

**WHY DO I FEEL HOMESICK AT A DIVERSE UNIVERSITY? A QUALITATIVE  
CASE STUDY ON THE RACIAL AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES OF LATINX  
FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS**

By

ANA CELIA RODRIGUEZ

A dissertation Submitted to the Graduate School of Education

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

Doctor of Education

Graduate Program in Education, Culture, and Society

Written under the direction of

---

Sandra Tomlinson-Clarke

---

Ariana Mangual Figueroa

---

Rosanna Ferro

---

Tanja Sargent

New Brunswick, New Jersey

May 2018

WHY DO I FEEL HOMESICK AT A DIVERSE UNIVERSITY?

© 2018  
Ana Celia Rodriguez  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

# WHY DO I FEEL HOMESICK AT A DIVERSE UNIVERSITY?

**Rutgers, University of New Jersey**

**Graduate School of Education**

**New Brunswick, New Jersey**

**ANA CELIA RODRIGUEZ**

## **Why Do I Feel Homesick at a Diverse University? A Qualitative Case Study on the Racial and Cultural Experiences of Latinx First Generation College Students**

### Committee:

Dr. Saundra Tomlinson-Clarke, Chair  
Dr. Ariana Mangual-Figueroa, Committee Member  
Dr. Rosanna Ferro, Committee Member  
Dr. Tanja Sargent, Committee Member

### **ABSTRACT**

Latinx first generation college students face challenges on college campuses that may make it more difficult to adjust. First, they are dealing with a steep learning curve from having a lack of knowledge about college compared to students whose parents have a college degree. Secondly, they may also be dealing with racial tension, racial microaggressions, and cultural incongruity between home and school which influences a negative campus cultural climate. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the racial and cultural experiences of Latinx first generation college students at an ethnically diverse institution such as Rutgers University - Camden. In fall 2016, almost half of the Rutgers Camden undergraduate population was non-White. To gain an in-depth understanding of the racial realities for the Latinx students, I conducted in-depth interviews, and a focus group interview. First, four Latinx first generation

## WHY DO I FEEL HOMESICK AT A DIVERSE UNIVERSITY?

students were interviewed spring 2016 during a pilot study to shape the interview protocol for the dissertation. Then, ten additional participants were interviewed summer 2017 for the dissertation. Findings suggest that Latinx students perceived the college campus to be a place that is both welcoming and unwelcoming based on positive and negative aspects that exist on the campus. The interviews also indicated that the campus is lacking representation from the Latinx culture, which influences feelings of invisibility. Although, Rutgers Camden has widened access to ethnically diverse students, efforts must be done to foster a more positive cultural campus climate to help ease the transition from home to an unfamiliar environment for Latinx students. Recommendations include integrating the Latinx culture (i.e. food, music, language, traditions) in areas of student affairs (i.e. residence life, student activities, and dining services). Additional recommendations include diversifying areas in academic affairs by hiring Latinx professors, and offering a variety of culturally oriented courses to increase feelings of affirmation and visibility for Latinx students.

## WHY DO I FEEL HOMESICK AT A DIVERSE UNIVERSITY?

### DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to the marginalized Latinx first generation college students who are forced to leave behind their families and culture at home to fit into White dominant spaces in college. This is for the Latinx students who feel culturally excluded from the campus culture, and are rarely represented among the professors/staff/students, in the classroom curriculum, or in the student clubs and campus programs.

You are not alone! Not only can I relate, but there are other Latinx students experiencing discrimination and cultural exclusion on their college campus.

Tell your story, and take action!

*“Transform your observations into obligations”* - MK Asante

## WHY DO I FEEL HOMESICK AT A DIVERSE UNIVERSITY?

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have completed this dissertation without the support of my God, family, and friends who I acknowledge below.

#### God

I was baptized in 2017, and on that day I felt like I was getting married to God. God has provided me with optimal blessings including the opportunity to go to school to be a role model to others. I was never alone in this process because God was always by my side.

#### Family

My mom has been my biggest cheerleader since day one I came into this world. She influenced my confidence and tenacity, and taught me to be strong, independent, and hard working. She has a G.E.D., but she deserves this doctorate as much as I do because she has held my hand through every step. My mom listened to me cry over the phone the first time I had to write a 5-page paper in 2005 during the EOF summer institute before my first semester of college. She has listened to my complaints and frustrations about my school assignments since then. My father, although he was more hands off with my education, supported me financially which is also a notable contribution to my success. In addition, he helped me learn to embrace my Latin heritage, which had an influence on my dissertation. My 15-month old son deserves acknowledgement, although he was more of a distraction, he was a purposeful distraction. He distracted me from school when I needed breaks, but forced me to make the best use of my time when he was sleep or in someone else's care. He was my biggest motivation to pursue a doctorate, even before he was conceived. My goal was to break the cycle of poverty for my family and pave the way for future generations including my kids, and grandkids. Thank you mom and thank you Terron Zion!

## WHY DO I FEEL HOMESICK AT A DIVERSE UNIVERSITY?

### **My Network**

My surrounding communities have all helped me pursue and reach my educational goals. My family and friends from Camden, New Jersey, and the low-income first generation students I serve ignited and fueled me before and during my doctoral journey as they reminded me daily about the inequities, and oppression People of Color face on and off campus. I made a promise to complete my doctoral degree to be a role model and resource to the students I serve, and the people in my hometown, Camden, New Jersey. I hope my testimony will help people see they can also attain the highest educational degree possible in spite of their life's circumstances. I aspire to be a role model like the champions who left a small or giant impact in my life. My teachers, counselors, mentors, sorority sisters, and supervisors have lifted me up and shaped my ambitions. I want to personally thank Dr. Rosanna Ferro, my sorority sister, for being my personal compass and leading me to Omega Phi Beta, TRiO McNair, and my doctoral program. My sisters in Omega Phi Beta taught me the importance of being professional, fostering relationships, and remembering my roots. Rosanna encouraged me to apply to TRiO McNair, which prepared me for my doctoral program. Seeing Dr. Rosanna undergo her masters and doctoral program was immensely inspirational and gave me the courage to fly! No matter her distance, she still manages to support as a mentor and now as one of my committee members.

Thank you to my high school friends who rooted for me, and understood my absence. I value my colleagues for providing moral support and welcomed hearing my rants. I appreciate the support from my Facebook groups including PhD moms, Latinas Completing Doctoral Degrees, and PhinishEd.D, which provided a platform to ask questions, and receive tips on surviving this doctoral journey.

## WHY DO I FEEL HOMESICK AT A DIVERSE UNIVERSITY?

### **My Committee**

My committee members, who all have a doctorate degree, represent a symbol of progress for me, given that all four are women, and three are women of Color. They understood and respected my new responsibilities as a new mother. They did not make me feel pressured or rushed during my process. I am grateful for their patience and support.

### **The Participants**

I want to give a huge shout out to the ten participants who gave me their time and testimonies. Your stories reminded me of the importance of finishing my degree to be a role model to students like you and to be able to advocate for you at greater depths. Because of your contribution, I have evidence to help shape stronger practices on campus that will help Latinx first generation college students feel culturally included. Thank you for your support!



**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	ii
<b>DEDICATION</b>	iv
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	v
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	viii
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	xi
<b>CHAPTER I</b>	1
<b>BACKGROUND, PURPOSE, AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY</b>	1
Background of the Study	1
Statement of the Problem	4
Institutional Background and Demographics	5
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions	7
Overview of the Study	9
<b>CHAPTER II</b>	10
<b>REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE</b>	10
Theoretical Framework (CRT and LatCrit)	10
Benefits of Integrating the Latinx Culture on Historically White Campuses	11
Challenges of Latinx First Generation College Students	14
Perceptions of Campus Climate at Predominantly White Institutions by Students of Color	16
Impact of Campus Climates on Students of Color	17
<b>CHAPTER III</b>	22
<b>RESEARCH METHODS</b>	22
Research Design	22
Pilot Study	23
Setting	23
Participants	25
Data Collection	28
Phase I: In-Depth Interviews	30
Phase II: Focus Group Interview	31
Phase III: Follow-up Email	32
Phase IV: Survey	32

## WHY DO I FEEL HOMESICK AT A DIVERSE UNIVERSITY?

Data Analysis and Representation	33
Phase I: Analysis of In-depth Interviews	33
Phase II: Analysis of Focus Group	34
Phase III: Analysis of Follow-up Email	34
Phase IV: Analysis of Survey	35
Researcher Position	35
Validity Procedures	36
Limitations	37
<b>CHAPTER IV</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>FINDINGS</b>	<b>38</b>
In-depth Interviews	38
Anthony's Experience	38
Arturo's Experience	43
Laura's Experience	49
Israel's Experience	53
Zoe's Experience	57
Giselle's Experience	61
Darlenys Experience	67
Iris Experience	70
Evelyn's Experience	77
Jessica's Experience	83
Focus Group	87
Positive Campus Climate	88
The Invisible Culture	88
Negative Campus Climate	90
Latinx Needs	92
Feelings of Affirmation	95
Follow-up Email Summary	98
Survey Summary	102
<b>CHAPTER V</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS</b>	<b>104</b>
Discussion	105
Positive Campus Climate	106
Invisible Culture	109
Negative Campus Climate	113
Latinx Needs	116

## WHY DO I FEEL HOMESICK AT A DIVERSE UNIVERSITY?

Feelings of Affirmation	119
Conclusions	121
Implications for Practice	124
<b>REFERENCES</b>	129
<b>APPENDICES</b>	136
Appendix A. Participant Recruitment Flyer	136
Appendix B. Participant Consent Form	137
Appendix C. In-depth Interview Protocol	140
Appendix D. Focus Group Protocol	144
Appendix E. Follow-up Email	147
Appendix F. Survey	148
Appendix G. Logic Model	150

**LIST OF TABLES**

3.1 Participant Profile Matrix	27
3.2 Participant Profile Matrix (Continued)	28
3.3 Data Collection Process	30
4.1 Summary of Follow-up Email Dataset	101
4.2 Summary of Survey Dataset	103
5.1 Positive Campus Climate	109
5.2 The Invisible Culture	113
5.3 Negative Campus Climate	116
5.4 Latinx Needs	119
5.5 Feelings of Affirmation	121

## **CHAPTER I**

### **BACKGROUND, PURPOSE, AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

#### **Background of the Study**

I remember experiencing shortness of breath, my heart racing, and body trembling each time I engaged in class discussions when I was attending Rutgers University- New Brunswick from 2005 to 2009 as an undergraduate student. The classroom discussions provoked my anxiety because I was concerned with the way White people in the class would perceive me. To sound more educated, I would mask my accent by speaking proper in front of my peers, which often times led to me fumbling on my words. Being in a classroom where I was the only Latinx student from Camden, NJ felt isolating and uncomfortable. I felt more at ease in my hometown that was filled with violence and crime compared to the classroom, which is supposed to be a safe space. My classes were culturally alienating, especially in my psychology courses, which consisted of predominantly White students. Being a first-generation college student also heightened my feelings of isolation because I was faced with navigating an unfamiliar environment without academic guidance from my parents.

Fast forward to 2017, I vicariously experience stress that is similar to the time I was an undergraduate as I hear the stories of Latinx first generation college students attending Rutgers University - Camden. For the purpose of this paper, Latinx is a terminology that refers to women and men of Latin American origin or descent such as Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Puerto Rican, etc. residing in the United States (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). In addition, a first-generation college student is someone whose parents did not earn a bachelor's degree (Jehangir, 2010). As an administrator at Rutgers University - Camden, students feel comfortable sharing their testimonies with me. Latinx students at Rutgers University - Camden have

experienced being called a spic, accused of stealing, witnessed microaggressions, and received unfair treatment by White students, staff, and professors. A Latinx student was told by another student, “It’s a Black and White world. Latinos just live in it... Spanish people can go to White events because they are socially accepted by both. Black people give Spanish people the Black card because they are basically Black and since they have lighter skin they are approved to be with the White students.”. Such statements or unfair treatment towards Latinx students are considered insensitive. However, vile incidents may sometimes get swept under the rug or goes unreported. Latinx students publicly took a stance at a reception Spring 2017. Three Latinx students volunteered to read a poem that resonated with their campus experience. The poem written by Janel Pineda is called *To be a Latina Woman on a College Campus*. The original full poem can be viewed and heard on YouTube. Excerpts from Pineda’s poem were included here to depict the experiences of students at Rutgers University - Camden.

For the people on this campus who dismissed Latino narratives... It is walking into a classroom on the first day of classes and praying that another student of Color walks in weeks later... it is seeing my culture reflected as costumes reduced to insult... Like everything means I shouldn’t be in this country in the first place. The illegals are stealing our jobs they say. They’re stealing our America. It is them not understanding that this, this is my America too. But most of us never even asked to become hyphen-American... It is belonging neither here nor there. Ni aqui ni alla... It is people feeling threatened whenever Spanish words are used. It is my culture making people uncomfortable. To be a Latina woman is to have to scream myself into spaces that don’t welcome me... It is coming home every day and writing all these poems hoping that someone out here will hear me.

Students of Color face great challenges that interfere with succeeding in college. For example, Black and Latinx students who are typically first generation college students, older, have dependent children and come from lower-income families, are less likely to complete their degrees (Engle et al., 2006). In 2007, the National Center for Education Statistics found that the attrition rates of first generation college students within their first year was 26 percent compared to 7 percent for their traditional counterparts (Jehangir, 2010). In another study, conducted by the Pell Institute, of the students who attained a bachelor's degree after six years, only 11 percent were low income first generation in comparison to 55 percent of their more advantaged counterparts (Engle & Tinto, 2008). In 2013-14, the percent of all bachelor's degrees earned was 11 percent for Blacks and 11 percent for Latinx students compared to 68 percent for Whites (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Other discouraging research display lower college graduation rates among Latinx students compared to African Americans and White students (Arbona & Nora, 2007). These findings show major disparities between traditional and non-traditional college goers, with Black and Latinx first generation college students trailing behind their White privileged counterparts in academia. Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano (2009) state that Latinx college students' experiences are under-researched and unaccounted for in widely known research. Therefore, it is important to research campus experiences and address the academic outcomes among Latinx students.

**Statement of the Problem**

Black and Latinx students at Rutgers University- Camden campus face similar academic challenges that are represented nationally. However, the gaps in graduation rates between Students of Color and White students at Rutgers University- Camden are not as steep compared to national statistics. The Rutgers University- Camden Office of Institutional Research found that Latinx students from fall 2010-2013 cohorts graduated within four years at a much lower rate compared to White students, 17.6 percent and 34.4 percent respectively. Among the myriad of personal, financial, and academic factors that influence student success, racial and cultural campus experiences is another factor that does not get as much attention. Museus and Jayakumar (2012) stated that many colleges and universities have not engaged in a critical self-examination and transformation of their campus cultures to most effectively serve diverse student populations. Institutions fail to cultivate supportive cultures that help Students of Color thrive, and this results in the institution perpetuating gaps in persistence and degree attainment between racial ethnic groups (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). Before I began this dissertation study, campus stakeholders (i.e. chancellors, deans, program directors, professors, etc.) were not certain whether or not Latinx students had negative racial/cultural experiences at Rutgers University- Camden. Furthermore, campus stakeholders were also unaware if students' commitment to completing their degree at Rutgers University- Camden was influenced by their racial/cultural experiences. Therefore, this study will uncover new knowledge that is valuable to the institution being studied as well as other institutions with a similar demographic make-up. The importance of Latinx students becoming positive contributors to society is a valid reason to focus on their academic persistence (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).



**Institutional Background and Demographics**

Rutgers University is the eighth oldest higher education institution in the nation. The mission of Rutgers University includes: providing for the instructional needs of New Jersey's citizens through its undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education programs; conducting the cutting-edge research that contributes to the medical, environmental, social, and cultural well-being of the state, as well as aiding the economy and the state's businesses and industries; and performing public service in support of the needs of the citizens of the state and its local, county, and state governments. Rutgers University should be a leading model for closing the academic achievement gaps between racial/ethnic groups given its long history and mission to contribute to the well being of the state and its citizens.

Per the Rutgers University- Camden Office of Institutional Research, the total undergraduate enrollment for fall 2016 was 5,029 with 14 percent Latinx students, and 53 percent White students. Latinx first generation students are more likely to need specialized attention and support at Rutgers- University - Camden based on their vulnerability to drop out. Higher proportions of Latinx students were first generation college students (children of parents with no college experience) compared to all other racial groups (RUC Office of Institutional Research, 2016). Of the 1,409 students whose parents had no college experience, 42 percent were Latinx, 28.6 percent Black, 23.6 percent White, 33.6 percent Asian, 22.2 percent Native Hawaiian, 22 percent two or more races, and 27.6 percent were unknown. This dissertation study will examine if Latinx first generation students are encountering racial/cultural issues on campus, and whether those experiences influence feelings of staying or leaving the campus. The graduation disparities between Latinx first generation college students and their White peers shows a need to proactively understand and support this subset of the undergraduate student

population. When looking at the number of non-returning students, it is a sign that the institution has not yet adapted to educating this student population (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). To understand and address the graduation gap between Latinx and White students, it is valuable to find out if Latinx students are having a challenge adjusting to an environment that is culturally different and/or unwelcoming. This dissertation study explored the experiences of Latinx students to find out whether or not they consider the campus to be a culturally inclusive and supportive atmosphere.

According to research, campus racial tension deters Black and Latinx students from successfully transitioning onto the campus. According to Harper and Hurtado (2007), “Despite fifteen years of racial climate research on multiple campuses, the themes of exclusion, institutional rhetoric rather than action, and marginality continue to emerge from student voices” (p. 21). Climate is defined as “the current perceptions and attitudes of faculty, staff, and students regarding issues of diversity on a campus” (Rankin & Reason, 2005, p. 48). A negative campus racial climate refers to a social and academic environment that exhibits and cultivates racial and gender discrimination, and racialized verbal or nonverbal insults (e.g. microaggressions) against People of Color (Yosso, 2006). On the other hand, a positive racial climate includes at least four elements: 1) The inclusion of students, faculty, and Administrators of Color, 2) A curriculum that reflects the historical and contemporary experiences of People of Color, 3) Programs to support the recruitment, retention, and graduation of Students of Color, and 4) A college/university mission that reinforces the colleges’ commitment to pluralism and racial diversity (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). More research on campus racial climates is needed to transform institutions into more inclusive environments. Most of the research that focuses on the campus racial climates is quantitative in nature. Therefore, adding more qualitative research

on campus climates to the literature will provide a more holistic analysis of students' experiences. The findings of 15 years of empirical research all point to the "need for greater transparency regarding racial realities in learning environments at PWI [Predominantly White Institutions]" (Harper & Hurtado, 2007, p. 19). Harper and Hurtado acknowledge that Black and Latinx students may feel academically and socially alienated based on the pervasiveness of Whiteness in space, curricula, and activities that remain common across institutions. This dissertation study will complement previous quantitative research by representing voices of Latinx students to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences on a diverse college campus.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to understand the racial and cultural experiences of Latinx first generation college students at Rutgers University- Camden. This study also seeks to understand whether or not the racial and cultural experiences influence Latinx students' feelings about persisting at the university. An exploration of Latinx first generation students is important because this population is underrepresented at Rutgers Camden, and continue to have lower rates of graduation (4-6 year graduation rates) compared to White students whose parents attended college on a national and local level. An innovative institution with the commitment to retain Latinx college students will 1) enable the representation of Latinx college students to grow, 2) identify Latinx needs, 3) evaluate its current services and attempt to address its current shortcomings, and 4) provide proper programmatic intervention (academic and social) for the prevention of attrition (Castellanos and Jones, 2003). Understanding whether Latinx first generation college students at Rutgers Camden feel welcomed or alienated will provide valuable information to support their college retention and persistence. Previous researchers discussed the multiple dimensions of campus climate that affect minority students'

transition to college including the historical legacy of inclusion/exclusion of minorities, student body racial/ethnic make up, student perceptions of whether campus climate is supportive of racial/ethnic differences, and campus interracial interactions (Nunez, 2009). Researchers suggested that administrators, faculty, and institutional researchers proactively explore their campus climates to determine the need for deep and pervasive transformational change in higher education (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Most of the research on campus climates has been done at predominantly White institutions. These findings add to the scarce body of qualitative research that uncovers the voices of an underrepresented ethnic group in an acclaimed diverse university. This research is also action-oriented and applicable to the campus being studied. Therefore, findings from this study are useful in guiding improvements to the institution climate and culture. Also, this study might encourage other campuses to examine the racial and cultural experiences of Latinx students. The following questions guided this dissertation study:

1. What are the racial and cultural campus experiences of Latinx first generation college students on a racially and ethnically diverse college campus?
  - a. What aspects of the campus, if any, influence feelings of exclusion for Latinx first generation students?
  - b. What aspects of the campus, if any, influence feelings of inclusion for Latinx first generation students?
2. What influences do racial and cultural experiences have on Latinx first generation students' attitudes about persisting at Rutgers University - Camden?

### **Overview of the Study**

Creswell (2013) recommends a set of guiding principles to use for organizing a qualitative case study. As suggested by Creswell, I began Chapter 1 with a vignette (realistic scenario) from my younger self, which heavily influences this dissertation study. Next, I identified the problem, purpose, and my research questions that guide this study. Chapter 2 provides references to other related research to show the need for studying Latinx first generation college students. Chapter 3 presents the research methods used to probe the problem further. In Chapter 4, I present evidence that answers the research questions. The evidence was obtained from the ten interviews I had with Latinx first generation college students at Rutgers University - Camden. I also incorporate evidence from a focus group interview, follow-up email responses, and survey responses. Finally, Chapter 5 provides assertions and a summary of my understanding about the case. The study is one case of several complex experiences on one college campus.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE**

In this literature review, I first discuss this study's theoretical framework, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit). Secondly, I transition into the benefits of integrating the Latinx culture on historically White campuses. Next, I report on the challenges of Latinx first generation college students. Then, I present perceptions of campus climate at predominantly White institutions by Students of Color, with a specific focus on Latinx students. Finally, I shed light on the impact of campus climates on Students of Color. A logic model is presented in Appendix G. to illustrate the relationship between the literature reviewed.

#### **Theoretical Framework (CRT and LatCrit)**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) challenges researchers to become more aware of racism experienced by Students of Color. Yosso (2005) highlights tenets of CRT in the field of education, which validates the purpose of this study. First, CRT recognizes that race and racism is deeply embedded in the American society, and often goes unnoticed by those less affected. Second, the theory is committed to social justice and offers a response to racial, gender, and class oppression. Third, CRT acknowledges the experiential knowledge of People of Color as legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing and teaching about racial subordination. Lastly, CRT uses multiple disciplines such as ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, law, psychology, film, theatre, and other fields to analyze race and racism. CRT is an appropriate and relevant lens for examining the racial and cultural experiences of Latinx students on a historically White college campus.

According to Villalpando (2004), CRT and LatCrit are frameworks that help us analyze patterns of racial exclusion and other forms of discrimination against Latinx students. Racism is

sometimes covert and insidious along policies, programs, and practices, and may interfere with abilities to receive the best educational opportunities within higher education (Villalpando, 2004). CRT and LatCrit expose these covert practices that perpetuate racial or ethnic subordination and help us remove their obstruction for the success of Latinx students in higher education (Villalpando, 2004). Like CRT, LatCrit came out of a social justice project and includes the elements of CRT, but concentrates on experiences and multi-dimensional identities and characteristics unique to Latinx students such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Villalpando, 2004). CRT and LatCrit acknowledge that race and racism are in the structures, discourses, and policies on college campuses, which affect the experiences of Students of Color (Villalpando, 2004). CRT and LatCrit remind us of the importance of consciously recognizing that Students of Color, and Latinx students specifically, experience pain from various degrees of racial discrimination and negative racial experiences on campus (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009).

### **Benefits of Integrating the Latinx Culture on Historically White Campuses**

For decades, Students of Color have been forced to assimilate and fit into a culture, which is not aligned with, reflective of, and validating of racial and ethnic groups (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012; Tierney, 1992, 1999). Colleges began as campuses with Eurocentric cultures and norms that were fostered by affluent White male faculty and staff who served the needs of that same population (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012). Although institutions have begun recruiting and enrolling more diverse students, staff and faculty, the Eurocentric culture remains deeply embedded in the fabric of the institution. Latinx students may feel that racial and social integration is only in favor of the White mainstream culture, and they often do not experience the same guaranteed ecological fit as their White counterparts (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano,

2009). Students are forced to leave behind their cultural communities and adopt the norms and values of the campus (Museus, Yi & Saelua, 2017). Most minority students can and do adapt in the educational systems, but they do so with the historical disadvantage of chronic underperformance (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). Therefore, creating culturally relevant environments to accommodate Latinx students are mutually beneficial for students and the campus community. Museus and Jayakumar (2012) argue that institutions that are serious about effectively serving and maximizing success among Students of Color must assess and be open to critiquing, adapting, and transforming the cultures of their campuses. Bensimon (2005) explains that using an equity cognitive lens pushes us to assess and improve the academic outcomes of underrepresented and underserved populations including Blacks, Hispanics, and Native American students. In addition, Museus and Jayakumar (2012) suggest that we work towards achieving a diverse, multicultural, and equitable campus culture that support the success of racially diverse student populations.

