which are generally categorized as academic and non-academic factors. One the non-academic factors that associated with retention for Latino/a college students is social engagement to the academic institution.

Prior studies have examined the relationship between social engagement and academic achievement for Latino/a college students, but have failed to take into account the diversity within the Latino/a ethnic group. Latinos/as are treated as a homogeneous group throughout most studies, despite documented differences in nationality, immigration status, ethnic identity, and other key factors. Neglecting to take these differences into account has led to limitations in understanding differences in social engagement for college students within this heterogeneous ethnic group. This is supported by already observed differences within these subgroups in attitudes towards education, college enrollment, academic performance and ultimately degree completion.

The key goal of this study is the applicability of Tinto's retention theory on Latino/a college students, focusing particularly on the social engagement component. More specifically, this study aimed at observing differences within specific groups under the Latino/a ethnic identity label. The results of this study provided new knowledge and provided support for the consideration of within group differences among Latino/a college students in relationship to social engagement to their academic institutions. This study found differences in social connectedness and/or student organizational

involvement for participants with different levels of ethnic identity, immigration generational status, employment status, and grade-point-average.

Although further research is needed to understand the directional relationship of these variables, the results of this study provide a starting point for understanding how these differences may affect Latino/a college students. Future research needs to focus on promoting better connections to the campus through understanding how differences within Latino/a college students contribute to better social engagement. The ultimate goal is to provide Latino/a college student a better chance to persist through college and obtain a college degree.

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Appendix A
Solicitation Letter

Dear Scholar:

You are invited to participate in my dissertation study exploring the relationship between specific variables and organizational involvement and social connectedness among health of Latinos/as college students. The variables considered are country of origin, generational status, level of ethnic identity, and academic profile and. The study is based on research suggesting variability in experiences between different subgroups of Latinos/as and exploration in how this relates to the college experience.

Participation is open to anyone who is 18-years old or over and identifies as Latina/o/ or Hispanic, or Latina/o or Hispanic descent, and is enrolled in a 4-year college/university in pursue of bachelor's degree. Participation in this study will involve filling out an internet-based survey with questions such as "are you involved in any on-campus student organizations?" "I am able to connect with other people," and I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to." It should only take 10-20 minutes to complete this survey.

Your participation in this study is anonymous and confidential, and no personal identification, such as name, phone number, or physical address will be collected at any time.

In order to increase the diversity of participants, please forward this message to Latinas/os/Hispanics in your personal network. There is a "SHARE" button at the bottom of the survey page that you can use to post to your Facebook account.

Though you will not receive any direct benefits from the completion of this study, your participation will contribute to a better understating of Latino/Hispanic college involvement. In addition, I will pledge to make a donation of \$2, with up to a maximum of \$1,000, to the Hispanic Scholarship Fund for every appropriate participant who completes the survey.

Thank you for your help through this process. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Enmanuel Mercedes, M.A.
Doctoral Candidate, Counseling Psychology Program
College of Education and Human Services
Seton Hall University
Enmanuel.mercedes@gmail.com

Clicking on this link indicates consent to participate in this study:
www.surveymonkey.com

This dissertation study is being conducted under the supervision of Pamela Foley, Ph.D., ABPP, and has been approved by the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board.

If you have any questions, concerns, complaints or would like to know the results, please feel free to contact me via e-mail enmanuel.mercedes@gmail.com. You may also contact my faculty sponsor, Dr. Foley, at Pamela.Foley@shu.edu.

Appendix B
Demographic Data Form

Demographic Data Form

How old are you? (check one)

 18 19 20 21 22 23 Other-Specify: _____

Gender (check one):

 Male Female

Race(s) that best describes you (check all that Apply):

 American Indian or Alaska Native Asian Black or African American Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander White Other-Specify: _____

Ethnicity that best describes you (check all that apply):

 Hispanic Latino Other-Specify: _____

Your country of birth (check one):

 Cuba Dominican Republic Mexico Puerto Rico U.S. Other-Specify: _____

Your father's country of birth (check one):

 Cuba Dominican Republic Mexico Puerto Rico U.S. Other-Specify: _____

Your mother's country of birth (check one):