Analyzing the experiences of racial/ethnic groups on college campuses, and developing culturally relevant and effective interventions to integrate sociohistorical and cultural knowledge is beneficial for campuses serving Latinx students (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Villalpando, 2004). Scholars have recognized that student success is influenced by culturally engaging and validating the backgrounds and identities of students in addition to academic and social components (Museus, 2014; Rendon, 1994). Culturally conscious frameworks increase sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Sense of belonging is a psychological connection to the campus and an indicator of success (Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). According to Hausmann, Schofield, and Woods (2007), a sense of belonging is positively connected to intent to persist towards



completing a degree. Findings suggest nine indicators of culturally engaging campus environments that are correlated with sense of belonging and include: cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, cultural community service, cross-cultural engagement, cultural validation, collectivist orientations, humanized environments, proactive philosophies, and holistic support (Museus & Jayakumar, 2012; Museus, Yi & Saelua, 2016).

Integrating the Latinx culture can foster a more welcoming and inclusive campus environment for Latinx students. For example, having Spanish speaking Latinx faculty reassures Latinx families about the well being of Latinx students (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). Latinx administrative or faculty role models helps students' see successful leaders or scholars in the institution who look like themselves, represent their perspectives, and serve as resources for student retention (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). Another example of cultivating a more inclusive campus is by reconstructing school curriculums and educational programs to better reflect and address the inequities and racism experienced by Chicano students (Tejeda, Martinez, & Leonardo, 2000). In addition, creating recruitment and orientation programs for Latinx students and their families can increase retention rates and ensure a more fulfilling experience in college (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). The culture of the environment and support from role models are factors that enhances sense of academic security, environmental comfort, and student success (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

Latinx students find ways to integrate their own culture to help them successfully transition to college. For example, they build a sense of community in academic and social counter spaces that represent the cultural wealth of their home communities (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). During and after rejection from White students, Latinx students seek social/academic communities where their cultural knowledge is valued as a strength

(Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). Furthermore, by building communities in social counter spaces, students cultivate a sense of home and family, which increases sense of belonging and nurtures resilience. Sense of belonging is important among Students of Color as it influences their college outcomes and experiences (Kim, Liz, & Franco, 2014). According to Hurtado and Carter (1997), Latinx students have a stronger sense of belonging on their campus when they are members of religious and social-community organizations. Such organizations are connected to external communities that are familiar to Latinx students, which help them feel at home when they can maintain ties to their culture (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Counterspaces allow Latinx students to develop skills to critically navigate multiple worlds of home and school, which helps them to succeed and survive racism and disprove racial stereotypes (Yosso, 2005, 2006; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). Latinx students have to tap into their home cultures to survive and resist the racism on their campuses (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009).

### **Challenges of Latinx First Generation College Students**

Research has noted that students who are first in their family to attend college are likely to feel more “handicapped” in navigating the college system and making academic and social choices (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). In other words, first generation college students feel physically, mentally, or socially challenged, which interferes with their daily functioning on the college campus. First generation college students often complete fewer credits per semester, juggle multiple jobs, earn a lower cumulative grade point average, have lower degree aspirations, commute to school, are less involved, and have low levels of peer interactions, which impacts students’ success (Pascarella et al., 2004). These findings came from a national longitudinal study that included a sample of 3,331 students across 18 four-year

colleges. Disparate curricular exposure, instructional/out-of-class experiences, institutional/environmental perception, and post college educational aspirations influence the academic achievement gap between privileged and underprivileged students (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; Tinto, 2007; Walpole, 2003). In addition to lacking academic preparation and resources, and balancing multiple responsibilities such as work, school, and children, first generation students enroll with less college knowledge (Engle, 2007; Pascarella et al., 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996). The challenges that first generation students confront explains their attrition rates and delayed graduation compared to their counterparts who have parents that went to college (Ishitani, 2006; Thayer, 2000). First generation college students are likely to experience a vast array of challenges, but when first generation identity intersects with ethnicity, the road to graduation becomes much harder to reach.

Latinx students who are the first in their family to attend college and have parents with limited formal education are likely to drop-out, therefore, they need to feel included (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). Research findings suggests that Latinx students at predominantly White institutions are ‘overwhelmed’ by their lack of academic preparation in addition to other cultural, economic, social, and political factors that may deter a successful transition (Hernandez, 2002). In addition, Tejeda, Martinez, and Leonardo (2000) state that lower educational outcomes among Latinx students are a result of being historically exploited, dominated, and marginalized in society. A Chicano, for example, must survive their academic life and social climate where the microaggressions threaten and diminish their potential (Yosso, 2006). Yosso stated that Chicanos feel pressured to represent all Latinx people, and experience stages of culture shock, community building, and critical navigation between multiple worlds. Fortunately, some students continue to persist academically in spite of culture shock, lack of cultural reflection in

values, and lack of numerical representation on their college campuses (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

### **Perceptions of Campus Climate at Predominantly White Institutions by Students of Color**

Perceiving the campus as less welcoming or feeling out of place at a predominantly White institution is common among Students of Color. Students of Color and White students at predominantly White institutions (PWI) hold stark perceptual differences of the campus racial climates (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). Climate is “the current perceptions and attitudes of faculty, staff, and students regarding issues of diversity on a campus” (Rankin & Reason, 2005, p 48). For instance, students who had stronger ties to their Latinx culture, and tended to speak Spanish at home were less likely to see their university as welcoming (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). In conjunction with the latter finding, many students expressed feeling out of place when they arrived at the university because their home communities did not resemble the university in terms of racial/ethnic composition (Nunez, 2011). Adjusting to a college largely made up of Whites and Asians posed a challenge for students who tended to be more familiar with Latinx or African American environments (Nunez, 2011). Latinx students who come from segregated classrooms or living environments may have never experienced being the only Latinx student in a space (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

Students of Color may also feel culturally alienated with campus sculptures, buildings, flyers, and office postings that do not reflect the Chicano history or experience (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). Results from several studies showed that Students of Color report more discrimination, harassment, lower sense of belonging, and lower satisfaction with the campus climates compared to their White counterparts (Kim et al., 2014; Mallet et al., 2011; Museus et al., 2008, Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Rankin & Reason, 2005). One study that surveyed

370 Latinx students across nine different campuses found that Latinx students perceived a hostile climate, which tended to significantly undermine Latinx students' sense of belonging and morale as a member of a particular campus (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Climate factors such as being singled out in class because of race/ethnicity, sensing racial tensions on campus, and hearing faculty express stereotypes about racial/ethnic groups compromised students' feelings of membership on their campus. Most older faculty still consider Latinx students less prepared or less intellectually capable than their Asian and White counterparts (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

Furthermore, another researcher that surveyed 546 participants at a Midwestern university learned that when first asked about discrimination, Students of Color reported significantly lower belonging than when the survey asked about belonging first (Mallett et al., 2011). However, White student reports were unaffected by the question order. In other words, when Students of Color think about their racial or ethnic group affiliation or remember any experiences that were discriminating, they may feel a lower sense of belonging (Mallett et al., 2011). Extensive research has highlighted the lack of access, the experience of marginalization and isolation of Latinx students in the academy, and the hostile environment toward diversity and multiculturalism that still permeates academia (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

### **Impact of Campus Climates on Students of Color**

Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano (2009) state that campus climate filled with microaggressions instills self doubt, alienation, and discouragement. Microaggressions are the subtle everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental insults that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages. For instance, microaggressions might include comments made by professors and advisors referencing students' lack of ability as well as, campus programming that exclude Latinx students (Villalpando, 2004). Other microaggressions include

experiencing racial slurs, racial jokes, segregated residence halls, and invalidations from university staff (Harwood, Hunt, Mendenhall, Lewis, 2012). Students of Color feel less welcomed and more like outsiders on their campuses due to racial microaggressions and discrimination.

Microaggressions cause Latinx students a great amount of stress (Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). According to Yosso et al., race based stress hinders Latinx students' academic achievement, and physical, emotional, and mental health. Institutional microinvalidations, which is one of the most difficult microaggressions to discern leaves students feeling disregarded and insignificant. An example of microinvalidation is failure to recruit and retain diverse Faculty of Color. According to Yosso et al. (2009), institutional microaggressions create barriers for building a community that is helpful for Latinx student persistence in college. Latinx students feel neglected and irrelevant by the school for not having an administrator assist Students of Color with coordinating culturally relevant programs (Yosso et al., 2009). Campus cultures that force students to sever their ties to home and family heightens a sense of isolation and rejection for Latinx students (Yosso et al., 2009).

In addition, dimensions of campus climate such as the legacy of minority inclusion/exclusion, racial/ethnic makeup, perceptions of supportive racial/ethnic differences, and campus interracial interactions affect minority students' transition to college (Nunez, 2009). Negative environments that include prejudice, discrimination, marginalization, isolation, differential treatment, stereotypes, and other aspects of hostile or "chilly" campus climates negatively impact students' college experience (Museus, 2014). For example, poor institutional climates and instances of racism increase departure among students, staff and faculty (Castellanos & Jones, 2003). Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000), note that hostile academic

environments coupled with racial tension, unfair faculty treatment, and stereotype threats can negatively influence Latinx students' academic achievement and psychological development. Hurtado and Carter (1997) found that Latinx students had a lower sense of belonging if they reported hostile climates.

Minority stress and persistence attitudes are outcomes mediated by perceptions of the university climate (Wei, Ku, & Liao, 2011). For example, not feeling valued or having to prove one's abilities by working twice as hard is common among Students of Color, which induces race related stress (Utsey, Chae, Brown, & Kelly, 2002). A study reported that Chicano and Latinx students exhibited psychological sensitivity to climates that included interpersonal tensions with White students and faculty, and actual or perceived experiences of racism and discrimination (Smedley, Myers, & Harrell's, 1993). In addition, having negative perceptions of the university climate influences persistence attitudes (Wei et al., 2011). Similarly, Johnson, Wasserman, Yildirim, and Yonai (2014) studied students' academic environment stress on persistence. However, they focused on persistence *decisions* versus persistence *attitudes*. For Students of Color at a predominantly White research university, observations of and encounters with racism on campus increased their academic environment stress and diminished their feelings about the campus environment, affecting commitment to the institution, and ultimately their decisions to persist.

Hostile climates appeared to have a negative effect on self-awareness and civic attitudes among Latinx college students (Kim et al., 2014). In the latter study, Latinx students had lower levels of involvement and initiative. Latinx students have unique languages, heritages, cultures, experiences, and histories that have been obscured and ignored, thus, their self-awareness and civic attitudes have been impacted (Bernal, 2002). In addition, Nora and Cabrera (1996) report

that perceptions of prejudice-discrimination negatively affect the adjustment of the minority student to the college while damaging the academic and nonacademic outcomes associated with college. Overall, campus environments influence student success (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Locks et al., 2008).

Nevertheless, there is disconfirming research, which suggests that perceptions of prejudice-discrimination do not have the overwhelming effect they are presumed to exert on the college persistence process among minority students (Nora & Cabrera, 1996). It is believed that perhaps minorities have become more accustomed to discriminatory acts on campuses and that they have subsequently become more hardened to pressures that would otherwise push students away from persisting in college. Another explanation for positive persistence patterns among Students of Color could be related to social involvement. Museus et al. (2008) discovered that satisfaction with the campus racial climate did exhibit an indirect effect on degree completion via social involvement among Latina/o students. In other words, involvement in a diverse array of educationally purposeful academic and social activities on campus not only influences satisfaction of the campus (Museus et al., 2008), and sense of belonging (Nunez, 2009), but is also a key tool in facilitating minority student persistence. According to Museus et al. (2008), this study lends further support to earlier assertions that climate, whether hostile or satisfying, does influence college student persistence and degree completion.

A hostile campus climate can have positive and negative outcomes. Research indicated that Latinx students felt the need to participate in diversity activities as a form of resistance to deal with their unwelcoming environments (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Perhaps, becoming engaged on campus leads to the formation of a peer group of activists, which both connects students to the campus and influences their commitment to the institution. On the other hand,



some students sense a hostile racial and ethnic climate because of their level of engagement (Nunez, 2009). For instance, students who are actively engaged in community and social issues, as well as the life of the college, are likely to become highly aware of the dynamics surrounding racial/ethnic issues in the college and society. As students become more engaged and better informed, they may learn more about hostility and their impression of hostility may grow. A hostile climate can have a negative effect on Latinx students' sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Thus, negative campus climates not only increase campus engagement and critical consciousness about racial and ethnic issues in some cases, but it can also decrease students' sense of belonging in other cases.

In conclusion, the perpetuation of White dominant cultural norms, microaggressions, and the lack of effort to integrate the culture of Students of Color will continue to influence educational outcomes and experiences. Therefore, analyzing campus climates to reduce hostile climates and culturally include Latinx first generation students is key to support their successful adjustments to campus.

### **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

#### **Research Design**

This study uses a qualitative case study approach because it seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of experiences bounded by time and place (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2012). In addition, critical race methodology shaped the design of this dissertation study, to draw on stories of People of Color to understand their racialized experiences in the U.S. educational system (Creswell, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Using a critical methodology incorporates counter-storytelling, oral traditions, historiographies, corridos, poetry, films, actos, focus groups and individual interviews (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In addition, researchers can share their own personal stories/reflections, and also draw on the multiple voices of family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances with critical methodology (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002, 2006), counter-stories serve at least four functions: a) build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice, b) challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society's center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems, c) open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position, and d) teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone. This dissertation presents a blend of counter-stories, poetry, focus groups, individual interviews, and personal stories to challenge racism and the deficit story told by the disparate graduation data between Latinx students and their White peers.

### **Pilot Study**

This dissertation study is an expansion of the pilot study I facilitated in Spring 2016 at Rutgers University Camden. The pilot study shaped the process for collecting and analyzing data for my dissertation. Four Latinx first generation students participated in the pilot study. The participants were engaged in the pilot study for four weeks, during which time they attended a pre- and post- interview, submitted weekly journal reflections, and captured photos. Due to the time commitment and high expectations, participant engagement began fading over the course of the study. Based on the data gathered from the pilot study, it appeared that Latinx students perceived some aspects of the institution as diverse whereas other aspects of the campus were lacking diversity. On one hand, the variety of people, including the students from around the world helped diversify the university. However, the faculty, resident halls, food, campus decor, campus programs, and nursing major were lacking diversity according to the students. The research participants in the pilot study described experiencing microaggressions. Three of them described their Africana Studies course as one of the few spaces that felt comforting because their Black professor encouraged racial and cultural discussion. By conducting a pilot study, I was able to develop a stronger interview protocol to elicit more elaborate responses. The data from the pilot study inspired me to delve deeper into understanding the racial and cultural experiences of Latinx first generation college students at Rutgers University Camden, and the influence that those experiences have on their attitudes about persisting at the institution.

### **Setting**

Rutgers University is a public research university and the largest institution for higher education in New Jersey. The University is the eighth oldest higher education institution in the United States. Although, Rutgers is housed in New Brunswick, Newark, and Camden, this

dissertation study solely focuses on Rutgers University in Camden, NJ. Rutgers Camden was selected because it is the institution where I work, and students have disclosed negative racial and cultural experiences despite the diversity of the campus.

The Office of Institutional Research at Rutgers University - Camden took a snapshot of the Fall 2016 enrollment status. The total population of undergraduates consisted of 5,029 students. The corresponding breakdown of ethnicity was 2,656 (53 %) White, 849 (17 %) Black, 720 (14 %) Latinx, 494 (10 %) Asian/Pacific Islander, 199 (4 %) two or more races, 107 (2 %) unknown, and 4 (.001 %) American Indian or Alaskan Native. The demographics of undergraduates at Rutgers is not representative of its surrounding urban neighborhood which consists of 32,203 (42 %) Blacks, 36,556 (48 %) Latinos, 4,013 (5 %) Whites, 2,075 (2.7 %) Asian, 1,077 (1.4 %) (i.e. Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, some other race, two or more races) (United States Census Bureau, 2016). Of the 5,029 undergraduate population, 55 percent were first generation, which is about 2,800 students, however, 1,409 were children of parents with no college experience. Of the students with parents with no college experience, 42 percent were Latinx, 28.6 percent Black, 23.6 percent White, 33.6 percent Asian, 22.2 percent Native Hawaiian, 22.6 percent Two or More Races, 27.6 percent Unknown. There were 263 students supported by the state funded Educational Opportunity Fund Program, and 147 students supported by the federally funded TRiO Student Support Program. Both programs aim to foster inclusive and supportive communities, and increase retention and graduation among low-income first generation college students. The college is considered a commuter campus given that 90 percent commute to campus. The 4-year graduation rates for first year students in fall 2010-2013 cohorts was 25 percent. The 5-year graduation rates for first year students in fall 2010-2012 cohorts was 47 percent. The 6-year graduation rate for the first year students in fall 2010-2011

cohorts was 54 percent. In terms of financial aid, 82 percent received aid, 44 percent were Pell recipients, and 10 percent received federal work study. In fall 2016, Latinx professors represented 2.5 percent of full time professors, whereas White professors represented 57 percent. The underrepresentation of Latinx students and professors as well as the high number of students who are first generation, low income, and are not supported by EOF or TRiO programs at Rutgers University - Camden reinforces the importance of addressing the needs of Latinx first generation college students at this institution.

### **Participants**

An advertisement was distributed across campus to professors and colleagues, and displayed on public bulletin boards, which solicited 10 research participants. The participants profiles are illustrated in tables 3.1 and 3.2. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Criterion sampling was specifically used to select qualified participants for this qualitative case study (Creswell, 2013). Criterion sampling is when all participants must meet one or more criteria as predetermined by the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Participants were required to meet a specific criteria to filter out other known variables that could influence a low sense of belonging on campus given I wanted to concentrate on cultural experiences as the main variable. The criteria to participate included the following: 1) student primarily self-identified as a Latinx, and a first-generation college student 2) student was in their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year of college, 3) student lived on campus, 4) student was between the ages of 18 and 22, and 5) student had never attended any other college other than Rutgers University - Camden. This research study ruled out new first year or transfers, and/or commuters, and/or non traditional aged students because they may have less experiences physically being on the campus. Students feel a lower sense of belonging if they live off campus

because they engage less in campus activities and classrooms than peers who live on campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nunez, 2009). Typically, first-year students are trying to learn a new environment, and commuters and non-traditional aged students who have family obligations spend less time on campus, which could negatively influence a student's sense of belonging to the campus.

Table 3.1  
*Participant Profile Matrix*

	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Year in college</i>	<i>Work-study Job</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>
Anthony	19	M	3rd	Orientation leader, EOF front desk	Black/Puerto Rican
Arturo	19	M	2nd	Ignite after school program for Camden City children	Mexican
Darlenys	21	F	3rd	Rutgers Future Scholars pre-college program for Camden City children	Mexican
Evelyn	19	F	2nd	OIT in the Library	Puerto Rican
Giselle	20	F	3rd	Jumpstart early education program for Camden City children	Puerto Rican
Iris	18	F	2nd	EOF front desk	Puerto Rican/Cuban
Israel	18	M	2nd	Ignite after school program for Camden City children	Portuguese/Guatemalan/Mexican
Jessica	19	F	2nd	Chemistry Department	Ecuadorian
Laura	20	F	3rd	Admissions	Dominican
Zoe	19	F	2nd	Rutgers Future Scholars pre-college program for Camden City children	Puerto Rican
N=10	18=2 19=5 20=2 21=1	F=7 M=3	2 yr=6 3 yr=4	Civic Engagement=5 On Campus Office=5	Puerto Rican=3 Mexican=2 Dominican=1 Ecuadorian=1 Multicultural=3

Table 3.2  
*Participant Profile Matrix (Continued)*

	<i>Home Language</i>	<i>Ties to Latinx Culture</i>	<i>Home-town</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>Affiliated Organizations</i>
Anthony	English	Weak	Bayonne	Psychology	Fraternity, Chi Alpha Epsilon, EOF Student Advisory Board
Arturo	Spanish/English	Moderate	Linden	Finance	EOF, TRiO
Darlenys	Spanish	Moderate	New Brunswick	Biology	EOF, TRiO, RFS
Evelyn	English	Moderate	Camden	Graphic Design	EOF, Smash Club, and Asian Culture Association
Giselle	Spanish/English	Moderate/Strong	Camden	Childhood Studies	EOF, TRiO, Interest Group for a Sorority
Iris	Spanish English	Moderate	New Brunswick	Childhood Studies	EOF, EOFSAB, LASO, RHA, Interest Group for a Sorority
Israel	Spanish/English	Strong	Jersey	Social Work	EOF, EOFSAB, Resident Hall Association
Jessica	Spanish	Strong	North Plainfield	Biology	TRiO
Laura	Spanish/English	Strong	New Brunswick	Social Work	EOF
Zoe	Spanish/English	Moderate	Camden	Psychology	TRiO, Dance Group
N=10	S only=2 E only=2 S & E=6	S=4 M=5 W=1	North=2 Central=3 South=4 NA=1	Business=1 Soc. Sci=6 Science=2 Digital=1	EOF=8 TRiO=5

### **Data Collection**

Creswell (2013) mentioned that case study data collection involves a range of procedures to build an in-depth illustration of the case. From June 2017 to November 2017, I collected a



variety of data which include: in-depth interviews (June-July), a focus group interview (early-November), email (mid-November), and an open-ended survey (late-November).

In summer 2017, I began conducting in-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with ten students who were referred to my study and met the study criteria. Several weeks after the fall 2017 semester began, I conducted a focus group to learn if the same students who were interviewed individually noticed any new notable racial/cultural experiences. The purpose of the in-depth interviews and focus group protocols were to draw on the experiences, feelings, and values of Latinx first generation students, and understand the impact of those experiences (Zurita, 2004). For example, one of the questions on the in-depth interview protocol asked to describe, if any, aspects of the campus that provide a welcoming space for Latinx students. Following the focus group interview, I sent a follow-up email to all of the students who participated in my dissertation study, and asked one final question about the factors that help them feel at home on the campus. I incorporated a question into the email to elicit any last statements from participants who may feel more comfortable providing a written versus verbal response. The last set of data I collected was towards the end of the fall semester, where I presented a short open-ended survey at the first reception for students, staff, and Professors of Color. The survey inquired about the ways that we could help students feel more included, valued, and welcomed on the campus. Table 3.3 illustrates a snapshot of the data collection process to help readers understand the different phases of data collected for this study.

Table 3.3  
*Data Collection Process*

	<i>In-depth Interview</i>	<i>Focus Group Interview</i>	<i>Follow-Up Email</i>	<i>Survey</i>
Purpose	In-depth understanding from participants	Additional Information from participants	Closure from participants	Additional Information from campus
Time	30 min- 1 hr	1 hr	Instant	Brief
Format	Face to face	Face to face	Electronic	Paper
Questions	Open Ended	Open Ended	Open Ended	Open Ended
Structure	Semistructured	Semistructured	One Question	One Question
Instrument	Protocol	Protocol/Probing	Email	Survey
Recording	Audio	Audio	Written	Written
Timeline	June-July	Early-Nov	Mid-Nov	Late-Nov

I describe the steps I followed to collecting the data in four phases: I) In-depth Interviews, II) Focus Group Interview, III) Follow-up Email, and IV) Survey.

### **Phase I: In-Depth Interviews**

The first method of data collection included ten in-depth interviews. The duration of the in-depth interviews for each participant ranged between thirty minutes to about an hour. A semi-structured open-ended interview protocol was used to guide the dialogue (See Appendix C). The creation of the protocol was inspired by the national literature and surveys I reviewed on campus climate. I also weaved in real campus scenarios as prompts into the interview protocol to elicit vivid reflections on cultural events that have taken place at Rutgers University - Camden. There were ten main interview questions on the protocol with impromptu probing questions where students seemed strongly opinionated by specific questions. The interviews were audio recorded then transcribed by a professional agency known as TranscribeMe.com. I jotted notes and

additional probe questions that came to mind on the interview protocol during the interview.

After the interviews were transcribed verbatim, I printed, read/reread, categorized and color coded the data manually according to the recurring patterns that I found.

### **Phase II: Focus Group Interview**

The second method of data collection was a focus group interview which lasted an hour. A focus group fosters interactivity and dialogue among participants, as well as clarifies and extends findings yielded by other methods (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). For instance, the focus group responses for my study extended and confirmed the themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews in my dissertation. I invited all ten participants who were interviewed in the summer to a focus group interview in November. By this time, participants could reflect on experiences they had encountered between September, the start of the semester, and November, the middle of the semester. All ten previous participants from the in-depth interviews were invited to the focus group, but only six of them attended. One person had to work, another stopped out of school due to pregnancy, and another person was sick. The meeting time took place during students' free period, which is generally an hour break allotted in the afternoon in between classes. A focus group interview protocol with seven questions was created in advance to guide and direct the students' conversations (See Appendix D). However, when I prompted the focus group interview by asking students to reflect on any negative or positive racial/cultural experiences they may have recently encountered on campus, the conversation became organic and needed less direction. I specifically asked the students to discuss and describe, if any, racial/cultural campus experiences that occurred since the start of the semester in September. This question was also sent to the students via email when I sent them the invitation to the focus group. Providing them with the prompt question prior to the focus group gave them more time to

process and prepare their responses in person. Impromptu probing questions, and student responses influenced other participants to respond. The focus group was also audio recorded, transcribed by TranscribeMe.com, read/reread, coded and categorized.

### **Phase III: Follow-up Email**

After the focus group interview, I sent the research participants a follow-up email thanking them for participating in the study, and ended the email by asking them to describe any factors on campus that help them feel at home (See Appendix E). This follow-up email provided students with another opportunity to share any information they may have missed, or had reservations about saying in person.

### **Phase IV: Survey**

As a member of the Diversity and Inclusion Counsel at Rutgers University - Camden, I volunteered to organize a networking reception for Students, Staff, and Professors of Color which drew a crowd of about 200 people from various racial/ethnic backgrounds. Incorporating some of the knowledge I gained from the in-depth interviews and focus group for this dissertation, I decided to infuse the Latinx culture into the reception with Latin food, Latin music, and Latin performers. I received positive feedback from attendees, and students requested to have the event regularly. Several research participants from the in-depth interviews and fall focus group attended the reception.

To collect more data from the general campus about racial/cultural experiences, I created a brief survey (See Appendix F). A survey provides demographic information, perceptual information, and qualitative (open-ended) elements (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). I presented two questions for student attendees to voluntarily answer which included: 1) What is your race/ethnicity 2) How can we help more students feel included, supported, valued, and welcomed

on this campus? The survey responses were collected, reviewed, coded, and categorized based on race/ethnicity and similar responses. Forty students responded to the survey, 15 were Black, 22 Latinx, 1 Mixed, and 2 Asian. One thing that was interesting was that no White students responded.

### **Data Analysis and Representation**

The data analysis spiral best represents the meaning making process when working with qualitative data (Creswell, 2013). The analytic process is not linear by any means. A case study, which is the approach I used for this dissertation, involves a process of pulling the data apart and putting them back together in more meaningful ways (Creswell, 2013). As mentioned in Creswell (2013), I started out with data of text from the in-depth interviews, focus group interview, and survey, which emerged into narratives.

#### **Phase I: Analysis of In-depth Interviews**

First, I printed and conducted a preliminary read-through of my dataset from the ten in-depth interviews, and re-read for validity purposes while writing side notes and developing initial codes (Creswell, 2013). I assigned codes to repeated statements across the ten interviews. Then I grouped the codes into broader categories. I used inductive reasoning (common patterns discovered in the interviews), and deductive reasoning (core ideas from the literature about campus climate) to formulate my initial categories (Patton, 1990). As Creswell (2013) suggested, I reduced and combined codes into five categories I used in the end to write the findings. Over time, the labels of my categories changed to best capture the essence of culminating excerpts. Each category was assigned a color to help organize and manage the raw data (i.e. Category 1: pink; category 2: blue; category 3: green; category 4: yellow; category 5: orange). For all ten interview transcripts, I used a pink highlighter to highlight all excerpts that

fit under category 1, then I used a blue highlighter to highlight all excerpts that fit under category 2, and so forth.

As recommended by Creswell (2013), I reorganized, revised, and collapsed my codes to develop a final set of meaningful categories that best represented the data set. The overarching themes of the in-depth interviews included five categories: 1) Perceptions of a Positive Campus Climate, 2) Experiences that Influence Invisibility, 3) Perceptions of a Negative Campus Climate, 4) Latinx Needs, and 5) Feelings of Affirmation.

The case study approach presents an in-depth picture of the case using narrative, tables, and figures (Creswell, 2013). I present the findings from the in-depth interviews as a set of stories from each research participant. Given the CRT framework, this study gives voice to individual Latinx students who are marginalized from the White dominant culture. The five themes are clearly presented within each participant's story. Several data summary tables were created to visually illustrate the dataset (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

### **Phase II: Analysis of Focus Group**

The five themes I developed from the in-depth interviews were also themes relevant to the focus group. I combined multiple voices with similar perspectives under respective themes. To be explicit, I gathered similar data excerpts from multiple participants in the focus group, and organized a coherent conversation under one respective theme (e.g. perceptions of a positive campus climate).

### **Phase III: Analysis of Follow-up Email**

I sent a follow-up email to thank all ten participants for volunteering their time for this study. The email also included a question about what helps them feel at home while they are on campus. Of the ten participants, four responded to the email. I read through all email responses

and found the same themes from the in-depth interviews and focus group which include: Positive Campus Climate, Negative Campus Climate, Latinx Needs, and Feelings of Affirmation. I present the entire email response from the four participants in the findings section. I list the themes prior to presenting each email. Then, I explain how specific statements from the email response coincide with the themes listed.

#### **Phase IV: Analysis of Survey**

I collected 40 surveys and organized them by race/ethnicity and recurring statements. Among the 40 surveys, 22 surveys were from Latinx students, 15 from Black students, and 3 Others (e.g. unknown, Filipino, and Bengali). Although, other racial/ethnic groups attended, including White students, they did not complete or submit a survey. For purposes of this study, I include an analysis of the responses from the Latinx students only. Fourteen codes were assigned to the dataset. I calculated the number of times each code appeared in the surveys. I developed categories based on the codes. The categories confirm two themes that emerged from the interviews, which include *Latinx Needs* and *Feelings of Affirmation*. I collapsed fourteen codes from the survey into the following three categories: 1) Integrating the Latinx Culture in Areas of Student Affairs, 2) Increasing Advocacy and Awareness on Latinx Issues, and 3) Diversifying Areas in Academic Affairs.

#### **Researcher Position**

As a Latina, first generation college graduate, and Rutgers University administrator at the Camden campus, I decided to study my own workplace to advocate on behalf of Latinx first generation college students. I chose to study a group of students I could relate to based on cultural background. I assumed they would have similar feelings of cultural exclusion on the college campus.

Although Creswell (2013) emphasizes that validity of research is jeopardized, and political risks are heightened when studying one's own 'backyard,' the urgency of assessing and guiding practice that support an underserved population outweighs the risks. I attended a campus program for Black History month February 2018, and the guest speaker MK Asante advised us to, "Transform observations into obligations." In other words, if see a problem, you have an obligation to become part of the solution.

It is important for me to take a stance and represent the voices of understudied, underrepresented, and vulnerable Latinx first generation college students in higher education, specifically at a diverse institution. I have had a genuine interest in increasing college persistence among Latinx first generation students, as evident by my research project in the 2008 TRiO McNair Scholars Summer Institute. The title of the aforementioned study was *The Factors that Influence Persistence among Latino First Generation College Students*.

Findings from this dissertation study can help inform practice and recommendations to improve the campus if deemed necessary by the students. Through their stories, we may be able to find solutions that target educational practices and environmental factors that can help Latinx first generation students feel less alienated and more welcomed/included on the campus.

### **Validity Procedures**

Creswell (2013) recommends using multiple strategies of validation to establish credibility, especially when studying one's own work site. I collected four sources of data including in-depth interviews, focus group interview, email responses, and a short open-ended survey to increase credibility of the study. In addition, peer reviews were conducted for external checks. Also, I have provided rich details and thick descriptions of my study setting to help other researchers or college administrators determine whether to utilize any parts of my study



based on any shared characteristics (Creswell, 2013). Yin (2017), explains that triangulation is one of the most vital strategies of a qualitative research study. Triangulation diminishes the probability of misinterpretation and bias that may derive from exclusively focusing on one source of data-collection analysis, or theory (Yin, 2017). The different data sets give this study validity because people are saying the same things across different platforms, when alone, when together, when verbal, when written. Even the general public who completed the survey, who did not know about my study's purpose presented consistent responses to the in-depth interviews.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study include a decrease of engagement among participants over the duration of data collection. After the in-depth interviews took place, participation dwindled for the focus group, and follow-up email. In addition, the duration of the focus group interview had to be cut short given we used the free period (1 hour) in between students scheduled classes. Also, two of the participants had to leave the focus group immediately at the end of the free period to return to work.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **In-depth Interviews**

This qualitative case study examined the racial and cultural experiences of ten Latinx first generation college students at Rutgers University - Camden. LatCrit, CRT, and Critical Race Methodology inspired me to concentrate on the racialized experiences of Latinx students, and represent their stories to expose covert racism that exists across college programs and practices. The findings include a profile for each research participant with direct quotes from their in depth interview. The profiles are organized in the following sequence. First, I detail the participants background and demographic information. Second, I discuss their perceptions of a positive campus climate. Third, I describe the experiences that influence their feelings of invisibility. Fourth, I explain the participants' perceptions of a negative climate. Fifth, I highlight the Latinx needs. Lastly, I emphasize students feelings of affirmation.

#### **Anthony's Experience**

Anthony is a bi-cultural male who identifies as African American and Puerto Rican. At the time I interviewed Anthony, it was the summer before he started his third year of college and he was studying psychology. Anthony described feeling a sense of belonging on campus, which I attributed to the amount of years he has spent on the campus, his affiliation with several organizations including his fraternity, EOF summer bridge cohort members, and his work-study job. During Anthony's interview, he stated while laughing, "I belong everywhere...I didn't ever grow up feeling like the White man is keeping me down, because my mom raised a narcissist." However, he later contradicts himself by saying, "I could never really fit in with Black people or Spanish people. So most of my friends growing up were White, for that reason." Given that

most of his friends were White, I presume it was less of a culture shock for Anthony while transitioning to the campus culture, which consisted of predominantly White students and staff.

Anthony's story is slightly different from the other students who were interviewed, perhaps because of his bicultural identity. Although, he fits the criteria for this study given he was entering his third year of college, lived in the resident halls, and also identified as Latinx. Unlike the other students who were interviewed, Anthony does not have many friends who identify as Latin. Also, Anthony was the only person interviewed who considered having weak ties to his Latin culture. His reason was that people do not speak Spanish in his immediate household, nor did the people in his original hometown. Then, he and his family moved to a new town a year before he started college where Spanish was heavily spoken. It became difficult for him to communicate and make connections with friends in this new environment. Perhaps his weak ties to his Latin culture is another reason he has a sense of belonging to the White campus culture and decided to join a historically White fraternity. As a result of personal experiences, Anthony views his environment through a cultural lens that differs from the other participants with moderate ties to their Latin culture.

**Positive Campus Climate.** Anthony described having multiple positive campus experiences by being connected to several sub communities. He is an orientation leader for new incoming college students, a member of the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) Program, which orients a cohort of students in the summer before they start college, and a member of a historically White fraternity. He works about 20 hours a week on campus for the EOF Program. In addition, Anthony is a member of other clubs on campus. Therefore, his high level of involvement is most likely a factor for his sense of belonging and perceptions of a positive campus climate. Anthony explained, "I was in the EOF program so I was pretty adjusted before

anyone else really got here so I kind of got a head start on adjusting, if that makes sense. I didn't really have that much to process. I knew where everything was, I knew how to do things. My second semester, I joined a fraternity so by then I was well-grounded." He also mentioned that he joined a White fraternity because the Black and multicultural fraternities on campus aren't really out there, and were hard to find.

Anthony describes a time where he saw positive interracial interactions outside of his fraternity. The interaction took place at *Tiene Fuego*, an event hosted by LASO. He mentioned that a large population of Latin and White students attended the event. Anthony observed the White students enjoying the event and dancing on stage towards the end.

**The Invisible Culture.** Anthony provided a few examples of the ways Latin culture lacks visibility on the campus. Anthony does not typically think about race or ethnicity until he approaches situations where race or ethnicity stands out and disrupts the norm. For instance, when Anthony was requested to reflect on the racial/ethnic makeup of students in his major, he proclaimed that he never made such an observation in his classes. He is aware that the majority of his professors have been White. Anthony stated, "I expect to see more White people in fields because just the education--the range of education White people have been allowed to have." In other words, having majority White professors has become normalized for Anthony. In the two years he has attended Rutgers Camden, he had two African American professors and a Spanish professor who taught his ethnic and foreign language courses. He is also aware that his ethnic courses (e.g. African American History) have more Black students enrolled. Anthony commented that his White fraternity brother who was enrolled in the same ethnic course felt weird being one of the few White students. Anthony stated, "they're [White students] kind of like dots in the class, which I thought was hilarious...which would be the same way if, I guess,

any minority would feel if they took a regular American history class.” There are courses where Students of Color are less visible as described by Anthony. Anthony joked and laughed with his White friend by saying, “Now you know how it feels.” Although Anthony is aware of the imbalance between racial ethnic groups in the classroom, he does not express feelings of discontent, tension, or hostility regarding the campus cultural climate. Although Anthony views Rutgers Camden to be diverse, he acknowledges that there are not many Latin events on campus coordinated outside of student organizations, and not many Latin professors.

**Negative Campus Climate.** Anthony presented concrete examples of incidents that increased feelings of negative campus climate. When prompting Anthony to speak on microaggressions that have taken place on campus, he described an incident regarding a White student’s act in a talent show. He stated,

And somebody went up there and ate a burrito in a poncho and a sombrero listening to Mexican music, and a lot of people got offended by that-- so a lot of Spanish people also are saying, ‘You can’t do that,’ obviously, right? But then, I saw some Spanish people didn’t care but then it was also people saying-- Spanish people making fun of other Spanish people also. So some people were laughing at it because they thought it was funny even though they were Spanish. But then, obviously, some people got offended. But there’s a lot of like, ‘Oh it’s because you’re Spanish,’ or because they’re Mexican, or because I’m Puerto Rican, or they’re Dominican. Those remarks I guess would be considered micro racist statements...Dressing up in a poncho, listening to Mexican music, in a sombrero, eating a burrito. As you can tell, I don’t care that much. But a lot of people explained to me how wrong it is. I’m like, ‘Okay, that makes sense.’

Anthony's lack of concern about this incident could be due to his weak ties to his Latin culture, racial/ethnic identity or other coping mechanisms used, and lack of understanding microaggressions. This incident was a catalyst for new century activism. Students spoke out and expressed their concerns on Facebook to share their pain and educate others on racial microaggressions. Anthony stated, "lawfully, the school can't do anything" about the incident. However, I would argue that this was a teachable moment to discuss microaggressions and the ways the performance was insulting to a marginalized and exploited population. Anthony discusses other forms of microaggressions experienced by his fraternity brothers. He said, "most of my fraternity is either Spanish or White, but they're like the White kind of Spanish people. People don't really believe that they're Spanish, even though they are." Another microaggression he described is when his fraternity brother expects him to know all of the rap music. Anthony stated,

Because I'm black, and he's like, 'Antonio, do you like this song?' And I'm like, 'I'm telling you for the 100th time, I don't know what it is. I don't know this song. I'm sorry.' I don't even listen to music like that. So I listen to rock. Everyone expects me because I'm black and Latino to listen to this music, and I don't. I listen to rock, metal, and alternative.

While he perceives a positive campus climate, he also notices segregation at his own fraternity parties where the music is played in the basement. He said

So when you come to our parties, you'll see a lot of White people upstairs on the first level, only because there's a lot of White females there...And then in the basement, you'll see a lot of Black people only because Black people like to dance, which I've confirmed in multiple parties that I went to. White people, right, don't really like to dance that

much, I want to say. So that's the kind of-- I'm going to say segregation, only because I can't really think of a different word, which is probably not the right word.

He also mentioned that he doesn't really see a lot of Latinx students at his fraternity parties or on campus.

**Latinx Needs.** Latinx students need to be exposed to more cultural programming. In Anthony's opinion, the Latin American Student Organization (LASO) and other student organizations should engage the campus more through events that highlight the Latin culture because he thinks it is lacking. Contrary to his beliefs, the other research participants believed it was unfair that students were responsible for hosting cultural events, and they felt the onus should be on the campus administration. Giving students a platform to organize events and programs is a great learning experience, but it can also be burdensome when they are juggling work, school, and family obligations. A balance should be attained between the students and campus administrators when determining the responsible parties for hosting cultural events.

**Feelings of Affirmation.** Specific behaviors, interests, and preferences help to affirm Anthony's Latin identity. For example, he enjoys watching the Spanish show called Casa Cerrado with his mom because he finds it interesting. In addition, he joined LASO for one semester to connect to more Latinx students.

### **Arturo's Experience**

Arturo is a Latino male who identifies as Mexican. At the time he was interviewed, Arturo had recently completed his first year of college and was entering his second year studying Finance. Before his first semester of college, Arturo participated in the EOF summer institute with other cohort members. In addition, Arturo is a member of the TRiO SSS program that provides another layer of support to low income first generation college students. Although he is

not involved in any clubs on campus, he expressed interest in joining the EOF Student Advisory Board, which he described as multicultural.

Arturo was raised in a Black and Latinx community, which differs from college. His mom is part of a community with mostly Latinx people. He said he grew up with a lot of Black and Latinx friends, and he continues to surround himself around this familiar group of people. His close circle of friends include an African American, Mexican, and Venezuelan. I presume his experience growing up in a community mostly populated with People of Color may have led to a greater culture shock for Arturo in his first semester of college. Personally, I understand that it could be a challenge adjusting to a place that does not mirror the racial ethnic makeup of your familiar environment.

According to Arturo, his ties to the Latinx culture are moderate. He likes embracing his American culture. Some people have told him that his Spanish is too Americanized, therefore, he chooses to speak English instead. When he is home with his mother, he embraces his Latinx culture by speaking Spanish because that is all his mother understands. He stated “I believe that it’s fair to her, because she doesn’t really understand much that’s going on around her with the American culture. She really only understands her culture, so that’s why I always like to act a certain way with my mother.” He explained that his culture emphasizes supporting family by securing a job. However, Arturo sacrificed work to go to college with the intentions of breaking the stereotype of Latinx people dropping out to get money. He also wants to break the stereotype of Latinx people only working on a farm or mowing lawns. Instead, he wants to hear more positive stereotypes for Mexicans. For example, he would like to hear a stereotype that, “All Mexicans are successful.” Arturo has a goal is to help the Latinx community, and motivate others to further their education.



**Positive Campus Climate.** Arturo expresses positive views about the campus culture. He stated,

I feel like it's very welcoming because it's one of those schools that's very multicultural, and it's not just a majority of something. It's always a balance of every race. And I don't know, I just feel like it's very welcoming because of that reason...they [teachers] don't really care about your background either, or what color your skin is. They really just care if you pass or not. I just feel like they always tell us, 'get good grades,' and teachers here are just like, 'if you want our help, you just have to ask for it.' It's like, 'I don't care what color you are, you have to ask for it.' And that's where I feel like it's equal here, and that's what I really like about the campus.

We have to understand that Latinx students could be afraid to ask questions because they do not want to be treated as incompetent. Considering the notion of validation by Rendon (1994), professors should not assume students can form connections on their own, and are encouraged to take initiative by reaching out to students to assist with learning more about college and increasing their positive college experience (Rendon, 2006).

**The Invisible Culture.** Similar to other students interviewed, Arturo described characteristics of the Latinx culture (e.g. music, food, language, love, and support) that were missing from the campus. Arturo stated,

My mom listens to a lot of ranchera music or something, and here it's just more like trap music or stuff like that and then American food like cheese steaks, fries, burgers, and stuff like that. Wings. And then my mom over here, is creating tamales, tacos, and stuff like that. I'm always speaking Spanish over there versus here, because my mom always wants me to speak Spanish there because she can't understand English. So yeah, it's very

different when I'm there. But I feel more at home when I'm with my mother than when I'm at college. I don't know, my mom gives me that home feeling. She just, I guess, brings me back to my culture, I guess, and makes me feel that all the pressure is not on my shoulders and stuff. It's just the way my mom makes me feel. And I know over there-- my mom will basically die for me and-- versus here, and I don't think people would die for me, but I don't know. I feel like I have more support where my mom is than here.

Arturo emphasized the strong support he feels when he is home compared to college. His mom keeps him rooted in his culture through music, food, and language. Arturo explains that he comes from a collectivistic culture, but he is pressured to assimilate into a individualistic culture. He stated,

it's like at home culturally, I just feel like I'm proud to be a Mexican and stuff like that. And I'm proud to be who I am there, because my mom never judged me in the first place. She's always there and she's always happy for me. And here it's like, "All right. I have to be a college student and you have to be a grownup and everything." The music's not the same here or anything, so I just put my headphones on if I really want to listen to a song that I like without people just like, "what? What type of song is that?" Or something... In college, I just feel very independent versus-- it's very different. I always have to change the mindset. 'My mom's not going to be here. She can't really take care of me or anything or cook for me,' like that. But here I have to buy my own things. I have to cook for myself. You just have to redesign your brain I guess to, 'that's home and this is college.' You're independent here, but over there you're very dependent on-- I'm very dependent with my mom.

**Negative Climate.** Although Arturo described the campus to be welcoming, there are instances where the campus has not been as warm and inviting. For instance, he has experienced microaggressions coming from one of his professors. He stated, “They expect me to just speak Spanish and not understand English at all. When they try to talk to me in Spanish and in my mind I’m thinking, “Dude, I speak English too. Come on.” He mentioned, “There was one professor that would try to, I guess, talk to me in Spanish because he didn’t think I could speak English and I was just like, I could speak English, Dude.” Arturo explained that his English professor went to his face and tried talking to him in a slow manner. Arturo also described having challenges connecting with White students. He explained,

I just feel like any time I try to talk to a White person, they just look at me if like if I’m something else, and I never really connected with them like that because we don’t connect culturally. We don’t really understand each other’s perspectives. And usually the people that I talk to, they usually just don’t understand half of my problems and they come from this nice background and that, then there’s just me that comes out of this minority type of background. But I always try to talk to them, but it’s always weird because I feel like they think they’re superior to me sometimes. And I don’t really have White friends’ I like that, but if anything, I don’t really care the color of your skin. As long as you treat me like I’m equal, I don’t really care, basically...they [White students] just give me that look, like, “Who are you?” Basically, and they tend to stick in their group of White people, I guess. And then I don’t know, it just feels weird when a colored person just walks in that little group and then they all just stare at you, basically. They feel different. But there’s nothing I can do, so I just don’t really put myself in that

position anyways. But that's why my friends are usually Black or Hispanic or Asian or whatever, because they understand me more than White people, basically.

Like some of the other students, Arturo mentioned that the 2017 United States presidential election was a particularly tense time. Arturo stated,

Well, in one of my business classes, it was definitely when the election was going on, and I guess the White people were voting for Trump because they wanted the immigrants out. And it sort of hurted because my mother is an immigrant, and I didn't really appreciate the fact that they called us criminals and stuff like that. And I didn't like how racist they were against Hispanics in general. And then that they actually believed that he was the right president for our country. Especially the election, yeah. There's a lot of that were, I guess, perceiving minorities in a way that I didn't really appreciate...I could hear them [students] mostly the White community, where they were just like, 'I hope he just takes away all the immigrants.' And they were basically referring to the Hispanics, because I guess we can't speak their-- some of us can't speak their language or some of us, I guess we don't appear the way they want us to appear.

In addition to the presidential election, Arturo has had other experiences on campus that have made him feel unwelcomed. He felt forced coming to college because he was made to believe that you need college to succeed in life. He stated, "there is times where I want to leave because I just feel like I'm not smart enough, sometimes and I just feel like I can't do it and how it's set up, sometimes, feels like I can't do it either... my town was very poor, so we didn't read the books I guess like other schools did, like Haddonfield, I guess, where their education is far better than ours." During his interview, Arturo, makes it clear that he is working towards moving up the social caste system. He said, "I don't think there's ever a thing of true equality,

but we can get close to it where most people are satisfied.” He feels like being identified as a minority comes with judgement and he wants to “prove them wrong” and help others move up the social caste system. A statement made by Yosso (2006) affirms Arturo’s mantra of proving them wrong. Yosso (2006) states, “although these students have overcome seemingly insurmountable structures of inequality, they experience extreme levels of pressure to “prove” their intelligence and merit.”

**Latinx Needs.** Latinx students need to see their culture integrated into the campus culture. For example, Arturo recommended creating a more inclusive, comfortable, and welcoming space for Latin students to feel at home by having more options of Latinx food, Latinx events, Latinx influenced art, and Latinx music. He stated, “ I feel like if Latinos can express and show their culture more, I feel like that can be more welcoming to other Latinos that are coming in.” He enjoys and takes pride in showing others the Latinx culture, but does not appreciate when his culture is mocked by White or Black students.

**Feelings of Affirmation.** Latinx students felt affirmed, emotionally supported, and encouraged by participating in the in depth interview. For example, Arturo stated, “I feel like you untapped something that I’ve basically been wanting to say and how I felt. And I guess it’s good to just talk about it sometimes. And it makes you recognize a lot of things, like what actually are the problems and stuff like that. And you can recognize the problems in certain people and certain groups and stuff like that.” Asking Latinx students about their racialized experiences is a good practice to help them feel more supported.