 Cuba Dominican Republic Mexico Puerto Rico U.S. Other-Specify: _____

Your father's country of birth (check one):

 Cuba Dominican Republic Mexico Puerto Rico U.S. Other-Specify: _____

Your maternal grandparent's country of birth (check all that apply):

 Cuba Dominican Republic Mexico Puerto Rico U.S. Other-Specify: _____

Your paternal grandparent's country of birth (check all that apply):

 Cuba Dominican Republic Mexico Puerto Rico U.S. Other-Specify: _____

State of Residence: _____

Estimated Family Income (check one)

 Less than \$25,000 \$25,000-50,000 \$50,000-75,000 \$75,000-100,000 More than \$100,000

Family Structure:

 Raised by both parents Raised by a single parent-Specify: Mother Father Other-Specify: _____

Educational profile:

Academic Institution:

 4 year private college/university 4 year public college/university

Estimated number of college credits earned as of the last semester: _____

Current cumulative grade point average: _____

 Commuter or ResidentAre you employed? No Yes-please specify: part-time full time

Mother's highest level of education (check one):

Grammar School High School College/University Graduate School Other-
Specify: __

Father's highest level of education (check one):

Grammar School High School College/University Graduate School Other-
Specify: __

Appendix C

Student Organization Involvement Survey

Student Organization Involvement Survey

Are you involved in any on-campus student organizations? ___ Yes ___ No

If No, why?

If Yes, continue below

Please list any on-campus organizations in which you have been involved in the 2011-2012 academic year:

1. _____

Type of organization: ___ Housing/Commuter, ___ Student Government, ___ Greek, ___ Academic, ___ Ethnic/Cultural, ___ Sports, or ___ other-fill in _____

Frequency of programming- how often the organization meets:

___(1) weekly ___(2) biweekly ___(3) monthly ___(4) less than monthly)

Degree of involvement:

Did you attend (5) all or nearly all of the programs/activities (4) 3/4 of the programs/activities (3) 1/2 of the programs/activities (2) 1/4 of the programs/activities (1) none or nearly none of the programs/activities.

What attracted you to this organization? _____

2. _____

Type of organization: ___ Housing/Commuter, ___ Student Government, ___ Greek, ___ Academic, ___ Ethnic/Cultural, ___ Sports, or ___ other-fill in _____

Frequency of programming- how often the organization meets:

___(1) weekly ___(2) biweekly ___(3) monthly ___(4) less than monthly)

Degree of involvement:

Did you attend (5) all or nearly all of the programs/activities (4) 3/4 of the programs/activities (3) 1/2 of the programs/activities (2) 1/4 of the programs/activities (1) none or nearly none of the programs/activities.

What attracted you to this organization? _____

3. _____

Type of organization: ___ Housing/Commuter, ___ Student Government, ___ Greek, ___ Academic, ___ Ethnic/Cultural, ___ Sports, or ___ other-fill in _____

Frequency of programming- how often the organization meets:

___(1) weekly ___(2) biweekly ___(3) monthly ___(4) less than monthly)

Degree of involvement:

Did you attend (5) all or nearly all of the programs/activities (4) 3/4 of the programs/activities (3) 1/2 of the programs/activities (2) 1/4 of the programs/activities (1) none or nearly none of the programs/activities.

What attracted you to this organization? _____

4. _____

Type of organization: ___ Housing/Commuter, ___ Student Government, ___ Greek,
___ Academic, ___ Ethnic/Cultural, ___ Sports, or ___ other-fill in _____

Frequency of programing- how often the organization meets:

___(1) weekly ___(2) biweekly ___(3) monthly ___(4) less than monthly)

Degree of involvement:

Did you attend (5) all or nearly all of the programs/activities (4) 3/4 of the
programs/activities (3) 1/2 of the programs/activities (2) 1/4 of the programs/activities (1)
none or nearly none of the programs/activities.

What attracted you to this

organization? _____

5. _____

Type of organization: ___ Housing/Commuter, ___ Student Government, ___ Greek,
___ Academic, ___ Ethnic/Cultural, ___ Sports, or ___ other-fill in _____

Frequency of programing- how often the organization meets:

___(1) weekly ___(2) biweekly ___(3) monthly ___(4) less than monthly)

Degree of involvement:

Did you attend (5) all or nearly all of the programs/activities (4) 3/4 of the
programs/activities (3) 1/2 of the programs/activities (2) 1/4 of the programs/activities (1)
none or nearly none of the programs/activities.