### **Laura’s Experience**

Laura is a 20-year old female entering her third year of college studying in the field of social work. Laura entered college in the summer before her first semester for the EOF summer

institute. She is a proud Dominican who speaks Spanish at home, but speaks English with her brothers. She considers her ties to her Latinx culture to be strong. Most of the people that she surrounds herself with are Latinx. For instance, she is mostly around her family, or friends' family who are also Latinx. In addition, her close circle of friends are Black and Latinx. She also visits her parents' motherland Dominican Republic frequently. Her hometown is New Brunswick, New Jersey where the racial ethnic makeup is mostly Black and Latinx. Laura's classroom racial ethnic makeup in K-12 also mirrored her hometown.

**Positive Campus Climate.** Laura described positive aspects of the college campus. For example, she observed positive intergroup relations at a Latinx event hosted by LASO, which was similar to the observation Anthony made during his interview. She noticed the White students were enjoying the Latin culture by dancing to the Spanish music, and eating the Spanish food. In addition, Laura appreciates that the college campus is generally welcoming, diverse, friendly, and small in size.

**The Invisible Culture.** Laura presents examples that show the Latinx culture missing from the campus. For example, the food, music, and cultural celebrations that are represented at home are different from the campus culture. She stated, "I think that's what I mostly listen to, so that makes me feel more happy or more content." She gets to embrace her culture in her private spaces such as her dorm room. To make the campus a more inclusive and welcoming space, Laura emphasized incorporating Latin food and music, which are the things she loves. She said it would make her feel really good to see stuff like Adobo, Malta, and Goya products in the Rutgers corner store. Laura suggested the following ideas to integrate the Latinx culture on campus. She stated,

Food is definitely one. I know there's a Spanish restaurant off campus. If there was definitely one on [campus], there would be a whole bunch of Latinos, different cultures as well, but mostly Latinos because that's what we mostly eat and things like that. Maybe, let's say, a Bodega. A lot of people-- a lot of Latinos go to Bodegas to get their, let's say, platanos, or their salami, and things like that. So if we have maybe a cultural Bodega at-- well, I think it's just a little convenience store. Maybe a Spanish restaurant on campus. That would bring more of the Latino culture.

**Negative Climate.** Although she described positive experiences during the interview, she also noted negative experiences. For example, Laura talked about the time she was uncomfortable in her class when race became the topic of discussion. She explained that White students were asked to raise their hand if they felt more privileged than Black and Latinx students. She experienced discomfort in the moment when White students raised their hand to acknowledge their privilege and superiority. This was a teachable moment in the classroom that seems to have gone wrong or was used in an unproductive way.

**Latinx Needs.** Laura presents several ways the campus can support the needs of Latinx students. The campus needs to enroll more Latinx students and professors. Although she considers the campus to be diverse with lots of African Americans, Whites, Indians, Asians, and Middle-Easterns, she wishes there were more Latinx students. In addition, most of her professors are White and she mentioned that she is less likely to relate to them. She explained that she would be able to relate and communicate better with Latinx professors given their common culture.

Laura compares the Rutgers University - Camden campus to the larger New Brunswick campus that has cultural programming to celebrate the Latin culture. She stated, "that would be

really cool if we had something here Latin-based, even though we have the Latin American Student Organization LASO. But it would be cool if we had more organizations or clubs like that.” Having more cultural programs that celebrate the Latin culture would make her proud. Laura takes pride in showing others how interesting and important the Latinx culture is to the campus. She also wishes she could create a different Latinx group to show Latinx kids interested in college, that Rutgers-Camden is welcoming. She stated, “maybe if we celebrate more of the Latinx culture, then we’ll have more Latinx students.” She is interested in bringing a Latin-oriented Greek organization to the campus to learn about different cultures within the Latino world. Laura mentioned that “it would be really interesting if we could have more organizations and clubs supporting the Latino group.”

**Feelings of Affirmation.** Moments of reflection have helped affirm Laura’s sense of belonging to the campus. Although the college campus is not representative of her personal community, Laura feels proud to be a Latina student on the college campus. She feels like she is empowering the Latinx community as well as her family. She stated, “I’m a first generation student as well, and I’m also a female, so that’s a plus as well. And there’s not a lot of Latinos out-- there is now, but if we just keep on going, just building up, and we will see-- and especially women as well. We’ll see that we’re just as and capable of doing everything well.” In addition, participating in the interview reminded Laura why she is proud to be Latina. She believes this research study is beneficial for raising awareness and talking about changes or improvements we need to make. Laura’s desire to join a Latin oriented sorority is another way to affirm her sense of belonging to the campus. Lastly, recruiting and hiring Latin professors would provide another level of emotional support.



**Israel's Experience**

Israel is 18 years old and was entering his second year of college at the time of the interview, studying social work. Neither of his parents have a bachelor's degree, and he is another member of the Educational Opportunity Fund EOF program. He is Portuguese, Guatemalan, and Mexican. At home he speaks English and Spanish. He rates his ties to his Latin culture as strong because he eats Spanish food, white rice and gandules, and celebrates Latinx traditions such as quinceañeras and family birthday parties where everything is Spanish influenced. Israel somewhat provides stereotypical examples of his culture.

As he reflects on his pre college experience, he explained not feeling connected to any particular hometown because he moved around yearly. He now lives on the South Jersey shore, but he has always resided in New Jersey. Moving to different locations exposed him to people from different cultural backgrounds. He was exposed to Latinx, Portuguese, Black, and White people. Israel has friends from all different backgrounds including Black, Latinx, Asian, and White. He considered primary school to be predominantly Latinx, and high school was predominantly White.

**Positive Campus Climate.** Israel shared positive stories about the campus, which could be attributed to his high level of involvement on the campus. Israel, like Anthony, is one of the more engaged students on the college campus from the research participants that were interviewed. He was involved with the Resident Hall Association which included Whites, Blacks and Latinx students. One of his most enjoyable moments was when the Resident Hall Association celebrated different cultures through a potluck dinner. Everyone had to bring an ethnic dish to the meeting. Then he became the president of the EOF Student Advisory which is

made up of Black and Latinx students. Overall, Israel described feeling welcomed on his college campus

**The Invisible Culture.** Israel describes ways that the Latinx culture seemed less visible on campus. For example, Latinx students have various phenotypes, and their ethnicity may be ambiguous to other people. Both Evelyn and Israel acknowledged that others may not recognize them as Latinx. He said, “I don’t look Spanish, so that’s kind of-- I think that’s part of it.”

In addition, he described the students and professors in his general education courses as being predominantly White. Israel said that although there is a lack of Latinx representation among professors, he has never felt uncomfortable or been affected, which is similar to a comment made by Anthony. However, he claims that it would be nice if there were more Latinx professors because it would be more of a connection. Israel also mentioned that Latinx related issues are not given much attention in the classroom discussions. He stated,

Even when we get into hot debates about racial injustice or inequality, it’s kind of the big African American versus Caucasian, and the Latinos don’t really get into that debate.

But at the same time, now, it’s getting bigger because of immigration and Donald Trump being president. So I think that’s a big factor now it’s coming around and I don’t know if this campus is there. I don’t know if this campus represents or is ready to discuss that because there’s not many Latinos here that I can see in the classroom. It’s either there’s one, or two, or not many, but then they’re on campus, so you don’t know who they are.

Israel enjoys courses that brings awareness to issues faced by People of Color. In his class that has racial debates, he mentioned that he feels like he is on a team with African Americans and Latinos, which is interesting to him. He feels like the media has an influence on the dialogue that takes place in the classroom. Israel stated that the media has been focusing on

Black and White issues and police brutality, which overshadows issues such as immigration and Latinx people being deported. He talks about a time he was compelled to educate a White student in his class. Israel said,

It was weird, but it was like-- there was this one student who was of White descent, or seemed of White descent, and stated, 'I don't really get this debate because not all White people are bad, and not all White cops are bad,' and I was like, 'I understand that, but there are White cops out there that are doing the wrong thing and need to be punished for that idea or that action,' and he was like, 'I get it but I don't see the issue.' And I was like, 'So you don't see an issue with White cops killing Black people just for the race of their skin? Or just because they identify as Black?' And he was like, 'Yes I do.' And I was like, 'It's the same thing with Latinos.' So it was little things like that. But it didn't defer me. It just made me want to open him to the side of ours because obviously he hasn't been exposed to that, or maybe he's not understanding where Latino and minority students are coming from. So I've never wanted to leave. It kind of makes me want to stay even more to show that there's things that still need to be changed and there's work to be done.

Stories similar to Israel's experiences appeared in the literature regarding students who become compelled to educate the campus about racial issues. Some students like Israel become inspired to bring awareness to the campus based on a negative racial experience. Israel wants to stick around longer on the campus to be an advocate for his community, to be a responsible representative that educates the ignorant. The incident gave Israel further motivation to commit to college.

During his interview, Israel had critiqued the college campus for having a low representation of Latinx people, lacking racial awareness, and lacking diversity in the cafe. He critiques the cafe by stating although they try, they need improvement because it's a predominantly White cafeteria. He said, "And then a little bit of anger came out once, one time, because they came up with this burrito thing and they made it Spanish, and it was just not the way to go. It was just wrong. And it was almost like a play on Chipotle but they made it Hispanic. They tried and it didn't work." Israel believes to cultivate more culturally inclusive and welcoming spaces on campus, we need to ask the Latinx students about their wants and needs. He presumes that providing more options in the cafeteria would be a good place to start.

**Negative Climate.** Israel has no recollection of having negative encounters in relation to his cultural background. He stated that because he does not look Latinx, he probably has not had negative encounters. He said, "I don't look Spanish, so that's kind of-- I think that's part of it." Israel has experienced hearing racial jokes from his peers who are Black about the hair products he uses, but the jokes haven't made him feel uncomfortable or bother him. For example, he uses something called gorilla moco, which means gorilla snot in Spanish, and people questioned why he owned gorilla snot.

**Latinx Needs.** Although Israel is accustomed to being in predominantly White learning spaces, he still expressed a desire to have Latinx professors and staff employed on the campus. He explained that having professors and staff who come from Latinx descent could help Latinx students feel more culturally included. He mentioned that Latinx professors would be able to understand cultural jokes, and relationships between students and professors would be easier to form because of the common culture.

Israel believes that more students need to be aware of the services on campus that exists to serve minorities who typically come from lower social class. He believes that the EOF, TRiO and Bridging the Gap programs are good programs that give students from challenging circumstances a chance to rise out of their situation. He sees that high school students are not fully aware of the support programs and he recommends that there needs to be some work in better advertising these opportunities.

He acknowledged that Latinx students in general need staff and faculty who are bilingual. He described that his cultural background helped him in his job working with youth in the community through the Civic Engagement office. He was able to translate to a parent that lives in the local community. Ultimately, he was able to communicate to the Latinx parent, which helped with the student's grades because he made the parent aware that the child was not doing his homework. That helpful interaction was particularly unique because he developed a stronger bond with the student and parent. He recommended the employees working with youth in the local community to learn Spanish to better communicate to the children and families. Overall, Israel seemed to like participating in the dissertation interview because he became aware of things he does not typically reflect upon.

**Feelings of Affirmation.** Israel, like Laura, also plans to join a Latin influenced Greek organization, to affirm students' sense of belonging on the campus. Israel also mentioned staff being another level of support for Latinx students.

### **Zoe's Experience**

Zoe is a 19-year old Puerto Rican female who completed her first year of college, and is studying psychology as a major. She works on campus for a mentor program that serves the inner city youth in her hometown, Camden, NJ, which is predominantly Black and Latinx. She

lived in Puerto Rico until she was five, moved to New Jersey, and returned to PR in 8th grade. Zoe moved back to Camden, NJ for high school to attend a charter school that was predominantly Black, Latinx, and Asian. Unlike the eight other research participants, Zoe is one of two research participants receiving services from TRiO SSS along with Jessica.

Zoe rates her ties to her Latinx culture as moderate because she does not know everything she wants to know about her culture, and claims her ties could be stronger. For example, because she was raised in the states, she claims that she does not have that first hand experience like the residents of Puerto Rico to know the history and culture. However, Zoe has knowledge and experience with the music, food, language, and family traditions of the Latinx culture. Zoe's connections to her culture were influenced by her grandmother and mother who have strong ties to the culture and its traditions. One tradition that Zoe described as one of her favorites occurs during Christmas where all of the family from her grandmother's side get together including her aunts, uncles, and cousins. They go into the backyard to sing, dance, and play instruments to traditional Spanish music.

**Positive Campus Climate.** It was a challenge finding positive statements regarding the campus climate in Zoe's interview. Zoe experienced the climate to have more negative aspects which increased feelings of invisibility. Although, Zoe did describe feeling positive about having Black and Latinx peers she could relate to on campus based on having common cultural backgrounds.

**The Invisible Culture.** There were comments that were made in Zoe's interview that represented a sense of invisibility. For instance, Zoe said that the institution and her classroom racial makeup has been predominantly White. According to Zoe, she has become accustomed to having predominantly White teachers even at the college level. Having a Latinx professor would

be different, but she presumes that she would have an instant connection with a professor who might be more relatable. She admitted to observing the way professors speak to learn to speak more proper like them. She stated,

Due to me growing in this environment, it's not surprising or nothing new. It's kind of expected for us [Latinx students] not to be in many college classes, so. I mean, it should be more. I feel some type of way...It feels like you're a little bit of an outsider unless you're like that socially good person that just wants to be friends with everybody, but it's definitely different like walking into a school where you feel a little comfortable and then walking to a different school where it's just like you are intimidated a little bit because you're so used to being around Hispanics, and Blacks...I just feel like when you step into a room, and there's mostly Caucasian people and not that many Hispanic people, like I said before, it kind of feels intimidating. It kind of feels like, 'Oh, I have to fit in.' I have to act this certain way.

Zoe talked about the ways that the university is different from her home culture. She stated that she has not really seen much on the campus that represents the Latinx culture. When there is a Latin program on the campus, Zoe stated, "I don't want to say framed or fake, but it's just stereotyped sometimes. I just feel like real Latinx people that know the culture good should be doing the stuff." She is skeptical when she sees flyers promoting Latin events, and usually doubts that many Latinx will attend. She has stated that there is a lack of Latinx students on campus, and the ones that are at the University grew up here in the states. Zoe presumes that the Latinx students who were raised here on the mainland are not well versed on the culture to educate others. She also critiques dining services for their poor representation of Spanish rice.

**Negative Climate.** Zoe also speaks on negative campus experiences. While living on campus, Zoe noticed that students would hang together in cliques. Zoe described an instance where she noticed segregation. She said,

We had a little glow-in-the-dark party, and at the glow-in-the-dark party, they were seated like-- the Hispanic girls with the Hispanic girls and the African Americans-- I think since we were so used to growing up, a lot of people knew each other, so we were okay together, but you will see a handful of Caucasian people that lived on-campus that were just kind of excluded, kind of didn't want to be a part of our little turn-up. So it was overwhelming, and then I walked by, and I would hear, 'Look at them being ratchet.' I get it, I'm just like, 'Time to go.' So that's one event that I went to, and I'd seen they were just all standing on the wall.

Zoe mentioned that some of the White students "turned up" and danced with her and friends, but the other White students stayed to themselves judging them.

Some students have made offensive comments about Zoe's hometown, Camden, NJ. People have sarcastically asked if she has ever been shot. They question the reason she stays living in Camden. These remarks upset Zoe because they are joking about a place she calls home. Zoe explained that she does not perceive her hometown to be all bad the way the news portrays. She feels like people from other areas are criticizing a place they don't know firsthand. She said it's not only White people, but it's anyone who is not from Camden that has made judgmental statements about the city. Zoe stated that some seasoned professors from the University are considerate of the students that live in the city and remind others to be mindful and careful about their comments.



**Latinx Needs.** Zoe describes opportunities for the institution to support the needs of Latinx students. Zoe suggested the University should celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month widely and decorate the campus with posters to educate others about the Latinx culture. She feels like more people should be educated on the Latinx history. In addition, Zoe suggested hiring chefs who know how to cook Spanish food. She stated, “the little bit of Latinos that are here will feel like, ‘Oh it’s a little more comfortable,’ like they appreciate us. They kind of want us here even though it’s a little bit of us here.”

**Feelings of Affirmation.** Zoe describes instances that affirm her sense of belonging. For example, she typically gravitates towards People of Color on a campus that doesn’t feel diverse. Some of her close circle of friends are Black. In addition, if she sees a Hispanic person, she stated, “We automatically connect on some type of level, so it’s kind of weird.” For instance, she and her roommate who is also Latina from Camden get along. However, she is unable to build close relationships with her White roommates, but does not explain what gets in the way of relationships with Whites.

Zoe reflected on her interview experience for this study and stated that the questions from the interview made her think about the small proportion of Latinx students on campus compared to everyone else. She stated, “as a whole in the world, we’re pretty big, but just in school, it’s just like we need to get more people in here.” Therefore, recruiting and retaining Latinx students, and professors would be another way to help increase feelings of affirmation for students like Zoe.

### **Giselle’s Experience**

Giselle is a 20-year old female Puerto Rican entering her third year of college studying childhood studies and interested in social work. Giselle also is a member of both EOF and TRiO

SSS. She works in a local elementary school for the national Jumpstart program working with inner city children in Camden, NJ. The racial-ethnic makeup of her work environment is primarily Black and Latinx among the children and staff. She considers her ties to her Latinx culture to be moderate because she does not always listen to Spanish music, she does not always speak the language, nor is she always with Latinx friends. Although, at home she speaks both English and Spanish. Giselle appreciates the beauty, heritage, and unity that are represented in her culture. She wishes she could be more into her culture. Giselle's hometown, Camden NJ, and k through 12 experience was predominantly Black and Latinx. She stated when she sees White people around her neighborhood, she presumes they are purchasing narcotics.

**Positive Campus Climate.** Throughout the interview Giselle talked about positive experiences on the campus. She mentioned that she found comfort when cultural Greek organizations came together for a probate, which are traditional performances that celebrate and recognize the newest members entering the Greek organization. Giselle gets "hyped" to see the unity among the organizations, and the presence of people from different schools coming to see the performances. She described that she is able to relate to the crowd of people. According to Giselle, "They seem like really down people. And they were of the same background, I guess, Hispanic and Black. So it made it more comfortable, I guess."

The cultural Greek organizations are a subculture on college campuses that has helped increase Giselle's sense of belonging. It has created a positive and welcoming campus climate for Giselle. Giselle expressed being happy around a relatable group of people who show their pride in their organizations through their unity and performances.

**The Invisible Culture.** Giselle described the ways that the Latinx culture is overshadowed by the White dominant culture. To be more explicit, Whiteness dominates in the

classrooms and cafeteria, and among the students and professors. For instance, most of her professors have been White, and the one Black professor she had taught the African-American History course. She stated,

I've stepped into classrooms where it's been like majority are the White kids and you're just the one Hispanic, or it's maybe one or two Hispanic or Black people in the room, and it's kind of just like, dang. I don't know. It makes you really aware that it's like-- investing in an education is very expensive. And it's like, you can look around and it's so easy for others to just kind of have that. I don't know. In my head, I feel like the kids who are White have it easier than the kids who are Hispanic and Black, and that's why I don't see a lot of the peers that are of my ethnicity in the classroom, so...I want to say it was my English 102 class when I noticed it. And I was like, 'Dang. There's really no Hispanic people in here.' And maybe it was my child literacy class, and I noticed it was just me and one Spanish girl, and maybe one Black girl in there. And that was it. And everybody else was White, and I was just like, 'Whoa.' Yeah. So it happens. In some of my classes, I can see it. But then in others, it's pretty diverse. When I was a business major, I noticed it was a lot more diverse than when I'm a childhood studies major...you can tell by the amount of White people that are here versus the amount of Hispanic and Black people that are here. Yes, there's a pretty-- I don't know. To me, I feel like there was a huge increase of White people that came in last year than there was Hispanic and Black. And it was crazy. I would turn and I would be like, "Dang, like what happened? Like where is everybody at?" And I don't know if it's because some people dropped or maybe they were just looking for people of just that background to bring into here, or however Rutgers does it, but I noticed it by a lot...It was weird. I don't know. The whole

shift in the students and the demographic, I guess, just changed. It was so many White people.

**Negative Campus Climate.** Giselle has experienced uncomfortable situations at campus events, and has also noticed racial group separation. She stated,

Well, I guess I'm going to give you an example of the moment that I felt like I wasn't accepted or felt uncomfortable while being in Rutgers-Camden. I went to an event on campus. It was just people were speaking in front of a mic. It was an open mic. People were talking about-- this was before Trump's, the election before he became president. So people were going up to the microphone and speaking about how we should stand up for our voices as a diverse, I guess, country, and just that we're home of the immigrants and stuff like that. And just people were speaking so inspirationally. And I remember a White male. He was walking around, and he was hooting and hollering and saying all these things about Trump. And it was just kind of giving me that confirmation that it's like, wow. People here actually feel superior over me because they're White and I'm not. And it made me feel more aware, I guess, that people aren't as accepting of Hispanic and Black people. And it kind of made me feel like, 'Wow. This life.'

Giselle stated that the White male made comments such as, "Shut up. You guys don't know what you're talking about" when students spoke against Trump.

Giselle noticed segregation in the cafeteria, where all of the White students and White Greeks hang out in cliques on one side, while Black students and Greeks sit together on another side. She wished groups would integrate, and were more diverse. However, she feels uncomfortable hanging with White kids, and prefers to be with Latinx and Black students. In the following quote she stated her feelings about the lack of Latinx students on campus.

Like I'm singled out. I feel like there's no-- how do I say this? I feel like there's no backbone there for me. There's not people I can depend on, really. Because it's like, yeah, I can talk to the White kids, but it's like we don't have the same, I don't know, the tribulations, I guess you can call it, aren't the same, so it's like we're not on that relatable scale. Whereas people who are Hispanic and Black, I can blend in more with and I can relate to more because we have those same, I guess, socioeconomic backgrounds and just like life in general. We kind of all, not experience the same things, but along the lines, it's harder. If that makes sense?...I feel like we don't walk the same paths. And I mean, yes, all people go through their struggles, but I feel like my struggle is different from somebody who is White and their struggle, because it's like-- I don't know. It's obvious. Your dad and your mom can pay for the education, or your dad, or whoever can pay for the education. And it's harder for me. It's hard to do this.

Giselle suggested ideas to integrate racial and ethnic groups. She mentioned that people need to be open-minded, and campus events should address the segregation and encourage integration. However, she is not confident that people would care to address, nor acknowledge that a racial/ethnic problem exists. She believes that people fear discomfort, and that could be the reason they stay segregated and stick with the people they have things in common with because it is more comfortable.

**Latinx Needs.** Giselle describes a need for spaces and programs that embrace her culture given the campus culture is not representative of her home culture. Spaces allow students like Giselle to learn about their roots, listen to their music, and eat different Spanish food. For example, the resident hall is a space where Giselle feels comfortable embracing her culture. There she openly listens to Spanish music, particularly the Romeo Santos radio station, in her

campus apartment. Her roommates show respect and appreciation for her music, and have called it dope and cool. The last comment that Giselle made in her interview was the following, “I personally believe if Rutgers Camden wants to grow, we need to develop programs that help all races and ethnicities to be able to build, live, and create together. She understands and expresses the need to build networks between Blacks and Latinx students through the campus events.

**Feelings of Affirmation.** Giselle described several aspects of the campus that affirmed her sense of belonging on the campus. Special courses, organizations, cultural programs, and Students of Color provided comfort to Giselle. For instance, Giselle acknowledged that the ethnic courses she has taken influenced her to be more aware about her race/ethnicity compared to regular general education courses. In addition, she admitted to having an easier time connecting with Latinx or Black students by having shared background experiences.

Giselle hangs with the multicultural students where she feels like she fits in better and easier. She has attended the White Greek parties where they played rave music, but she felt like it wasn’t her thing. She prefers the hip-hop and Spanish music played at the Latinx and Black parties. Giselle also is interested in joining a Latin Greek organization like Laura and Israel. She stated, “I’m trying to be in touch with my Hispanic roots through them because they’re so into their culture and just very festive, I guess. And they show that unity because it’s one of their principles.” Cultural organizations such as LASO and the Latin sorority have helped validate Giselle’s identity on the campus. The organizations have hosted events on topics ranging from sex trafficking to Latinx heritage where attendees learned about different Latinx groups from Mexico, Paraguay, etc.

**Darlenys Experience**

Darlenys is a 21-year old Mexican female entering her third year of college studying Biology, and a member of EOF and TRiO. She was born in Mexico, and eventually moved to the United States, in a community plagued with drugs and gangs. She rates her ties to her Latinx culture as moderate. She speaks Spanish at home, and follows the traditions, but when her parents came to this country, they became Americanized and stopped traditions they followed. However, they try to conserve their cultural traditions as much as possible. One of her favorite traditions that her family celebrates is Day of the Dead when everyone gathers to value people who have passed away and a feast is made for them. Also, she appreciates other holidays such as Christmas, and New Years. She explains that Mother's Day for Mexicans is scheduled on a different date than the date for Americans. She enjoys Mother's Day because it is one of her mom's favorite traditions to celebrate. The traditions that she noted were her favorite have a common theme of family and giving to others. Her hometown and K-12 schools in New Brunswick was made up of majority Black and Latinx people. She said that you barely saw any White people in her hometown. In addition, Darlenys works on campus that is mixed with different cultures including Black, Latinx, and White people.

**Positive Campus Climate.** She considers the campus to be unexpectedly welcoming. She said the campus feels at home because of its small size, you get to know your professors and other students, people are nice, you feel like you belong, and you feel safe.

**The Invisible Culture.** Darlenys acknowledged areas where the Latinx culture was unseen on campus. Coming to college was different for Darlenys because there was more of a mixture of students who were Black, Latinx, White, Indian, Asian, and everything else. However, in her biology classes, she mentioned that Latinx students are really hard to

find. She notices that the majority is usually Black, Asian, or White, and the professors are usually White.

She wishes there were more Latinx students. When asked about her feelings towards the lack of Latinx representation, she stated that she felt upset that Latinx were not into Biology because it gets tough. She stated, it would be great if more Latinx students would study Biology, because it would feel like “You’re not just alone in the classroom. You have other kids that are the same race as you and same ethnicity.” She would feel like people are in it together, fighting together, doing the same thing.

**Negative Climate.** Darlenys notices separation and segregation between the different racial and ethnic groups. She said it was a little off putting because you don’t see racial integration like you do on the television. She stated,

it was very hard to talk to them [White students] because sometimes they were more busy than us...Or sometimes when I would try to talk to them they would be more shy towards us. Yeah and they barely talked when you would go to them and talk and say hi. Some of them, I’m not saying all of them, but some of them would be like, “Hey.” But they wouldn’t try to really have a conversation with you...It made me feel kind of shy and kind of uncomfortable because then I’m like, “Do I have something that you don’t want to be my friend or something? Is it my race or anything?” She observed that White students stay with people with the same race and level of economics. She said, “I want to say some of them are not like that but in my experiences, I’ve only had certain few White friends that come back and talk to me.

**Latinx Needs.** Darlenys expressed several ways the campus could address the needs of Latinx students. One way is recruiting more Latinx professors who understand Spanish and



studied science. She stated, “with my teachers, sometimes it’s pretty hard because, again, sometimes the language barriers, it’s pretty hard to talk with them. If you had some that were Hispanic, it would help and it would also show you that it’s never impossible for you to get to your goals.” Another way to address the Latinx needs is by recruiting more Latinx students. She stated that it’s hard to identify with others because you barely have anyone to share Hispanic jokes. An additional way to address the needs of Latinx students is by expanding the campus meal options and including Spanish food. Darlenys and her friends have to search outside of campus to find authentic Mexican food. She also has to search for special creams for pain off campus. Lastly, Darlenys desires to see more of culture represented on the campus. She feels a little sad because she would like to express her traditions more than just at home. She stated,

I don’t want to feel like I’m being shut down because I don’t have all my Latino friends. Again, I would love to express it [traditions] to even to any race, but sometimes a lot of races don’t understand what you do because their point of view is different than the way you do it and sometimes they’ll think it’s wrong. And it would be nicer if you had more Latinos so that way you get a little backed up.

Darlenys commented, “I feel like that would help if we had more Latino clubs. I think, if I’m not wrong, I think the LASO is the only big one that we know. I feel like more clubs like that would help.” She said that the Latinx clubs do not depict all of the Latin countries or their traditions, and when they do give a program on a particular cultural tradition, the depiction is not an accurate representation of the culture. Darlenys has noticed that less Latinx students and more Whites, Blacks, and Asians attend the club events. She presumes that Latinx students are not attending the events because their parents expect them to go to school and go right back

home. She presumes based on personal experience that students have a curfew that prevent them from attending events.

**Feelings of Affirmation.** Darlenys acknowledges the things that positively affirm her place on the campus. For instance, being around Black and Latinx people with similar struggles is encouraging to her. Her cultural experiences helps her to understand other racial groups going through tough times and problems. She stated, “sometimes you tend to be like, “Wow. You’re going through the same thing as I did. You come from the same place as I do.” In different situations, but you kind of do go through almost the same thing.”

Reflecting on her experiences through the interview also increased feelings of affirmation for Darlenys. She gained a better sense of her purpose. When reflecting on the interview, she stated that the questions were deep and made her think about the problems that exist. She realized there are barely any Latinx students and thinks that it’s a problem and we are not reaching them. She said, “maybe I would like to try to do some more. Maybe get involved with the clubs and be able to bring out more Latinos...and educate the community.” The literature discussed that some students who become aware of inequalities are encouraged to get involved in creating change on the campus. Darlenys, Israel, and other interviewees expressed interest in taking action on campus to address social issues.

### **Iris Experience**

Iris is an 18-year old Latina female approaching her second year of college pursuing Childhood Studies as a major and Women and Gender Studies as a minor. Iris also entered college in the summer for the EOF summer institute. She was born and raised in a Spanish-speaking household, but has trouble speaking both Spanish and English. She understands Spanish, but she responds in Spanglish, which she described as sometimes English and

sometimes Spanish. When spoken to in English, she thinks before responding to avoid improper grammar. Iris rated her ties to her Latinx culture as moderate. She and her family celebrate the holidays connected to the Latinx culture such as Three Kings Day, Feliz Navidad, Day of the Saints, and Yemaya. Iris explained that Yemaya is a Goddess who protects mothers and their children. In addition, many Latinx people including Mexicans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans live in her hometown, New Brunswick. In the past she considered the people from Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras to be Mexican until she learned the difference. Then a demographic shift occurred when she transitioned into a school outside of her home district. She went from being one of many Latinx students in her previous school to being one of a few Latinx students in her new school at a College Prep Charter School from grades 7-12, which was predominantly Black and Asian. Her graduating class was 32 people.

**Positive Campus Climate.** Iris shared various aspects of the campus that she considered to be positive. For example, Iris is associated with several organizations that help her feel connected to the campus. Like most of the research participants, she is a participant in the Educational Opportunity Fund Program. She is also a member of an interest group for a multicultural sorority. She presumes that White students do not join the multicultural or Latin sororities because they are afraid it does not represent them. She is a member of LASO the Latin American Student Organization. She recognized LASO as one of the aspects of the campus that helps her feel welcomed. She stated that it is “times like when LASO created a Hispanic event, that's when it became welcoming. So I feel like it takes a Hispanic person to create something in order for other Hispanics to want to do something. But if it's the school itself, I feel as if they're not going to do anything for us.” Iris was also involved in the EOF Student Advisory Board, and the Resident Hall Association. The EOF Student Advisory Board has three Latinx and one Black

member. According to Iris, the Resident Hall Association was mixed with everything because it was connected to the dorms and anyone in the resident halls could join. In addition, Iris works on campus as a receptionist for EOF, which she considers to be diverse given the work environment, is made up of Black, White, and Latinx people.

Iris highlighted her class, Dance of African diaspora, as one of the aspects of campus that influences a sense of belonging for her. I presume that the course validates her cultural background as it incorporates traditional ethnic song and dance, which are key elements of the Latinx culture that the other research participants also emphasized in their interviews. She mentioned the class would get filled up quickly before class began, which she considers to be dedication.

**The Invisible Culture.** Iris described instances where her culture felt invisible on the campus. Iris explained that before switching her major to Childhood Studies, she was studying Criminal Justice, which was primarily filled with White students. In addition, her professors have mainly been White. She had one Black professor for an African-American class.

Iris admits that adjusting to the campus culture has been difficult as a Latina. From the interview, I have gathered that Iris does not perceive the campus culture is inclusive of the Latinx population. She said,

It's been challenging because I'm trying to find-- I bought a coffee maker just to make some coffee because I don't like the taste of Starbucks every day or the taste of 7-Eleven coffee. And the food, I feel like they portray food a certain way here. I don't know. When they make food it's not really like-- I think all campus food sucks no matter what. But the fact that when they make Spanish stuff, they think of automatically tacos and things like that, when not all Spanish people eat that. So when they do cook it here, and when they

have events here and they try to embrace Spanish cultures, you usually have chips and salsa. If I want chips and salsa, I could go to 7-Eleven. Show me diversity. Show me what you could get from Puerto Rico that's different from, I don't know, Dominican Republic. Show me the different pasteles that you could get everywhere.

She referenced another example of the Latinx culture being excluded from the campus. Iris reflected on campus events and only recalls hip hop, rap, and pop playing at basketball games or sporting events. She wondered if Spanish music is ever played at such events. She also pondered if posters are ever printed in Spanish. She stated, "It shouldn't be just LASO's job to make Spanish events, it should be the school's job too."

**Negative Climate.** Iris provided real scenarios that influenced an unwelcoming and negative campus climate. The real scenarios included public and personal racial incidents that increase racial tension among her and other students. Students were negatively affected by the racial incident and reacted on social media eliciting over 200 Facebook posts in response to the event. She highlighted a student who felt betrayed, offended, hurt, and bothered by the incident because his Mexican heritage was being ridiculed. Iris stated,

I feel like there's certain situations and certain things that make Rutgers-Camden not welcoming to Hispanics. Because there was this cystic fibrosis thing that they had going on with the D Phi E sorority. And it was like anyone can come, it was a fraternity broadcasting a talent basically, and the D Phi E was hosting it. One of the talents that they do every year, someone eats something. This year, a very husky Caucasian man ate Chipotle while having a sombrero on. I don't remember the details because I wasn't personally there, but I heard and I saw pictures. He had a sombrero, played mariachi music in the background, portraying-- I think he was wearing a poncho, but I'm not too

sure, had a Maraca necklace, portraying that this is what Hispanic culture do, which is very insulting and it's a Caucasian man doing that, so it felt very disrespectful...And it's just the simple fact that that person was Caucasian and that made it worse because they never went through-- I don't want to say they never went through struggles because we don't know their personal life. But they never had someone look at them and automatically think, "Oh, you're a thief," or, "Oh, you're a killer," or something like that. Or, "Oh, you steal," or stuff like that. No one automatically thought that kind of stuff towards a Caucasian basically. But they don't know how, when they discriminate or they stereotype somebody, how much it hurts them because they've went through stuff that that person might not have gone through.

Iris was sensitive towards the situation and said that if people had the audacity to mock an oppressed group in public, she could only imagine the insults that takes place in private. She said that insulting Mexicans at the talent show was the same as people celebrating Cinco de Mayo to have another reason to drink tequila. During the interview, she also critiqued White students for not taking the time out to learn and appreciate the Latinx culture and dances, but prefer to take a shot of tequila during Cinco de Mayo.

Iris also described a time when she felt a low sense of belonging, and she was shocked that the feeling occurred in her Spanish class. The professor compared Latinx people from Colombia, his country, to Latinx people in America. Iris felt belittled by the comparison. She feels like Americans will judge people for not being American enough, and Latinx people will judge people for not being Latin enough.

Iris described a couple of negative racial experiences in the resident halls. For example, she noticed that the rooms are filled with a single race or ethnicity. Iris stated, "it was like

majority of White people in a room, or a majority of African Americans in a room. So I found that interesting. You picked out of a hat, but yet all this one race is in this room.” Iris discussed another negative encounter that she experienced in the resident halls. She felt like she was wrongfully accused of having guests at a party, and her privileges were taken away. Iris had to meet with an administrator in the housing department, and she described the conversation below.

Oh, you people are always up to no good. Oh, they stated that there was people at that party, apparently you had guests." I was like, "Why?" She's [administrator] like, 'You've been in a track record already. You've been in trouble a couple of times. You sure you didn't have any guests with you?' I felt very bothered by that. Why is she coming at me for this stuff? And everytime I try to do a-- not argument, but try to get my stuff back. I forgot the word for it. Petition for my things back, they always say, "Okay, we're not going to give you all of it back, but we'll give you a piece by piece." So I'm on probation until December for two noise complaints and then the guests, no three noise complaints and then the guests policy. But I'm on probation until December. So it bothered me a lot because she gets the final say and it's a Caucasian woman deciding my fate.

Lastly, Iris stated that she is skeptical about some of the services geared towards helping low income students who are generally Students of Color. She characterized the existing services as superficial, as if such programs were created to help build the institution's positive reputation. The scenarios including the cultural appropriation, judgement from the professor, segregated rooms, false accusations, and superficial services all play a role in influencing a negative campus climate for Latinx students like Iris.

**Latinx Needs.** Iris described some ideas for supporting the needs of Latinx students including having more Latinx professors on the campus. She stated,

When it comes to the teachers, I feel like I wish I could see more professors of my background, teaching, not Spanish class, but History or something like that because it'd be nice to know that okay, I've seen a professor who's of my descent. Maybe they went through my challenges, so maybe I could do it too.

In addition to having more Latinx professors, she desires more Latinx staff to serve as advocates for the Latinx student body. She stated,

I feel like a majority of the head people over in the dorms are Caucasian and it doesn't really help when there is an African-American student or a Hispanic student just looking for some guidance that isn't the RAs, but someone that works in the residence hall, because they have no one to look at.

Latinx students like Iris need to find ways to maintain their culture while on campus. Therefore, Latinx students bring aspects of their culture to campus to interrupt the White culture that overwhelmingly dominates the campus. She stated, "Like, the coffee I'm drinking right now is Bustelo, so that's another thing. So I try to bring it within the food that I have here."

She also mentioned that she plays Spanish music while cleaning with Fabuloso, a cleaning product commonly found in a Latin household, and she laughed while talking about it. Iris stated, "because there's not a lot of Latino people - Latinx people here - I feel like if I don't embrace it here, I'm going to lose it."

The culture is different when she goes back home to work. Iris stated,

I work at IHOP. When I say it's nothing but Spanish people cooking, nothing but Spanish people. And you're always hearing Spanish music in the back. So, it's like I'm always, wherever I'm going, in New Jersey up north, I'm always having that Spanish culture. But when I'm here, I have to create that culture for myself.



**Feelings of Affirmation.** Iris explains aspects that help Students of Color feel included on the campus. She highlighted the diversity in the Educational Opportunity Fund program. For example, Iris described a time that she and her friend saw someone wearing a Hijab. Iris explained that her friend “smiled so brightly, knowing that she’s not alone, that there is somebody that is in EOF, not in her year, but in EOF, who is in the same background culture. So I liked the fact that EOF made sure they picked a broad set of people.” Through her example, Iris expressed the importance of seeing people from your same background to help you feel that you are not alone. Perhaps the reason Iris wants to join a cultural Greek-lettered organization is to meet other people with a similar background. Iris, Israel, Laura, and Giselle all expressed an interest in joining a cultural greek-lettered organization, which is another way to increase their feelings of belonging and affirmation. In addition, Iris expressed an appreciation for the interview questions. She stated, “I feel like I’m getting understood. Someone actually wants to hear an opinion of a Latino/Latina student.” Therefore, asking students about their cultural experiences can affirm, encourage, and emotionally support Latinx students who do not feel welcomed or included on the campus.

### **Evelyn’s Experience**

Evelyn is a 19-year old Puerto Rican female entering her third year of college, studying Graphic design, and also in the EOF program. She works on campus for the Information Technology Desk. She described her work environment as mixed with Latinx students and Egyptians. She also comes from a mixed family. Both her mom and dad remarried to Mexicans, and their spouses have been in her life since she was younger. Therefore, she claimed that she has adopted the Mexican culture. At home she speaks English, but she understands Spanish more than most of her friends who are Latinx. Evelyn rated her ties to her Latinx culture as

moderate because she has an understanding of the Spanish language. She stated that she likes having ties to her Latinx culture, which differs from other people she knows who were raised the American way.

Coming to Rutgers was a cultural shift for Evelyn. She was raised in Camden, NJ where people are mostly Black or Latinx and the same racial makeup existed in her K-12 experience. Her pre-college experience was revolved around Black and Latinx students, then she entered a campus filled with people who are Muslim, Asian, Egyptian, middle Eastern, and White, which she found interesting, cool, and mind blowing. Evelyn became close friends with a Muslim student from Bangladesh. She stated that it has been interesting learning about her friend's culture.

**Positive Campus Climate.** Evelyn acknowledged having positive experiences on campus. She mentioned that all campus activities help her feel a sense of belonging on campus because the activities are open to everyone. She has attended events hosted by LASO- the Latin American Student Organization, and Asian oriented events. I presume that many of Evelyn's positive campus experiences are related to her personal network of friends and connections to campus organizations including EOF. Most of Evelyn's close circle of friends are Latinx and from her hometown in Camden. They understand each other because they grew up in similar households. They understand the jokes they make about having Latinx mothers. Although most of them understand Spanish, they will make a joke about one of their friends not understanding something said in Spanish. According to Evelyn, it has also been easy for her to adjust to the campus because she made connections to Latinx women who understand her. She stated,

I've talked with a sorority - they're not on campus anymore - because my aunt used to be with them. And it was nice when I was talking with them because it's a Latina sorority.

And basically, it was nice to have a conversation with them, and them understand because their parents came here, and their parents didn't speak English or anything like that. Luckily, my parents knew English, but at the same time, my mom, if she goes to write something, I have to read it to make sure it makes sense because she can speak English, but she can't necessarily write very well. So it's kind of just that understanding of, "Yeah. We have to be there for our parents...Because just me talking with them, I kind of had a connection of-- me personally, I've never been really close to girls. I usually talk to a lot of guys. And it was really interesting having a conversation with them and having that understanding of growing up in a Hispanic home, and I was like, "You know, this is really nice." I feel, in a way, I was kind of like-- I kind of want other people to be able to talk to people about this, especially sister-wise, because I know--Their culture and stuff like that. Because they have an understanding of it, and it's really nice to have a group of people who have been through similar situations but have different perspectives on it come together and just spend time with each other.

She stated, that she was not as interested in joining a "regular" sorority because she was not sure if she would have that same bond with them because she wants to have things in common with a group of sorority sisters.

**The Invisible Culture.** Although Evelyn noted that she has had positive experiences on campus, she described some of her favorite aspects of the Latinx culture that were missing from the campus. For example, she misses Spanish food, and spending time with family. She stated, My mom, she knows I like to eat and that I don't always like eating campus food and stuff like that. So usually if I'm home, I'll eat there. And then at the same time, she'll give me extra food to take with me back on campus. And sometimes, I do share with-- what'd

I bring? I don't know what it's called, but it's kind of like a platano, a lasagna-type thing, where it's platano, and beef, and cheese. And I brought that, and I shared it with my boyfriend because he's never had it before, and he really liked it.

Evelyn's boyfriend, who is White, enjoys the food that she introduces to him. Food is such a major theme that appeared across the majority of the research interviews. Going away to college strips students away from much of their culture, especially the authentic Spanish food. The curriculum can also distance students from their culture. For instance, Evelyn is interested in learning Latinx history, but as a freshman she was automatically placed into a European History course.

In addition to food, Latinx professors are also missing from the campus. When reflecting on the racial/ethnic makeup of her professors, she first talked about the diversity among her professors being White, Arabic, and Asian. However, none of her professors have were Latinx.

**Negative Climate.** Evelyn has had negative experiences as a student on the campus. One of her negative experiences involved people from the local community. She stated, Because I'm pale and people don't know I'm Puerto Rican, the majority of the time, they think I'm white. I was walking to work one day, and I heard a group of people who weren't students, they were probably just passing by campus, and they said some really negative things, and they called me a pale skin or white-skinned or something like that. And I kind of got offended from it because I'm not white, I'm Hispanic... since I am pale, people do think I'm white a lot, and so people treat me like that. And it's funny because my dad, he's actually--We were talking before, and he was like, 'It's a good thing we're paler skin because then cops wouldn't pull us over.' Because there's racist cops who just pull darker-skinned people over. And that's kind of like a blessing and a curse in and of

its own because I kind of want to be known as Hispanic. But from the way-- I guess because of my skin tone, and the way I act, and the way I am, I come off as white, and so I kind of just blend in with everything. And then when I come to a Hispanic group and I'll start speaking Spanish or something like that, that's mind-blowing to them [laughter].

Another time Evelyn had a negative experience was when a group of predominantly White athletes mocked her because of her hair being orange. They said her hair looked like a carrot. She commented that some people think they're better than everyone else. She exclaimed, "And culture-wise, that can go a long way, especially nowadays with Trump [laughter]." From my understanding, Evelyn is referring to president Trump because he is one to say anything he feels and thinks even if offensive to another racial or ethnic group. The other negative aspect of the campus that Evelyn observes is segregation through the formation of cliques. She mentioned that, "The majority of the time, people do end up having cliques with people that they have a lot of things in common with, and sometimes, race happens to be one of them."

**Latinx Needs.** Evelyn suggested ways to support the needs of Latinx students to help them feel more included and welcomed on campus. She recognized that other activities and events on campus are geared towards other cultures, or for everyone. Creating events that target Latinx students may be a start for helping them feel more included. Additionally, Some ideas that Evelyn mentioned could easily be implemented are playing more Spanish music, serving authentic Spanish food, and incorporating more opportunities for Spanish dancing on the campus. She stated,

I'm kind of biased, but I like to Bachata [laughter]." She mentioned that she was able to enjoy Bachata during a LASO sponsored event. She said, "I think also when they have the beginning-of-the-semester parties and stuff like that, when they have a DJ and stuff

like that. I feel like they play a lot of Trap music, and I'm like, "You should probably switch that up to different kinds of music." Because I'm just there like, "I can't dance to this."

Evelyn also commented that we need more Latinx professors. She said, "I never really thought about it, but I'm kind of like, 'They need more of that [laughter],' now that I think about it. Because I feel like that's a whole different perspective. Because different cultures bring different perspectives into teaching and stuff like that."

**Feelings of Affirmation.** Evelyn was the fifth participant to declare her interest in joining a cultural greek-lettered organization, which she clearly admitted as one of the factors that helped her adjust to the campus. The sisters in the cultural sorority increased her feelings of affirmation because they understood her background.

Being asked to reflect on the Latinx culture during the the interview was affirming for Evelyn. Through the reflection process, Evelyn was encouraged to think about her culture, and she wants to learn more about the History of Puerto Rico to have a stronger understanding of her roots. She reflected on the interview by stating,

I felt like it was very-- got me thinking [laughter] because I don't really think much about how, culturally, how things are on campus. I kind of just go with things, but that's kind of how I am as a person is I just go with the flow of things. It kind of did make me think, though, how much of Hispanic culture is on campus and in my life. Because I know for a while, when I was younger, I kind of didn't want to necessarily-- how do I say this? I didn't want to necessarily do things that Hispanics did... Yeah. I didn't really want to embrace it because I was kind of-- at the time, I wasn't interested in knowing Spanish and stuff like that. And when I got older, I was kind of like, "This would actually be really

nice to have [laughter]...And I kind of wanted to learn more about my culture and things in general like that [laughter].

### **Jessica's Experience**

Jessica is a 19-year old Ecuadorian female approaching her second year of college and studying Biology. Jessica is one of the two research participants not affiliated with EOF, but rather connected to the TRiO program. TRiO is a federal grant program serving low income first generation college students, which she described as having a variety of people from different backgrounds. She works on campus in the chemistry department with students who are Black, Latinx, Pakistani, and her supervisor is White. Her hometown is North Plainfield, New Jersey, which consists of Latinx, White, Black, and Asian people. The demographics she described in her hometown was the same in her K-12 schools. Jessica was the only research participant who rated her ties to her Latinx culture as strong. She extolled that she is family oriented, frequently attends Ecuadorian parties, speaks Spanish at home and cooks Spanish food. Jessica likes participating in events related to the Ecuadorian culture such as the Danza. She stated, "It's where you get folklore clothes, you dance in those parades, you give back to community."

**Positive Campus Climate.** Jessica had positive views about the campus. For example, she described the campus as being really welcoming, friendly, and united. In addition, she claimed that most of her time is spent with her roommates who are Black, White, and Pakistani. Jessica explained that her roommates were accepting of each other's culture, and the Spanish music she played like Farruko, Wisin & Yandel, Maluma.

**The Invisible Culture.** On the other hand, Jessica does not widely see her culture represented on campus. She explained that the campus is a place where you rarely see Latinx students and rarely speak Spanish. To be explicit, she said, "I don't feel like there's a lot of

Spanish people here.” She stated, “I thought at first it wasn't as diverse, but there's maybe not a lot of Latinos that I know, but there's a good diversity of people. Different cultures.” Moreover, she said, “I mean it felt a little bit weird once I got home to speak Spanish, because all I did was speak English all the time.” She has started assimilating to the American college culture, which is affecting her when she goes back home.

Jessica notices the absence of her culture while she is on campus. She stated that she misses the order/rules of the house, and the family culture. According to Dennis, Phinney, and Chuateco (2005), having the more individualistic orientation motivation to attend college at the beginning of the sophomore year is important for feelings of satisfaction with the college environment and commitment to finishing college at the end of the year. Individualistic motivations are based on personal interest, intellectual curiosity, and the desire to attain a rewarding career (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005). While Latinx students like Jessica may have individualistic motivations for attending college, they also have collectivist motivations as they come from interdependent family cultures. However, Latinx students are expected to move away from their collectivist culture and transition to a more individualist culture to commit to finishing college.

In addition, while Jessica is on campus, she misses the food from home. She said the cafeteria serves food like pizza, sandwiches, wraps, pasta, and steaks. However, she would like to see a variety of food, as well as people who put care into meal prepping. She resorts to eating the campus food because she was raised to eat the food even if she doesn't like it, but she prefers having Ecuadorian food at times. Therefore, she travels to Philadelphia, the next state closest to the campus, to eat Ecuadorian food. She stated, “I was looking up Ecuadorian food in the area. I'm pretty sure they're by the same owner. There's one in Pennsauken, and one in Philly. Yeah.