What attracted you to this

organization? _____

Appendix D

Social Connectedness Scale, Revised-Campus Version

Social Connectedness Scale, Revised- Campus Version

Directions: The following statements reflect various ways in which you may describe your experience on this entire college campus. Rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the following scale (1 = Strongly Disagree and 6 = Strongly Agree). There is no right or wrong answer. Do not spend too much time with any one statement and do not leave any unanswered.

1. There are people on campus with whom I feel a close bond
- *2. I don't feel that I really belong around the people that I know on campus
3. I feel that I can share personal concerns with other students
4. I am able to make connections with a diverse group of people
- *5. I feel so distant from the other students
- *6. I have no sense of togetherness with my peers
7. I can relate to my fellow classmates
- *8. I catch myself losing all sense of connectedness with college life
9. I feel that I fit right in on campus
- *10. There is no sense of brother/sisterhood with my college friends
- *11. I don't feel related to anyone on campus
12. Other students make me feel at home on campus
- *13. I feel disconnected from campus life
- *14. I don't feel I participate with anyone

Appendix E

The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)

The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM)

In this country, people come from many different countries and cultures, and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or ethnic groups that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Asian American, Chinese, Filipino, American Indian, Mexican American, Caucasian or White, Italian American, and many others. These questions are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or react to it.

Please fill in: In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be _____

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

(4) Strongly agree (3) Agree (2) Disagree (1) Strongly disagree

- 1- I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs.
- 2- I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group.
- 3- I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me.
- 4- I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.
- 5- I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to.
- 6- I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
- 7- I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.
- 8- In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.
- 9- I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.
- 10- I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.
- 11- I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.
- 12- I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.

Appendix E
Informed Consent

Informed Consent

Purpose:

Participants are invited to participate in a dissertation study exploring the relationship between specific variables and organizational involvement and social connectedness among health of Latinos/as college students. The variables considered are country of origin, generational status, level of ethnic identity, and academic profile. The study is based on research suggesting variability in experiences between different subgroups of Latinos/as and exploration in how this relates to the college experience.

Procedures:

Participants in this study will be 18 years old and older, self-identified Latino/a college students of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or Dominican descent. Participants will need to be students in four-year institutions in the states of New York and New Jersey pursuing a bachelor's degree. Participants will be recruited by disseminating the link through email (snowball sample), listservs, and the online social network known as Facebook.com. Participants should be able to complete the measures within 10-20 minutes. In order to increase the diversity of participants, those completing the study will be given the option to share the link with other people in their personal network.

Instruments:

This study will utilize the following instruments: The Demographic Data Form will be used to collect participants' background information. The Student Involvement Organization Survey will be used to collect participant's engagement in student organizations. The Social Connectedness Scale-Revised, Campus Version (SCS-R) will be used to provide a broad measure of individual belonging and connectedness to the social environment. And The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) Form will be used to provide a measure of ethnic identity to a wide range of ethnic groups and ages.

Voluntary Nature:

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and the participant may chose to disengage from the study at any time.

Anonymity:

Participation in this study is anonymous, and no personal identification, such as name, phone number, or physical address will be collected at any time.

Confidentiality:

There will be no link between information collected and *Facebook.com*. All responses will be kept confidential. Only those directly involved in the study will have access to the data collected.

Records:

Each participant's set of responses will be coded and saved in a password protected USB memory key and kept in a locked desk in my personal office. Data will be kept for further possible further analysis after the study.

Risks or Discomforts:

There is no anticipated risk or discomfort expected for the participants in this study.

Direct Benefits:

The participants will not receive any direct benefits from the completion of this study, however, they will contribute to a better understating of Latino/Hispanic college involvement.

Compensation:

As an incentive, a donation of \$2, with up to a maximum of \$1,000, to the Hispanic Scholarship Fund for every appropriate participant who completes the survey.

Alternative Procedure:

Alternative paper format will be made available upon request.

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Copy of Consent Form:

Participants should print or save a copy of this Inform Consent Form for their records.