And I was like, "Alright, let's go try it out." Yeah. Or I'll still bring food from home, and that's considered sticking with your culture." Jessica expressed feeling of happy about moving into a new space in the resident halls that has a kitchen, so she can cook. She stated that she is used to a different style of cooking. When I asked her what she would cook, she replied, "Rice, meat, frituras. Ecuadorian stuff [laughter]." Most participants in this research study laugh after making comments about food during their interview.

**Negative Climate.** During her in-depth interview, Jessica mentioned negative aspects of the campus. For example, the campus has a negative stigma given its location in Camden NJ, a city that is frequently on the news for crimes. When she informed her friends she would be attending Rutgers University - Camden, they reacted by saying "Oh, my God, like hold on." People have a negative view about the city, which also came up during the in-depth interviews for Zoe and Darlenys. In addition, Jessica observed segregation in the resident halls where mostly Black students live and interact among their racial/ethnic group.

Jessica described a negative incident when a White student tried to challenge her integrity on an assignment. The student gave Jessica a dirty look in class, and Jessica reciprocated the same gesture. She felt like the student was trying to bring her down and see her fail. She stated, "it just makes me mad because we're supposed to be bringing out the best in each other. But unfortunately, there's people that are just trying to always be better than you." In addition, she described another incident when a White student called her loud and annoying while she was talking to her friend over the phone.

**Latinx Needs.** Latinx students have specific needs to feel more included on the campus, which Jessica specified in her interview. For instance, she expressed her need to engage in Ecuadorian events to feel a sense of belonging. She stated, "I prefer to be at an Ecuadorian

party, compared to like a college house party or something like a frat party.” She has been to frat parties but she stated, “I felt like it wasn't my place.” When comparing a fraternity party to an Ecuadorian party, she stated that an Ecuadorian party is more family-oriented. She said, “I prefer to go to my family parties, like Ecuadorian parties and Ecuadorian concerts. I prefer-- I feel more connected being with people like that...I feel more connected when I'm with people from my country. It's fun.”

Jessica described a need to stay connected to her roots, therefore, she brings aspects of her culture to the campus. As a result, she compensates for the cultural shortfalls of the campus by exposing others to her Latinx culture. She stated,

For me, my culture is important. My Spanish roots are important. I know a lot of people, for example, that are like, ‘Okay, they're Spanish, Latino background,’ but I don't feel like they embrace it. Like my friend who commutes, she embraces her culture, I feel. She'll bring horchata to school everyday. She's open about her food and that's how I am. I was very Ecuadorian. I would bring food from back home from an Ecuadorian restaurant. It was this purple drink, everybody was like, "What is that?" And I was like, "Oh, it's really good. Try it." And they were like, "Oh my God, it's really good.

She makes a poignant statement about feeling homesick because she needed a friend she could relate to. She quoted,

*‘Why do I feel homesick or something?’* I was like, ‘Why do I feel like I'm not-- I don't feel happy. I feel like something is wrong.’ And then I would look at my surroundings, and I was like, ‘Well, I really don't have any Spanish person to feel like I have someone to talk to.’ Then once the end of the semester came, I met a couple of Spanish people and I was like, ‘Alright. This is what I needed.’ I have a Spanish friend on the second floor or

two, but I would see them every other week. And it was just like, ‘Wow,’ this is what really got to me, I was just like, ‘Wow, maybe this is what I need, a diverse group of friends.’ Not diverse, but someone that's Spanish too. Not Ecuadorian, but someone Spanish that understands.

Eventually, she found a friend who was Mexican, and now she feels like she has someone to talk to and relate to. She stated that she knew something was missing. She stated, “I would sit in the room with people that don't even know Spanish, and I'll be laughing at these Spanish memes. And everybody's just like, ‘I don't get it.’ I was like, ‘You can't understand. You have to be Spanish to understand.’”

**Feelings of Affirmation.** Jessica discusses ways she feels affirmed on campus. She brings up the use of music as one way to affirm Latinx students. If playing Spanish music around campus became normalized, then Jessica would more likely feel comfortable listening to her Spanish music in public. However, she feels more comfortable playing Spanish music around other Latinx people. Jessica stated, “at the beginning of the semester, I felt bad. I was like, ‘I feel like I'm just blasting my Spanish music in the shower, and they're probably just like, ‘Oh my God, here we go again.’” And I was like, “I feel really bad.” Jessica explained that she feels wrong for playing Spanish music in public because she is the only person who speaks Spanish. She explained that she would feel more comfortable blasting Spanish music in front of a group of Latinx people. Her peers on campus labeled her as the Spanish friend or the Spanish girl because she embraces her culture.

### **Focus Group**

I facilitated a focus group fall 2017, the semester following the in-depth interviews summer 2017. The focus group was strategically scheduled several weeks after the fall 2017

semester began. I expected students would have had racial/cultural experiences they could highlight in the focus group that occurred after the in-depth interviews. Six participants attended the focus group interview. The participants presented a variety of new experiences they gained since the in-depth interviews took place. The experiences described in the focus group were aligned with those discussed during the in-depth interviews. In other words, the same themes from the in-depth interviews appeared in the focus group. The findings section was organized by the overarching themes including: Positive Campus Climate, Invisible Culture, Negative Campus Climate, Latinx Needs, and Feelings of Affirmation. Relevant excerpts within the participant interviews were grouped under applicable themes.

### **Positive Campus Climate**

Positive aspects of the campus were mentioned from one person during the focus group. Anthony had described positive experiences he's had since we last spoke during his personal interview. He explained that, although he is a member of a historically White fraternity, he has been making efforts to embrace and celebrate the Latinx culture. For example, his fraternity collaborated on a cultural event, Noche de Tremendo, with a Latin sorority, and the fraternity also planned a Taco Tuesday event. According to Anthony, his fraternity is trying to branch out to get more prospective students who are Latinx. He stated, "It's really me trying to do it [collaborate]... I realized we never really do anything with any of the cultural fraternities or sororities." Anthony also mentioned that the demographic of his fraternity is changing on his campus. More Indian and Latinx men are joining the organization.

### **The Invisible Culture**

Feelings of not being culturally represented on the campus were expressed during the focus group. For instance, Darlenys reiterated her observations from the in-depth interview by

mentioning the following. First, a low representation of Latinx students exist on campus. Next, students lack the knowledge of particular Latinx traditions. Lastly, many Latin places such as Ecuador, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Colombia, and so forth are not represented.

Darlenys expressed,

Well, for me I prefer a lot more clubs that are Latino-related. I've been here four years technically. My first year, I did not know nobody that was Hispanic, and if there were, you never saw them. The only person I knew was David. If you guys know, he works in the Starbucks. But that was my only friend. I mean, besides my friends from high school, but I never saw. If you went to the clubs known as [LASO], they try-- David was the president, he tried to bring in the Mexican culture so people would know, but it was very hard. For us, like right now in November, towards October-- or the ending of October to November, we have a very significant type of-- significant dates which are Day of the Dead, Dia de Los Muertos. For us, that's very significant. That means that our loved ones who passed away are coming back. And what we do, it's significant. The flowers, the candles, the food, it all has its meaning. When we went to the event [last year], for whoever went, nobody had the experience to know what it was, because the music they had in the background was not Mexican nor did it show or depict any of our culture.

In addition, Jessica expressed similar sentiments about the campus poorly representing the Latinx culture. For example, Jessica explained that the campus misses opportunities to invite Latinx speakers to motivate the students. Jessica stated,

Well, I feel like a lot of times, for example, you know how they have LGBT month?

They bring a lot of people that talk about their experience. Well, I feel, coming from a Spanish home, you really don't see a lot of Hispanics coming like, "Oh, well, I came from

a Hispanic home, and I went to school. I have a career now." I don't feel like I see that. I feel like they focus on, oh, well, they'll bring people from the STEM. I think it was kind of like a whole thing with women in STEM and stuff like that, which is cool, too, but I feel like they don't really involve people from different cultures and how they became successful or how they went to school or what their outcome was.

### **Negative Campus Climate**

The students in the focus group talked about new experiences that have been negative since the in-depth interviews. For example, described not feeling supported by the White staff when she reported being bullied by her White roommate. Jessica complained about receiving threatening voicemails, feeling uncomfortable, crying, losing focus, and wanting to leave school. Finally, Jessica was assaulted by her roommate, but got arrested for injuring the offender during self defense. Jessica was summoned to court and hired a lawyer. She stated, "I thought my whole life was going to turn upside down. I'm first generation, I'm Hispanic, and I'm just like, 'Wow.' The sheriff was White, and she [offender] was White, and the three of us involved were minorities."

Darlenys also described a negative experience when she and her friends were enjoying a mariachi band at a LASO sponsored event. She stated,

That's my culture. I like it. A lot of people don't know about it, a lot of people don't like it. It's perfectly fine. But when I was like, my friends, three of us, were singing towards the song, everybody looked at us, and they looked at us like, 'Okay. You all okay? You all too excited? You guys are good.' I was like, 'But that's my culture.' I don't want to feel like I can't express or show what I like in an event that's international, that shows everybody's culture.

Then, Iris took the initiative of informing the others about the negative racial incident that took place in the previous semester. Below is the dialogue about the racial incident.

**Iris:** Last year, there was a Deepher Dude that was Caucasian, and his talent was eating a burrito, and it was this whole-- it got serious. David posted it on Facebook. It was that whole not-- it was a whole, complete nonsense. He's Caucasian, it was for Deepher Dudes, it was for a talent show to raise money for, I believe, children with leukemia and his talent was eating a burrito under a certain amount of time. Mariachi music was playing in the background, he had Maracas or some type of necklace. He had a sombrero. He had a poncho, all that-- even a burrito. Yeah.

**Darlenys:** I would feel offended.

**Interviewer:** Why would you feel offended?

**Iris:** It got Facebook blast and everything.

**Darlenys:** Because one, burrito is not Mexican. Two, if you're a Caucasian. I mean, I don't mind anybody-- you know how people-- they're like, "Oh, I get offended." On Halloween, you dress up or whatever. But Halloween is to dress up. I would honestly not mind if somebody dressed with a poncho or a sombrero if you're not insulting my country. But I mean, like I said, if you're going to wear it and eat a burrito, on a certain amount, I feel like that's your-- you're making a joke out of my country."

**Laura:** But I feel like it's just not his fault. It's also who hosted because I feel like when you do talent shows, you have to approve the talent. You have to approve to use it.

**Iris:** He just said that he was just eating the burrito. He never mentioned the accessories or anything like that.

**Iris:** Because I continued reading the comments and everything. And it got really-- he was like, "I'm sorry, dude." But David was really--

**Interviewer:** What would you have liked to see, if you saw somebody doing that, what would you want to happen in that moment? Do you know?

**Iris:** For him to stop, to be honest.

**Darlenys:** Just take the accessories out.

**Iris:** You come out wearing, that and you're about to grab a burrito, just go where you come from. Take the stuff off and go home. You're not even going to win a contest. That's nonsense.

**Darlenys:** Or just take it off and eat the burrito.

**Laura:** Or you can have after that-- after whatever happened, you can have like disclaimers saying, "Hey, sorry if we ever offended anybody," or, "We're not here to discriminate anybody," something like that just so that, "Wow, nothing was said after this. Is this really happening?" So if something was said like just a speech or just a quick thing, all right. We get it. I understand. Yeah.

One last notable incident that influenced a negative campus climate is when the campus forgot to celebrate Hispanic Heritage month. The students expressed sadness about the campus not celebrating Hispanic heritage month. Some mentioned that they were accustomed to celebrating Hispanic heritage month in their K-12 education.

### **Latinx Needs**

The needs of Latinx students on campus were addressed during the focus group meeting. For instance, Laura mentioned that students need to see more diversity on the campus because she is unsatisfied with the low presence of Latinx students and Latin oriented



organizations. According to Anthony, the Greek advisor of sororities and fraternities added more requirements for members to organize diversity programming. Laura stated,

So I feel like this campus needs more diversity because I feel I don't see much Spanish people. When I was in my freshmen year, I only knew people from the EOF program, that was the only Spanish people that I saw. I've seen you before and somebody else but that's about it. I'm like where are the Dominicans at? Where are Puerto Ricans at? Where are Mexicans at?...I feel like this campus in general just needs to praise more of our nationalities. And so I'm really trying hard to bring an organization to campus, and it's pretty hard. They're Latin-based, Latin-oriented... it also depends on the authorities because I heard the authorities here are kind of strict, which is kind of unfortunate because us students, we're trying to make a difference here and it's really hard sometimes because we can't, we get turned down.

Latin students also need more staff who can support, relate, and understand the Latinx student experience. The students only named two Latinx staff members they could contact for support. Israel acknowledged that the primary investigator [me] of this research study is one of the two mentioned. Shortly after, Iris reflected on her counselor who holds her accountable and reminds her of a mother figure. Iris stated, "I can count on Mrs. Waters honestly when it comes to Spanish rice and culture because we've had a couple of conversations, and she's someone that - she's like that Spanish mom."

Iris mentioned the idea of protesting for the needs of Latinx students to be met. Iris stated, "But no, we really should [protest], it's crazy because we say we want something. It's so easy to say it but not do it. I know we're all busy and it takes a lot of time to do all the other stuff, but if we at least do it one time it's like, 'Whoa, okay, they're serious about this.'" Below is the

conversation among some of the focus group participants that helped formulate a preliminary list of requests, which include: 1) More Latinx professors and staff that represent various departments, 2) Cultural Competency Training, and 3) More variety of diverse programming.

**Israel:** What do Spanish teachers teach?

**Laura:** Spanish.

**Iris:** We have Spanish teachers that speak Spanish, like Colombian and all that.

**Laura:** I had Spanish teachers that teach Spanish.

**Iris:** So you want a Spanish teacher teaching Psychology?

**Laura:** Yeah, like other authorities. I feel like they can relate more-- because Spanish just doesn't relate to Spanish. They relate to--

**Iris:** Minorities.

**Laura:** African-Americans because lowkey, we are all in the same boat. So I feel like if we have more Spanish authorities, people sometimes will feel much comfortable, to be honest. Let's be real.

**Interviewer:** Who's going to feel more comfortable?

**Laura:** Us minorities. Because sometimes maybe, let's say if I'm in a Sociology class and we're speaking about race, I feel like I can't even say a few things because I don't know if the teacher is going to feel offended or these kids. I'm pretty sure a White teacher's going to support all the other White kids instead of the Blacks and the other minorities. In my opinion.

**Interviewer:** So you want more teachers and Arturoities--

**Iris:** I'm looking at more like diversity, in a sense, because this campus doesn't have much of it, but when they try to do it, it's very stereotypical. So when I think of

something-- international week is nice. I like it, I guess. But also, why not a diversity night? And that campus center. We know we don't use all the rooms at the same time at night. So why not have the MPR as a social gathering thing toward the end, and you know the Tunnel of Oppression? Have a Tunnel of Diversity. And they have every single room a nationality.

**Laura:** I like that.

**Iris:** Like have Spanish, Asian, if you want, you could put American. So we could all feel included in this stuff.

**Laura:** That's really smart.

**Iris:** Gracias. Thank you.

### **Feelings of Affirmation**

Students described different ways to affirm Latinx students on campus. For example, Iris suggested incorporating Spanish into branding and marketing materials. She stated,

Posters wise everything is in English...There's a lot of people on this campus, and they all don't just speak English. So having different posters with probably positive quotes or encouraging sayings or motivational stuff and having it around campus like how they do it over by the campus [student center] next to the MPR [Multipurpose Room] with those photos. There are diverse people, but everything is in English. Why not have an Asian person and there's some type of Asian language or Hispanic person and Spanish language and all that.

Another way to help Latinx students feel affirmed on the campus is by playing more Spanish music at events. Music was a topic that was prevalent across the in-depth interviews and appeared again in the focus group. Most of the students in the focus group lit up when music

became the topic of conversation, and began contributing to the dialogue. The energy increased in the room, and the consensus was they were upset that Spanish music is not played at parties.

Below is the discourse on music that developed during the focus group.

**Iris:** When they have parties here, not like outside parties, but parties just in general, there's not like a lot of Spanish music. Spanish music they consider, Despacito, Suavemente--

**Laura:** [crosstalk] so disrespectful, Oh my God. Do you know how mad I get when they put like two little [songs]--

**Darlenys:** And the worst part is when they put Justin Bieber on.

**Iris:** And then everyone is singing just the Justin Bieber part. And then when they change the song--

**Laura:** Oh, My God, I get livid.

**Anthony:** Yea, that irks my soul.

**Darlenys:** It irks, my soul!

**Iris:**--they change it just after Justin Bieber, just because they want that part.

**Iris:** Do you know there's so much--

**Anthony:** that's a good song [laughter].

**Darlenys:** So guys, and then the worst part is, people don't know who made the song and they're like, "Justin Bieber did it." And I'm like--

**Iris:** Or like they think that's the original song.

**Darlenys:** I'm like, "You guys are in some other world."

**Iris:** Or like they think the background, like, "Wild thoughts" Yeah.

**Darlenys:** I'm like, I can't with you guys, I can't. We need to teach them music.

**Iris:** And if you put like some Spanish music, some like Rap or something, they are like, "What is this?" like, "Why are we listening to this stuff?" I'm like, this is what I use to clean my room, this is that popping music right.

Providing authentic Spanish food to students on campus is another way to affirm Latinx students. Many of the focus group participants agreed that the food in the cafeteria does not represent their culture. Darlenys said the tacos were Americanized and she wouldn't like them because they are not Mexican. Anthony recommended advertising the local Latin restaurant that is nearby the school. Below is a conversation from the focus group that depicts the low level of satisfaction with the campus food.

**Israel:** I'm going to put this out. When they did the three burrito bar whatever.

**Darlenys:** I hate it.

**Israel:** I thought that was kind of-- I didn't really like the fact that they did that--

**Darlenys:** First of all, burritos are not Mexican. They're not, and nobody in Mexico eats burritos because we don't even know what burritos are. I came to this country, and I was like, "What the hell is a burrito [laughter]?" They're like, "Oh my god, burritos are so good." And I'm like, "What the hell is a burrito?" They're like, "It's just a flour tortilla." I'm like, "First of all, we don't use flour tortilla, we use corn tortilla," I'm like, "What is that?" And they're like--

**Laura:** State the facts! [laughter].

**Darlenys:** "You put rice on it." and I'm like, "Why are you putting rice-- what are you doing?" And they're like, "You just wrap it." I'm like, "That doesn't even exist in Mexico." When I tell that they're like, "What [laughter] that's not Mexican?" I'm like, "No."

Seeing more external role models from the community is another source of affirmation. Laura suggested bringing Latinx speakers and slam poets. She reflected on someone who did perform at Rutgers Camden. Laura stated,

He was super dope. Like he talked about-- well, he has some Spanish background, because he was Boricua or Dominican. So I thought that was really beautiful because you can relate back to your Spanish culture, or whatever. Like even having a Spanish speaker, or anybody like that, talking about, 'Hey, I came here from this, and this is what I went through even just to come to America. Now I got a job, and I'm mad successful.' Have a slam poet, have un dancer. Have just people come. I know it's expensive, it takes time, but I'm pretty sure there's connects, people, everybody here have resources.

#### **Follow-up Email Summary**

On November 11, 2017, I emailed all ten of the participants in my dissertation study to thank them for their time to help me with my dissertation. I let them know that I appreciated hearing their stories. I ended the email by asking one question to elicit responses they may have missed during their interviews. The question asked about the factors that help them feel at home. The participants' email responses reinforced several themes from the in-depth interviews. Four out of the ten research participants responded to the email question. Table 4.1 illustrates the data collected from the follow-up email responses. I discuss the email responses below from Jessica, Laura, Darlenys, and Emily.

Jessica's short response confirmed several themes from the in-depth interviews including: *negative campus climate, Latinx needs, and feelings of affirmation*. Jessica's response to the email stated,

Well after everything that has happened this past month I felt that having you and TRiO as a resource was emotional support and knowing that you come from an understanding Hispanic background. Honestly, if I had never gone to your office and never even spoken to you I would have resigned from this university. Now that I look back at it, it actually upsets me because I would have been another failure statistic in the Hispanic community. I would have never known what to do and unfortunately, being Latina, I just felt that the resources wouldn't have been as helpful.

Jessica's negative campus experience almost influenced her to stop persisting in college. She found a resource in a campus staff person who could relate based on having similar cultural backgrounds, which helped to increase feelings of affirmation for Jessica. Furthermore, Jessica presented suggestions to address the needs of Latinx students including increasing feelings of affirmation among Latinx students. For example, she suggested decorating the bulletin boards for Hispanic Heritage month with Latin countries. In addition, she recommended to provide an incentive with high value to people who visit the bulletin boards, which are strategies used to get high volumes of traffic at campus programs. Jessica also proposed to invite more Latinx people in the community that overcame struggles and challenges. She stated, "I feel like you [the researcher] are an example because although we don't know your background, you are getting a doctorate degree which is a huge accomplishment." Lastly, Jessica volunteered her relatives, who perform at Latinx festivals showcasing the Ecuadorian culture, to perform on the campus.

In reading Laura's response to the follow-up email, I found that her response confirmed themes of *positive campus climate* and *Latinx needs*. Laura described ways she creates a positive campus climate in her personal space in the resident halls. In addition, she explained the need to

keep close ties to her family practices/cultural habits to feel more at home while staying on campus. Laura stated,

One factor that helps me feel at home is having pictures around my room. Pictures of my family, friends, and good moments of myself. Pictures are captured moments and just by looking at one, it brings me back to good times. Another factor that helps me feel at home is always having a fixed bed. Growing up my father raised me and my brother to always fix the bed right after you wake up, you WILL hear him if you do not. However, he was raised that way as well. Dominicans can be very picky when it comes having things in order in a household! So therefore my room is always neat because if I do not have it neat, I can feel my father coming to my room and start talking. (I stay neat even living away from my parents).

Furthermore, Darlenys response to the follow-up email incorporated codes that confirmed themes of *positive campus climate*, *negative campus climate*, and *feelings of affirmation*. She wrote,

Well, personally what makes me feel at home here is the fact that I am living with my friends from back home. We all dorm, and we all bring a bit of our Mexican culture into our dorm. We celebrated our festivities and our traditions, but here on campus if it weren't for them I probably would feel uncomfortable.

Darlenys attributes her positive campus experiences to having Mexican friends she knows from her hometown also attending the same campus. In addition, her positive campus experiences come from compensating for the missing culture on the campus by bringing aspects of the Latinx culture into personal spaces such as the resident halls. On the other hand, Darlenys insinuates a negative campus climate by mentioning the possibilities of feeling discomfort if her friends were



not with her on campus. She also recognizes that having Latinx friends on campus is a source of affirmation.

Lastly, Evelyn had the shortest response of the four who responded to the email. I found that her statement confirmed the theme *positive campus climate*. Her response illustrates that she is responsible for creating a positive experience for herself as she brings the Latinx culture to the campus. Evelyn noted, “I feel at home when I feel comfortable and can be myself, and when I share my culture either with music or food.”

Table 4.1 illustrates the codes that came up in the email responses that support the respective themes from the in-depth interviews. All students perceived the a positive campus climate. However, half of the students also referenced statements that confirmed a negative campus climate. Finally, two participants referenced ways to address Latinx Needs and increase feelings of affirmation for Latinx students.

Table 4.1  
*Summary of Follow-up Email Dataset*

	<i>Positive Campus Climate</i>	<i>The Invisible Culture</i>	<i>Negative Campus Climate</i>	<i>Latinx Needs</i>	<i>Feelings of Affirmation</i>
Darlenys	x		x		x
Evelyn	x				
Jessica	x		x	x	x
Laura	x			x	
N=4	100%	0	50%	50%	50%

### Survey Summary

The responses to the open-ended question on the survey were aligned with themes presented in the in-depth interview such as *Latinx Needs* and *Feelings of Affirmation*. The three categories that emerged from the open-ended question include: 1) *Integrating the Latinx culture in areas of student affairs*, 2) *Increasing Feelings of Affirmations*, and 3) *Diversifying areas in academic affairs*. Table 4.2 below shows that the majority of responses at 73 percent, suggested infusing the Latinx culture (e.g. the music, dances, language, and food) into areas of student affairs (e.g. events, activities, workshops, campus dining, and student clubs). One student, who remains unknown, suggested that the campus should “have more events that are Hispanic; all Latin countries represented not only Dominican and Puerto Rican...The only thing that was Mexican at the Dia De Los Muertos event was the Mariachi, other than that, it was White washed and a bit offensive.” Another student stated, “I would like to see more events like this and the Platanos and Collard Greens show. That was really beautiful and informative and this is just really welcoming.” The survey dataset was additional information collected from the external campus community that confirmed the themes presented during the in-depth interviews.

Table 4.2  
*Summary of Survey Dataset*

<i>Race/ Ethnicity</i>	<i>Integrating Latinx Culture in Areas of Student Affairs (e.g. Events, Activities, Workshops, music/dance/food/languag e, Clubs)</i>	<i>Increasing Feelings of Affirmations (e.g. Special advisement and advocacy efforts, challenge stigmas, support special issues like DACA)</i>	<i>Diversifying Areas in Academic Affairs (e.g. Curriculum, professors, advisement, courses, point of contact)</i>
Puerto Rican/Dominican	x		x
Mexican/Irish/Slovakian		x	
Latina		x	
Black/Puerto Rican	x	x	x
Latino		x	
Egyptian/Mexican		x	
Black/Puerto Rican		x	
Dominican/Puerto Rican		x	
Hispanic	x		
Puerto Rican	x		
Puerto Rican/Black/White	x		x
Spanish/Puerto Rican	x		
Puerto Rican	x		
Mexican	x		
Puerto Rican	x		x
Hispanic/Latino	x		
Puerto Rican	x		
Black/Puerto Rican	x		
Mexican	x		
Puerto Rican	x		
Hispanic	x		
Hispanic/Latina	x	x	x
	16 (73%)	8 (36%)	5 (23%)

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS**

This study was needed to learn about the experiences of and hear direct stories from an underrepresented and understudied population of Latinx students at a historically White campus. Findings from this study also add to the scarce amount of qualitative data on the topic of campus climate. Moreover, the campus being studied, Rutgers University - Camden has a wide reputation for being a diverse institution. However, we have yet to be intentional about finding out if students feel included, welcomed and validated on this “diverse” campus being studied, especially from those who are at greater risks of leaving school before completing their degrees. The following research questions guided this study: 1) What are the racial and cultural campus experiences of Latinx first generation college students on a racially and ethnically diverse college campus? What aspects of the campus, if any, influence feelings of exclusion for Latinx first generation students? What aspects of the campus, if any, influence feelings of inclusion for Latinx first generation students? 2) What influences do racial and cultural experiences have on Latinx first generation students’ attitudes about persisting at Rutgers University - Camden? The literature review that frames this study validated the need to study and represent the voices of Latinx first generation college students. CRT and LatCrit both framed and informed the study design. The literature reviewed proved the importance of integrating the Latinx culture onto college campuses, struggles faced by Latinx first generation college students, ways Students of Color perceived campus climate at different institutions, and the impact that campus climate had on Students of Color. Hence, I decided to focus on the campus that I served to better assess and address the needs of the Latinx first generation population who had lower graduation rates compared to their counterparts. Therefore, the twofold purpose of this qualitative case study was

to: 1) understand the racial and cultural experiences of Latinx first generation college students at Rutgers University- Camden, and 2) understand whether or not the racial and cultural experiences influence Latinx students' feelings about persisting at the university.

In this chapter, I present the discussion, conclusion, and implications to give the reader a synopsis of the overall intentions of this study.

### **Discussion**

This study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the racial realities of Latinx first generation college students attending a diverse college campus. Therefore, I conducted in-depth interviews, and a focus group interview with ten participants who attended Rutgers Camden. First, four Latinx first generation students were interviewed spring 2016 for a pilot study, which shaped the dissertation interview protocol. Then, ten additional participants were interviewed summer 2017 for the actual dissertation study. All ten participants who volunteered for the in-depth interviews met the required criteria: 1) student primarily self-identified as a Latinx, and a first-generation college student 2) student was in their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year of college, 3) student lived on campus, 4) student was between the ages of 18 and 22, and 5) student had never attended any other college other than Rutgers University - Camden. The question in the title of this dissertation, *Why Do I Feel Homesick* was influenced by a direct quote from Jessica's in-depth interview. In addition, the title also incorporates *Diverse University* given the way the participants characterized their campus. The participants described the campus as diverse because of the racial/ethnic makeup and religious affiliations among the undergraduates. They also described the campus to be welcoming based on its small size. However, Latinx students described other aspects of the campus that does not feel completely inclusive or welcoming.

Themes that emerged from the stories of the ten Latinx first generation students respond to the aforementioned title *Why Do I Feel Homesick at a Diverse University? A Qualitative Case Study of Latinx First Generation Students*. Although Latinx first generation college students described positive aspects about the campus, they also described negative campus experiences that influence feelings of invisibility, and lowers their sense of belonging. The participants describe the needs unique to their Latinx culture for institutions to consider. They also explain ways to increase their feelings of affirmation. I organized the following section to illustrate the five themes that emerged from the in-depth interviews and were confirmed by the focus group, follow-up email, and survey: *Positive Campus Climate, Invisible Culture, Negative Campus Climate, Latinx Needs, and Feelings of Affirmation*. After summarizing each theme, I display a table to represent the codes from the dataset that ties to the appropriate theme.

### **Positive Campus Climate**

When interviewing the Latinx first generation college students, I learned that every student that was interviewed was able to describe positive campus experiences in and out of the classroom. Participants described the campus to be welcoming, and diverse. The small size, the people, and professors on campus make the campus more welcoming. For example, having Latinx and Black friends is comforting because they can understand each other, it's easier to identify with someone's background and struggles, and it's easier to relate and connect to Latinx people. According to Israel, Black and Latinx students unite during class discourse regarding issues that impact both groups. In addition, professors contribute to students feeling more welcomed and supported on the campus. Arturo mentioned that he can appreciate that his professors care more about helping students instead of focusing on students' background and color of their skin. Zoe talked about a professor who encourages students to be sensitive to their

classmates personal backgrounds. The campus is perceived to be diverse because it differs from the communities the participants came from which were majority Black and Latinx. Some of the participants described Rutgers Camden as being diverse because the campus has Muslim, Egyptian, White, and Black students.

Other aspects of the campus that contributed to the participants positive experiences include their affiliation with student support programs. All of the participants interviewed are connected to campus through work-study, and student organizations. Of the ten students who were interviewed, eight participated in a summer bridge program known as the Educational Opportunity Fund program, which acclimated them to the campus before their first semester of college. Of those eight participants, three receive additional resources and mentorship from TRiO Student Support Services. They are receiving optimal social, and financial support by being a member of both programs. Two participants are in the federal TRiO program only, which also provides them with personal, academic, and professional support. Israel mentioned that support programs such as Educational Opportunity Fund Program, TRiO Student Support Services, and Bridging the Gap Summer Bridge Program could be helpful for new Latinx students coming to the campus.

Several participants described positive experiences within the resident halls and campus activities. They feel a sense of pride and responsibility to represent and share their Latinx culture with the rest of the campus, as well as help other Latinx students. Therefore, they share and celebrate their cultural traditions with their peers in the resident halls, and campus events. For instance, several of the participants expressed joy in exposing their peers to different Spanish food, Spanish music, and Spanish products. I learned that many of their peers from different backgrounds have been accepting and showed appreciation for the Latin culture. Some

participants observed White students showing appreciation for, and wanting to learn about the Latinx culture at campus events. About half of the participants acknowledged that they not only see good intergroup relations between White and Latinx students, but they also have good relations with White students.

Table 5.1 illustrates the codes that were developed while reading the in-depth interviews, and were categorized under the theme *Positive Campus Climate*. The column headings on Table 5.1 represent the codes, and the row headings show the participants who noted the codes during their in-depth interview. The codes listed include: 1) Satisfied with the structural diversity or numerical representation of various racial/ethnic groups, 2) has positive perceptions and attitudes between different racial/ethnic groups, 3) has positive perceptions and attitudes among same racial/ethnic groups, and 4) sees positive intergroup relations. The code that appeared the most with 90 percent of the participants was *Has positive perceptions and attitudes among same racial/ethnic groups*. The participants emphasized the importance of being around others who understand and relate to their cultural background.



Table 5.1  
*Positive Campus Climate*

	<i>Satisfied with the structural diversity, or the numerical representation of various racial/ethnic groups</i>	<i>Has positive perceptions and attitudes <u>between</u> <u>different</u> racial/ethnic groups</i>	<i>Has positive perceptions and attitudes <u>among</u> <u>same</u> racial/ethnic groups</i>	<i>Sees positive intergroup relations</i>
Anthony	x	x		x
Arturo			x	
Darlenys			x	
Evelyn	x	x	x	x
Giselle		x	x	
Iris	x		x	
Israel	x	x	x	x
Jessica	x	x	x	x
Laura		x	x	x
Zoe			x	
N=10	50%	60%	90%	50%

### **Invisible Culture**

All the while participants felt the campus has some welcoming and diverse aspects, they also felt like some areas of the campus is not inclusive of Latinx students, which influences feelings of invisibility. Zoe stated that Rutgers doesn't feel diverse like it's a lot of different people. Aspects of the Latinx culture such as the people, music, food, traditions, and art are all hard to find in areas of student affairs and academic affairs.

One area of student affairs where the Latinx culture feels invisible is in dining services. For example, Arturo stated that the campus offers more American food like cheesesteaks,

burgers, fries and wings. Zoe, Darlenys, Iris, Israel, Jessica, Laura, Arturo, and Evelyn all expressed disappointment with the campus food and its poor representation of Latin food. Some mentioned they missed their Latin food and spending time with family. Darlenys mentioned that food is a part of the Latinx identity, but struggles to find Mexican food around. Jessica and Anthony search off campus for Latin food, and others bring the food from home. Even when campus events provide food from outside vendors, the food is still generic lacking Latin flavor, authenticity, and variety.

Another area lacking representation of the Latinx culture is in student activities. Iris stated that the school does not take responsibility for creating Latin events, which was confirmed when the campus forgot to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month in 2018. Zoe mentioned if Latin activities are hosted, Latinx people should be orchestrating the event to accurately represent the culture. In addition, Iris and Darlenys observe mostly Black, White, and Asian students attend the few Latin events that are organized. Some of the participants observed more events geared towards other cultures including West Indian or Muslims. Participants also observed that events play more trap music by southern rappers, and rarely play Spanish music.

The resident halls is another place that lacks the visibility of Latinx students. According to Jessica and Iris, more Black students stay in the resident halls. One participant stated that Latinx students were the “other” in the resident halls. According to Rutgers University Camden Office of Institutional Research, the residential status by ethnicity for fall 2016 was 20.2 percent for Black, 10.3 percent for Latinx, 5.5 percent for White, 13.8 percent for Asian, and 11.7 percent unknown. Iris also expressed her concerns with the staff in the resident halls being majority White. Iris spoke on behalf of herself and other Latinx students by stating the challenges she faces when seeking guidance from the staff in the resident halls. She expressed

displeasure by a White woman deciding her fate, taking away her privileges, and putting her on probation.

The Latinx culture also feels invisible in areas of academic affairs such as the classroom. Classroom discussions have overlooked immigration policies because the focus has been on police brutality, specifically between Blacks and Whites, and Latinx students are not included in those conversations, according to Israel. Additionally, according to Zoe, Arturo, Iris, Giselle, and Darlenys, some classrooms are made up of majority White or Black students. Zoe stated that she feels intimidated, like an outsider, when she steps into a classroom filled with White students. Darlenys felt upset that there were only a few Latinx students in her Biology class. Giselle felt singled out with no one to depend on or relate to in all White classrooms. One participant presumed the reason they do not see Latinx students on campus is because Latinx students have it harder than other groups. Not only is it hard to find Latinx students on campus, it is even harder to find Latinx professors on campus. The participants, members of the Diversity and Inclusion Council, and Office of Institutional Research at Rutgers University Camden have all confirmed that the majority of professors are White, with 39.9 percent White full and part-time professors compared to 1.7% of Latinx professors. Iris, Anthony, and Giselle mentioned that the few Black and Latinx professors that do teach at Rutgers University Camden have only taught their African American and Spanish courses. Anthony made the comment that he understood the reason mostly White people are professors, which is because of the education White people have been afforded. Students in Yosso's (2006) research also stated that "it's hard for minorities to succeed in a class filled with White students because it is hard to relate to people."

Table 5.2 illustrates the codes that emerged across all ten in-depth interviews, and were categorized under the theme *Invisible Culture*. Some of the codes were direct quotes from the participants. The column headings in Table 5.2 represent the codes, which include: 1) *Latinx people are hard to find*, 2) *there is a lack of Latinx culture*, 3) *people don't know that I am Latinx because I don't look Spanish*, and 4) *Latinx issues excluded from discourse*. The code that came up 100 percent times across all in-depth interviews was *Latinx people are hard to find*. Participants described the challenge with finding other Latinx students to relate to and share jokes. However, determining if someone is Latinx based on physical features is a challenge, which could also contribute to students feeling invisible and perceiving a scarce representation of Latinx people on the campus. For example, Israel, Anthony, and Evelyn all said they don't look "Spanish." Finally, the next code that came up across 70 percent of the in-depth interviews was *There is a lack of Latinx culture* at the campus events. The events are missing the music, food, language, art, and traditions that represent the Latin culture.

Table 5.2  
*The Invisible Culture*

	<i>Latinx people (e.g. professors and students) are hard to find</i>	<i>There is a lack of Latinx culture (e.g. Spanish events/food/music/art /traditions)</i>	<i>People don't know that I am Latinx because I don't "look" Spanish</i>	<i>Latinx issues excluded from discourse</i>
Anthony	x	x		
Arturo	x	x		
Darlenys	x	x		
Evelyn	x	x	x	
Giselle	x			
Iris	x	x		
Israel	x		x	x
Jessica	x			
Laura	x	x		
Zoe	x	x		
N=10	100%	70%	20%	10%

### Negative Campus Climate

Latinx students experience racial incidents that influence a negative campus climate. Segregated spaces is one aspect that influences a negative campus climate at Rutgers University - Camden. For example, Anthony said he did an experiment because he was noticing a racial trend at his fraternity parties held in the fraternity house. He observed racial segregation with mostly Black people down in the basement where the DJ plays music, and White people typically socializing upstairs. Zoe, Giselle, Iris, Darlenys, Jessica, and Evelyn also acknowledged segregated spaces that exists on the campus. Evelyn stated that cliques form from

having a common race. Zoe stated that she always sees cliques and less intergroup mingling. For example, Zoe observed White people segregated at a party while she and her friends were on the dance floor. Zoe overheard the White group of people judge her and her friends by stating “Look at them being ratchet.” On several accounts, participants admitted to having friends who are typically Latinx or Black. One possible reason that Latinx students stick to their common ethnic group is because White students stick to their own racial group according to the participants. Darlenys stated that White students stick with people from their same race and socioeconomic status. Some participants like Darlenys have had unsuccessful attempts to intermingle with White students. For example, Darlenys mentioned that only a certain few White friends come back to talk to her.

Political events is another aspect that influences negative campus climates. For example, Evelyn, Arturo, and Giselle all experienced hostility and tension between racial/ethnic groups especially at the height of the political climate when Donald Trump was elected President of the United States. They agreed that the political climate gave people a sense of power, especially for Whites who felt superior while Trump was running for office. Arturo heard White people stating that they hope Trump takes away all of the immigrants. Participants experienced being ridiculed, mocked, and stereotyped based on their Latinx culture around the height of the presidential election.

Table 5.3 illustrates the codes categorized under the theme *Negative Campus Climate* that emerged across all participants’ in-depth interviews. The column headings represent the codes which include: 1) *Segregation*, 2) *racial incident*, 3) *racial microaggression*, 4) *sense of not fitting in with White students*, 5) *RUC does not feel diverse*. The two codes *microaggressions* and *segregation* equally emerged the most across 70 percent of the participants. The next code

that appeared the most was *Does not fit in with White students*, which emerged across 60 percent of the participants. One major example of microaggression that participants illustrated was when a White student publicly mocked the Mexican culture at a campus-wide talent show.

Additionally, Iris tried to analyze the reason segregation exists in the resident halls where she sees more People of Color living in the resident halls. She concluded that more People of Color come to college to find better education, and being home is not the best scenery for them, which influences them to reside on campus. I presume that her reference of home as “not the best scenery” means a place comprised of poverty, violence, crimes, and a myriad of other challenges.

Table 5.3  
*Negative Campus Climate*

	<i>Segregation (e.g. Classroom, Resident Halls, social settings)</i>	<i>Racial Incident (i.e. Cultural appropriation, Trump election)</i>	<i>Microaggress- ions</i>	<i>Does not fit in with White students</i>	<i>RUC does not feel diverse</i>
Anthony	x	x	x	x	
Arturo		x	x	x	
Darlenys	x			x	
Evelyn	x	x	x		
Giselle	x	x		x	x
Iris	x	x	x		
Israel			x		
Jessica	x		x	x	x
Laura					
Zoe	x		x	x	x
N=10	70%	50%	70%	60%	30%

### Latinx Needs

Participants presented unique needs of Latinx students for them to feel at home on a campus that does not represent their familiar environments. Latinx students need to see their culture integrated within the student organizations, support networks, and classroom environments.

Latinx students need to engage in culturally oriented student organizations. For instance, Laura and Darlenys expressed that it would be cool to have more Latinx clubs and events which cultivate those cultural spaces. Majority of the students interviewed were only aware of the Latin American Student Organization (LASO). However, Jessica noted that LASO needs to



improve their recruitment and marketing strategies to get more people involved. Laura, Evelyn, Israel, Iris, and Giselle all expressed interest in joining a cultural Greek-lettered organization because the members with similar cultural backgrounds would understand and relate to their challenges. Darlenys and others expressed a need to see their Latinx culture and traditions embraced and showcased in all aspects of the campus, which could be enhanced through culturally oriented student organizations. Although, not everyone has the same sentiments. For example, Anthony who is both Black and Latinx, and claimed to have weak ties to his Latinx culture acknowledges that he can go home to learn more about the Latin culture or learn on his own if he desired. The participants all described ways they compensated and brought the Latinx culture to the campus. Iris, for example, claimed that she creates that Spanish culture for herself.

Latinx students need a support network that resembles their home environments to help them navigate the unfamiliar academic terrains. For example, Evelyn, Jessica, Darlenys, Laura, Anthony, Arturo and others have emphasized the importance of maintaining ties to their family. Therefore, Latinx students need campus communities that foster family environments, and are family friendly. In addition, Latinx students need special advisement to work through unique challenges pertaining to the Latinx population. Laura and Darlenys expressed the desire to see more Latinx people on campus, which could help them feel at home. Darlenys stated to have other Latinx students in class will help her feel stronger to fight uphill battles. Unity is another characteristic of the home, and Giselle suggested the campus bridge the gap between Latinx students, and unite Latinx, White, and Black students. Lastly, Israel mentioned the need for Latinx students to join supportive networks at Rutgers Camden.

Additionally, Latinx students need to see diversity in academic areas. For instance, Evelyn, Israel, Iris, Arturo, and Zoe spoke about their need to see more Latinx professors and

staff to bring different perspectives in and outside of the classroom. Darlenys stated that language barriers make it harder to talk with professors, and having Latinx professors would help you see that your goals are possible. Lastly, Evelyn, who is Puerto Rican, expressed a need to learn about the Puerto Rican culture and the different Latin countries in the curriculum.

Table 5.4 illustrates the codes and categories that emerged from the in-depth interviews that were grouped under the theme *Latinx Needs*. The codes were grouped into the following categories: 1) *integrate the Latinx culture into areas of student affairs*, 2) *increase feelings of affirmations*, and 3) *diversify areas of academic affairs*. Of the three categories, 100 percent of the participants mentioned to *integrate the Latinx culture into areas student affairs*. For example, each participant wants to see more events/activities/workshops, music/food/dances/language/art/traditions, student organizations, staff, and family values that represent the Latin culture. All in all, there is a consensus that integrating the Latin culture on campus is a need for Latinx students to feel welcomed and included.

Table 5.4  
*Latinx Needs*

	<i>Integrate the Latinx Culture into Areas of Student affairs (e.g. Incorporate Latin-oriented Events/activities/workshops, music/food/dances/language /art/traditions, student organizations, staff, and family values)</i>	<i>Increase Feelings Affirmations (e.g. Special advisement for Latinx students, unite students of all races and ethnicities, advertise support services, break stigmas, promote Latinx culture, increase Latinx population, and hire bilingual staff)</i>	<i>Diversify Areas of Academic Affairs (e.g. Hire Latinx professors/staff, and promote Latin/ethnic courses)</i>
Anthony	x		
Arturo	x	x	x
Darlenys	x	x	x
Evelyn	x	x	x
Giselle	x	x	x
Iris	x		x
Israel	x	x	x
Jessica	x		
Laura	x	x	
Zoe	x		x
N=10	100%	60%	70%

### Feelings of Affirmation

Students who participated in the in-depth interviews shared stories about feelings of affirmation- emotional support or encouragement- by people, courses, organizations, and the interview itself. About 80 percent of the participants noted the ideal of feeling affirmed by Latinx people such as students, staff, and professors, whereas 70 percent noted feeling affirmed by courses and organizations/programs. One participant mentioned that multicultural students in

Greek life are more relatable. Hence the reason participants wanted to become members of cultural oriented organizations for that additional connection and social support. More specifically, five of the students are interested in joining cultural Greek-lettered organizations, whereas one of the students, Anthony, joined a historically White fraternity. However, Anthony has been recruiting more Latinx members and partnering with cultural organizations.

Although, only 50 percent of participants noted the significance of being interviewed as a source of affirmation, I would like to explore this area further. For Laura, the interview helped her reflect on her Latinx culture and ultimately increased her sense of pride in being a Latinx student on the campus. The interview helped Evelyn see the wealth of Latinx culture on the campus, and inspired her to become more knowledgeable about her culture. Iris was elated to be asked about the Latinx perspective, and felt like it was one of the first times she was understood. Arturo felt empowered to release unspoken thoughts regarding issues of Latinx people. Lastly, Darlenys felt empowered to become more involved on campus to engage more Latinx students.

For Zoe, the interview was not described as affirming. However, the interview which was an activity of reflection increased Zoe's awareness of the low proportion of Latinx people on campus. For Israel and Darlenys, the interview increased their awareness about Latinx issues.

Table 5.5 represents the codes that emerged from the in-depth interviews, and were categorized under the theme *Feelings of Affirmation*. The codes include: 1) *Latinx people that provide emotional support (i.e. members of cultural Greek-lettered organizations, and staff/students/professors)*, 2) *Culturally relevant curriculum/programs that increase feelings of belonging (i.e. LASO/EOF)*, and 3) *Interview/reflecting on personal experiences*. Of the 8 people who mentioned Latinx people as a source of emotional support, 5 of those highlighted the intent to join a cultural Greek lettered organization to connect with the relatable members. The

cultural Greek organizations are a subculture on college campuses that could cultivate a sense of belonging for students like Giselle, Laura, Evelyn, Israel, and Iris.

Table 5.5  
*Feelings of Affirmation*

	<i>Latinx people that provide emotional support (i.e. members of cultural Greek-lettered organizations, and staff/students/professors)</i>	<i>Culturally relevant curriculum/programs that increase feelings of belonging (i.e. LASO/EOF)</i>	<i>Interview/reflecting on personal experiences</i>
Anthony		x	
Arturo		x	x
Darlenys	x		x
Evelyn	x		x
Giselle	x	x	
Iris	x	x	x
Israel	x	x	
Jessica	x	x	
Laura	x		x
Zoe	x	x	
N=10	80%	70%	50%

### Conclusions

Once underserved students cross into the college world, they often experience cultural incongruity between the college world and their personal world, which lead to transitional problems crossing the academic border (Rendon, 2006). Rendon acknowledges that underserved students have problems transitioning because the racial/ethnic makeup, physical symbols, and knowledge shared on campus represents a predominantly White cultural perspective which

exclude students who do not “fit” into the dominant culture. Findings from my dissertation study also confirm Rendons position regarding Latinx students’ feelings of cultural incongruity, and feelings of exclusion on the college campus. With a pressing problem of Latinx students not returning to college, this study ventured into understanding the realities of campus racial and cultural experiences of Latinx students at Rutgers University – Camden. Although Rutgers Camden has widened access to racially ethnic students, the institution must adapt to educating the Latinx student population to address the problem of non-returning students.

According to the findings of this dissertation, Latinx students perceived Rutgers University - Camden to be a place that is welcoming based on positive aspects that exist on the campus. Many described the campus as diverse because it looks different from their household, hometown, and K-12 education, which was mostly made up of Black and Latinx students. However, the majority of students (90 percent) perceived the campus as positive and welcoming when they were around people with a similar background. Although the participants described their campus as diverse, the findings indicated that the Latinx students felt their culture was invisible. To be explicit, 100 percent stated that Latinx people (e.g. professors and students) are hard to find in the classroom and social settings on campus. In addition, 70 percent stated there is a lack of Latinx cultural representation on campus including Latin oriented events, clubs, food, music, art, and traditions. Therefore, some students resort to seeking aspects of their culture outside of the campus, and will travel the distance to stores and restaurants that reflect their culture.

On the other hand, participants described aspects of the campus that influenced perceptions of a negative campus climate. For instance, 70 percent noticed segregation in the classrooms, resident halls, and social settings as well as experienced/witnessed

microaggressions. As mentioned in the literature, negative cultural campus climates can influence students thoughts of college departure. For example, Arturo expressed wanting to leave because of the way the education system is set up makes him feel like he is not smart enough. Arturo later moved out of the resident halls and back with his mother and brother, but remained enrolled in college. Jessica was another participant who admitted wanting to leave college because of personal conflicts she had with a White student.

Also, Latinx needs were expressed across the voices of the participants along with aspects that increase feelings of affirmation. For instance, 100 percent expressed a need for the Latinx culture (i.e. food, music, language, art, traditions) to be integrated into areas of student affairs (i.e. student activities, dining services, etc.). Moreover, 70 percent expressed a need for more diversity in areas of academic affairs (i.e. Latinx professors, and ethnic study courses). Lastly, the participants described aspects of the campus that increased their feelings of affirmation. For instance, 80 percent acknowledged Latinx people on the campus provided them with emotional support. In addition, 70 percent acknowledged culturally relevant curriculum and clubs/programs such as the Latin American Student Organization, cultural greek-lettered organizations, and targeted support programs such as the Educational Opportunity Fund Program (EOF) increased feelings of emotional support.

Overall, in-depth interviews and focus groups are helpful to: 1) assess racial and cultural campus climate to highlight positive climates, and expose negative climates to faculty and staff, 2) gain insight into ethnic realities of Latinx students to help explain ethnic and racial gaps in higher education, and 3) guide new and improved practices that support the needs of, and increase feelings of affirmation for Latinx students at Rutgers University – Camden and other campuses.

### **Implications for Practice**

According to Urbina and Wright (2016) findings voiced by students provide insight into the ethnic realities of Latinx students, which is essential as we seek to implement mechanisms to close existing ethnic and racial gaps in higher education. The ethnic and cultural realities that have been discovered through the voices of Latinx first generation college students can guide new and improved practices at Rutgers University - Camden for helping Latinx students feel more welcomed, supported, and included. Practices should cultivate campus environments that is similar to the home to help students face fewer barriers getting academically and socially integrated into the college world (Rendon, 2006). To help students function in the college environment, colleges can foster congruity between the college world and Latinx world.

According to findings from this dissertation study, to address feelings of invisibility and increase feelings of belonging, campuses should invest more energy into integrating the Latinx culture (i.e. food, music, language, art, traditions) into areas of student affairs (i.e. residence life, programs, student involvement, and dining services). In addition, Rutgers University - Camden should consider diversifying areas in academic affairs by hiring more Latinx professors, and offering a wider variety of culturally oriented courses in Latin American and Latino Studies. Hiring Latinx faculty role models, moving away from a Euro-centered curriculum, and forming culturally oriented peer groups on campus to maintain cultural identities are practices that campuses can implement right away, which will increase students' feelings of affirmations. Museus and Jayakumar (2012) suggested campuses emphasized collectivist approaches including collaborating with local cultural centers, educating and strengthening parent relations staff and services, and expanding/lending greater support to culturally based student organizations/centers/support programs. Additional practices entail engaging local Communities



of Color with youth and families, and educating college faculty, advisors, and career counselors about the needs and strengths of collectivist oriented students (Museus and Jayakumar, 2012). Fostering culturally inclusive environments is essential for enhancing Latinx students' overall experience, sense of belonging, and ultimately persisting at the university.

We are responsible for uplifting a group that has been neglected, ignored, and marginalized for centuries. Therefore, we must also address the negative aspects of the campus (i.e. microaggression and segregated spaces). Several ways to address the negative aspects described by the students is by 1) dedicating time and money to assessing racial and cultural campus climate, and training students and faculty how to spot and avoid microaggressions, 2) publish a list of microaggressions online, and organize photo campaigns/dialogues/spoken word programs, etc. to uncover negative racial realities, 3) research and promote interventions to ending negative racial experiences 4) promote counseling and resources to students impacted by negative racial experiences.

Also, notable efforts made by Rutgers University – Camden for improving the racial and cultural campus climate for Students of Color can be replicated on other campuses. For example, the Honors college hosted a campus wide diversity and inclusion workshop. The campus center hosts a Tunnel of Oppression annually, which transforms all conference rooms into scenes which incorporates skits about racial injustices suffered by People of Color. The campus recently established an Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) in Spring 2017. A participant from my pilot study, prior to this dissertation study, was a key person who established a social justice student organization called *Underground* and advocated for ODI. The Office of Diversity and Inclusion has increased efforts in cultivating a more culturally engaging environment via culturally relevant programming. In addition, the first Latinx Chancellor was

recently hired January 2018 at Rutgers University - Camden as the Vice Chancellor for Student Academic Success, as well as a newly hired Latinx professor in the psychology department. In spring 2018, the Latinx Chancellor began organizing a committee to plan Hispanic Heritage Month for fall 2018.

The in-depth interviews/focus group influenced several culturally relevant programs that I initiated fall 2017 and spring 2018. One event I coordinated was the viewing of an Off Broadway Show called *Platanos and Collard Greens*, which attracted over 400 guests from on and off campus. The play illustrated racial and cultural issues in a humorous fashion. Students and staff continued raving about the event weeks later, and requested to invite the cast again for another production. In addition, I hosted a reception for Students, Staff, and Professors of Color and infused the Latin culture with food, music, and a poem about the Latinx experience on college campuses read by Latinx students. The reception attracted over 200 guests, and students, staff, and professors also requested more events like it. Another event I coordinated was the Meet and Greet with the new Latinx Chancellor. The meeting was intimate with about 13 students and 3 staff members. I observed students comfortably conversing in Spanish, the Chancellor requesting to hear Latin music, students presenting gifts to the Chancellor, and publicly sharing positive sentiments of him being a symbol of hope and progress for Latinx students on campus. Additionally, I created a space in the Center for Learning, and Student Success for students to lounge with couches, and flags representing different countries hanging from the ceiling to help the students feel at home, welcomed, and included. Informally, I have observed six or more Latinx students who are consistently in the lounge studying or socializing. Lastly, a Latinx student and I coordinated an alternative spring break to Puerto Rico to support communities impacted by Hurricane Maria, the worst natural disaster that hit Puerto Rico in

2017. Six students who attended were Latinx, while one was Black, and one White. This trip also aimed to affirm students Latinx identity and expose them to the culture of Puerto Rico.

Implications that are aligned with the dissertation findings as well as the research presented by Castellanos and Jones (2003) include: 1) promoting a culturally relevant curriculum and faculty engagement 2) recruiting, enrolling, and retaining Students, Staff, and Faculty of Color (especially Latinx) 3) assessing and examining Latinx students experiences and retention trends consistently and intentionally, and 4) promoting culturally relevant programs and initiatives. With knowledge gained through this study, I plan to share my findings with campus stakeholders (i.e. faculty and staff) in the Diversity and Inclusion Council. In addition, I plan to promote courses in the Latin American and Latino Studies department to more students, and collaborate more often with the departments' professors on campus programs and initiatives. Lastly, I plan to collaborate more often with the cultural Greek-letter organizations through campus wide programming and initiatives. Moving forward, I will use the lens of Critical Race Theory and LatCrit when assessing, planning, and implementing initiatives to support Latinx college students. Using a CRT and LatCrit lens as well as considering these implications and implementing culturally relevant initiatives can help students maintain their cultural connection to alleviate homesickness.

With more time and resources, I would like to pursue this research further by interviewing more Latinx first generation students on the campus to the point of saturation, to help validate the cultural identities of these students. I also would like to collect, review, and analyze additional artifacts with the students (i.e. emails, marketing materials, program flyers) during focus group to improve the ways the campus supports and portrays the Latinx population to the public. In addition, with more time, I would have conducted member checks for

participants to elaborate on their responses and to strengthen the validity of this study. Adding observation data is another source of data I would consider incorporating into future research to analyze student behaviors in their natural settings at cultural events verses mainstream events.

## REFERENCES

- Ancis, J. R., Sedlacek, W. E., & Mohr, J. J. (2000). Student perceptions of campus cultural climate by race. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 78(2), 180-185.
- Arbona, C., & Nora, A. (2007). The influence of academic and environmental factors on Hispanic college degree attainment. *The Review of Higher Education*, 30(3), 247-269.
- Banks, W. L., Hammond, D. L., & Hernandez, E. (2014). Serving diverse student populations in college unions. *New Directions for Student Services*, (145), 13-25.
- Bensimon, E. M. (2005). Closing the achievement gap in higher education: An organizational learning perspective. *New directions for higher education*, 2005(131), 99-111.
- Bernal, D. D. (2002). Critical race theory, Latino critical theory, and critical raced-gendered epistemologies: Recognizing students of color as holders and creators of knowledge. *Qualitative inquiry*, 8(1), 105-126.
- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2012). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A road map from beginning to end*. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Brown, L. I. (2004). Diversity: The challenge for higher education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 7(1), 21-34.
- Castellanos, J., & Jones, L. (2003). Latina/o undergraduate experiences in American higher education. *The majority in the minority: Expanding the representation of Latina/o faculty, administrators, and students in higher education*, 1-14. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

- Dennis, J. M., Phinney, J. S., & Chuateco, L. I. (2005). The role of motivation, parental support, and peer support in the academic success of ethnic minority first-generation college students. *Journal of college student development*, 46(3), 223-236.
- Engle, J., Bermeo, A., & O'Brien, C. (2006). Straight from the source: What works for first-generation college students. *Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education*, [Information Analyses].
- Engle, J. (2007). Postsecondary access and success for first-generation college students. *American Academic*, 3(1), 25-48.
- Engle, J., & Tinto, V. (2008). Moving beyond access: College success for low-income, first generation students. *Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education*, 1-31.
- Hausmann, L. R., Schofield, J. W., & Woods, R. L. (2007). Sense of belonging as a predictor of intentions to persist among African American and White first-year college students. *Research in higher education*, 48(7), 803-839.
- Harper, S. R., & Hurtado, S. (2007). Nine themes in campus racial climates and implications for institutional transformation. *New Directions for Student Services*, (120), 7-24.
- Harwood, S. A., Hunt, M. B., Mendenhall, R., & Lewis, J. A. (2012). Racial microaggressions in the residence halls: Experiences of Students of Color at a predominantly white university. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 5(3), 159.
- Hernandez, J. C. (2002). A qualitative exploration of the first-year experience of Latino college students. *NASPA Journal*, 40(1) 1-16.
- Hurtado, S. and Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of campus racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education*, 70(4), 324-345.

- Hurtado, S., & Ponjuan, L. (2005). Latino educational outcomes and the campus climate. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 4(3), 235-251.
- Ishitani, T. T. (2006). Studying attrition and degree completion behavior among first-generation college students in the united states. *Journal of Higher Education*, 77(5), 861-885.
- Jehangir, R. (2010). Stories as knowledge: Bringing the lived experience of first-generation college students into the academy. *Urban Education*, 45(4), 533-553.
- Johnson, D. R., Wasserman, T. H., Yildirim, N., & Yonai, B. A. (2014). Examining the effects of stress and campus climate on the persistence of students of color and white students: An application of bean and Eaton's psychological model of retention. *Research in Higher Education*, 55(1), 75-100.
- Kezar, A., & Eckel, P. (2002). Examining the institutional transformation process: The importance of sensemaking, interrelated strategies, and balance. *Research in Higher Education*, 43(3), 295-328.
- Kim, Y. K., Rennick, L. A., & Franco, M. A. (2014). Latino college students at highly selective institutions A comparison of their college experiences and outcomes to other Racial/Ethnic groups. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 13(4), 245-268.
- Locks, A. M., Hurtado, S., Bowman, N. A., & Oseguera, L. (2008). Extending notions of campus climate and diversity to students' transition to college. *The Review of Higher Education*, 31(3), 257-285.
- Mallett, R. K., Mello, Z. R., Wagner, D. E., Worrell, F., Burrow, R. N., & Andretta, J. R. (2011). Do I belong? it depends on when you ask. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 17(4), 432.

- Museus, S. D., Nichols, A. H., & Lambert, A. D. (2008). Racial differences in the effects of campus racial climate on degree completion: A structural equation model. *The Review of Higher Education*, 32(1), 107-134.
- Museus, S. D., & Jayakumar, U. M. (Eds.). (2012). *Creating campus cultures: Fostering success among racially diverse student populations*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Museus, S. D. (2014). The culturally engaging campus environments (CECE) model: A new theory of success among racially diverse college student populations. *In Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 189-227). Springer, Dordrecht.
- Museus, S. D., Yi, V., & Saelua, N. (2017). The impact of culturally engaging campus environments on sense of belonging. *The Review of Higher Education*, 40(2), 187-215.
- Nora, A., & Cabrera, A. F. (1996). The role of perceptions of prejudice and discrimination on the adjustment of minority students to college. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 67(2), 119-148.
- Núñez, A. (2009). A critical paradox? Predictors of Latino students' sense of belonging in college. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 2(1), 46-61.
- Núñez, A. (2011). Counterspaces and connections in college transitions: First-generation Latino students' perspectives on Chicano studies. *Journal of College Student Development*, 52(6), 639-655.
- Pascarella, E. T., Pierson, C. T., Wolniak, G. C., & Terenzini, P. T. (2004). First-generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes. *Journal of Higher Education*, 75(3), 249-284.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, inc.



- Rankin, S. R., & Reason, R. D. (2005). Differing perceptions: How Students of Color and white students perceive campus climate for underrepresented groups. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*(1), 43-61.
- Rendon, L. I. (1994). Validating culturally diverse students: Toward a new model of learning and student development. *Innovative higher education, 19*(1), 33-51.
- Rendón, L. I. (2006, October). Reconceptualizing success for underserved students in higher education. *In meeting of the 2006 National Symposium on Postsecondary Student Success*, Washington, DC.
- Rodriguez, C. A. (2015). Experiences of Racial Inclusion and/or Exclusion among Latino First Generation College Students at Rutgers Camden. *In Qualitative Methods course at Rutgers University*, New Brunswick, NJ. 1-18.
- Rutgers University Camden Office of Institutional Research. (2016). Demographic, Faculty, and Persistence/Graduation Data. Camden, NJ: RUC OIR.
- Smedley, B. D., Myers, H. F., & Harrell, S. P. (1993). Minority-status stresses and the college adjustment of ethnic minority freshmen. *The Journal of Higher Education, 64*(4), 434-452.
- Solorzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Negro Education, 60*-73.
- Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative inquiry, 8*(1), 23-44.
- Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. (6th ed.). Los Angeles, CA. SAGE publications.

- Yosso, T. J., & Solórzano, D. G. (2006). Leaks in the Chicana and Chicano Educational Pipeline. *Latino Policy & Issues Brief*. Number 13. UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.
- Tejeda, C., Martinez, C., & Leonardo, Z. (2000). *Charting New Terrains of Chicana (o)/Latina (o) Education. Themes of Urban and Inner City Education*. Broadway, Cresskill, NJ. Hampton Press, Inc., 23
- Terenzini, P. T., Springer, L., Yaeger, P. M., Pascarella, E. T., & Nora, A. (1996). First-generation college students: Characteristics, experiences, and cognitive development. *Research in Higher Education*, 37(1), 1-22.
- Thayer, P. B. (2000). Retention of students from first generation and low income backgrounds. *Journal of the Council for Opportunity in Education: Opportunity Outlook*, Department of Education, Washington, DC. [Information Analyses].
- Tierney, W. G. (1999). Models of minority college-going and retention: Cultural integrity versus cultural suicide. *Journal of Negro Education*, 80-91
- Tinto, V. (2006). Research and practice of student retention: What next? *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 8(1), 1-19.
- Tinto, V. (2007). *Taking student retention seriously*. Syracuse University.
- United States Census Bureau. (2016). ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates. (2012-2016). <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>
- United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). Number of degrees conferred by post-secondary institutions and percent change, by race/ethnicity and level of degree: Academic years 2003-04, 2012-13, and 2013-14. Retrieved from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator\\_ree.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator_ree.asp)

- Urbina, M. G., & Wright, C. R. (2015). *Latino Access to Higher Education: Ethnic Realities and New Directions for the Twenty-First Century*. Springfield, IL: Charles C Thomas Publisher.
- Utsey, S. O., Chae, M. H., Brown, C. F., & Kelly, D. (2002). Effect of ethnic group membership on ethnic identity, race-related stress, and quality of life. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 8(4), 366.
- Walpole, M. (2003). Socioeconomic status and college: How SES affects college experiences and outcomes. *The Review of Higher Education*, 27(1), 45-73.
- Wei, M., Ku, T., & Liao, K. Y. (2011). Minority stress and college persistence attitudes among African American, Asian American, and Latino students: Perception of university environment as a mediator. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 17(2), 195-203.
- Villalpando, O. (2004). Practical considerations of critical race theory and Latino critical theory for Latino college students. *New directions for student services*, 2004(105), 41-50.
- Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91.
- Yosso, T. J. (2006). *Critical race counterstories along the Chicana/Chicano educational pipeline*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Yosso, T., Smith, W., Ceja, M., & Solórzano, D. (2009). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate for Latina/o undergraduates. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(4), 659-691.
- Zurita, M. (2004). Stopping out and persisting: Experiences of Latino undergraduates. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 6(3), 301-324.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A. Participant Recruitment Flyer



The flyer is a vertical rectangular graphic with a white background. It features a large teal rectangle on the left side containing text. To the right of the teal rectangle is a vertical orange rectangle with a pattern of concentric semi-circles. Below the teal rectangle is a horizontal green rectangle with a similar pattern. To the right of the green rectangle is a vertical red rectangle with contact information. The text is in yellow and white colors.

**Participants Needed for  
Dissertation Study**

**Are you a Latino  
First Generation  
College Student?**

Seeking participants who meet the following criteria:

- Student primarily self-identifies as a Latino, and first generation college student
- Student is in their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year of college
- Student lives on campus
- Student is between the ages of 18 and 22
- Student has never attended any other college other than Rutgers Camden

Contact  
Ana  
Rodriguez  
at  
[anar@rutgers.edu](mailto:anar@rutgers.edu)  
for more  
information

## Appendix B. Participant Consent Form



### Interview Consent Form with Audio/Visual Recording

**Title of Study:** Understanding the Perceptions of Racial and Cultural Campus Climate among Latino First Generation Students at Rutgers Camden.

**Principal Investigator:**

Ana Rodriguez  
 Doctoral Student  
 Rutgers University  
 Graduate School of Education  
 609-319-5834  
 anar@rutgers.edu

**Criteria:** The criteria to participate include the following: 1) student primarily self-identifies as a Latino, and a first-generation college student 2) student is in their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year of college, 3) student lives on campus, 4) student is between the ages of 18 and 22, and 5) student has never attended any other college other than Rutgers Camden.

During this one on one interview, you will be asked several open-ended questions about racial and ethnic experiences at Rutgers-Camden. **The interviews will be audio-recorded and written verbatim.** You will be contacted later if the investigator needs further clarification on a response, and to also give you an opportunity to read over your responses. **You will be invited to participate in a focus group interview on a different day** to discuss racial and ethnic experiences with other Latino students at Rutgers.

A total of 10 subjects will participate in this study, and the duration of your participation in this study will last about **one hour for the one on one interview** and about **one hour for the focus group interview**. However, please feel free to expand on the topic or talk about related ideas. Also, if there are any questions you would rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you prefer.

This **research is confidential**. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about you includes your personal experiences and perspectives. Please note that we will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. Records and data will be stored and maintained in a locked business office at Rutgers-Camden. No reference will be

For IRB Use Only. This Section Must be Included on the Consent Form and Cannot Be Altered Except For Updates to the Version Date.

IRB Stamp Box

IRB Stamp Box

Version Date: v1.0  
 Page 1



made in oral or written reports, which could link you to the study. The data gathered in this study are confidential with respect to your personal identity unless you specify otherwise. All study data will be destroyed in 5 years.

You are aware that **your participation in this interview is voluntary**. You understand the intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, at any time, you wish to stop the interview, you may do so without having to give an explanation.

The risks of participation include possible inconvenience or discomfort from answering personal questions. If you require counseling after participating in the study, you will be referred to the following free services:

Rutgers Camden- Health Services  
326 Penn Street  
Campus Center - 2nd Floor  
Camden, NJ 08102  
Tel: (856) 225-6005

**Benefits:** The recording(s) from your interview and the focus group will be used for analysis by the research team, educational purposes, and possible use of influencing policy at Rutgers-Camden. By sharing your racial and ethnic experiences at Rutgers-Camden, you may be helping improve the campus environment to foster a more welcoming space for all students of different backgrounds.

If you say anything that you believe at a later point may be hurtful and/or damage your reputation, then you can ask the interviewer to rewind the recording and record over such information OR you can ask that certain text be removed from the dataset/transcripts.

The recording(s) will be stored in a restricted-access external drive that is password protected for the subjects' privacy. The recordings will be deleted in 5 years.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact me at Ana Rodriguez at [anar@rutgers.edu](mailto:anar@rutgers.edu) or 609-319-5834. You may also contact my faculty advisor below

Dr. Sandra M. Tomlinson-Clarke  
Professor  
GSE-Department of Educational Psychology  
10 Seminary Place  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-1108  
848-932-0815  
[sandra.tomlinson-clarke@gse.rutgers.edu](mailto:sandra.tomlinson-clarke@gse.rutgers.edu)

*For IRB Use Only. This Section Must be Included on the Consent Form and Cannot Be Altered Except For Updates to the Version Date.*

IRB Stamp Box

IRB Stamp Box

Version Date: v1.0  
Page 2



If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers (which is a committee that reviews research studies to protect research participants).

Institutional Review Board  
Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey  
Liberty Plaza / Suite 3200  
335 George Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901  
Phone: 732-235-9806  
Email: [humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu](mailto:humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu)

You will be offered a copy of this consent form that you may keep for your own reference.

Once you have read the above form and, with the understanding that you can withdraw at any time and for whatever reason, you need to let me know your decision to participate in today's interview.

**Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the 1) one on one interview; and 2) focus group which you will be invited to on a different day. Audio-recording is mandatory for participation in the research study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than stated in the consent form without your written permission.**

Subject (Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Subject Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records. By participating in the above stated procedures, then you agree to participate in this study.

*For IRB Use Only. This Section Must be Included on the Consent Form and Cannot Be Altered Except For Updates to the Version Date.*

<b>IRB Stamp Box</b>
----------------------

<b>IRB Stamp Box</b>
----------------------

Version Date: v1.0  
Page 3

## Appendix C. In-depth Interview Protocol

### Interview Protocol: (One on One Interviews)

**Title of the Project:** Understanding the Perceptions of Racial and Cultural Campus Climate among Latino First Generation Students at a Diversity University

**Time:**

**Date:**

**Place:**

**Interviewer:**

**Pseudonym:**

*Hello,*

*I'm a doctoral student at Rutgers New Brunswick conducting research on Latino first generation college students. Thank you for volunteering in my study. I am most interested in your thoughts and racial/ethnic experiences as a Latino student at Rutgers Camden. Hopefully, I will gain insight to help improve the Rutgers-Camden campus for Latino students.*

*Nothing you say will ever be identified with you personally unless you prefer. As you go through the study, you are free to take a break, or discontinue the study at any point.*

*We will be going over several questions, which will make it difficult to write down all your responses. May I receive your permission to audio record you? You may ask me to stop recording at any point.*

*Any questions before we begin?*

#### *Background/Demographic Data*

- What is your age?
- Gender?
- What year are you (second, or third)?
- Do your parents have a bachelor's degree?
- Do you work on campus? If so, where?
- If you work on campus, briefly describe the racial ethnic makeup of your work environment.
- What is your ethnicity?
- Please explain the reason you identify with that ethnicity?
- What language do you speak at home?
- How would you rate your ties to your Latino culture (weak, moderate, strong)?
- What is your hometown?
- Briefly describe the racial ethnic makeup of your hometown while growing up.
- Briefly describe the racial ethnic makeup of your k-12 schools you attended.
- What social class do you identify with (lower, middle, or upper)?
- What is your major?



- Briefly describe the racial ethnic makeup of the students and professors in your major.
- Where do you reside on campus?
- Briefly describe the racial ethnic makeup of the students and resident assistants in your resident halls.
- Are you affiliated with any student organizations?
- If so, briefly describe the racial ethnic makeup of the students in your affiliated organization.

Open Ended Interview Questions

- 1) Describe how Rutgers Camden may or may not feel welcoming to a Latino student.
  - a) Probe: What courses, professors, organizations, or campus activities make you feel like you belong or do not belong on campus?

---

---

---

---

---

- 2) Describe an instance on campus, if any, when you have perceived non-verbal, implied, or overt discrimination, stereotypes, racial jokes, harassment, and/or prejudice based on your ethnicity in the classroom, resident halls, or campus activity?

---

---

---

---

---

- 3) What campus racial experiences, if any, make you want to stay or leave Rutgers Camden?

---

---

---

---

---

- 4) Describe the differences between your Latino culture at home and the campus culture.
- a) Probe: Describe how the Latino culture is or is not welcomed by students, staff, or faculty at the university.

---

---

---

---

---

- 5) How has being a Latino student influenced your adjustment to the campus environment?
- a) Probe: How has it been challenging or easy?

---

---

---

---

---

- 6) How can spaces on campus be redesigned to help Latinos feel more included and welcomed?

---

---

---

---

---

- 7) How do you feel about the racial/ethnic makeup of students and professors in your classes, and residents or RAs in the dorms?

---

---

---

---

---

- 8) What types of services, programs, and organizations, that you know of, are available on campus to support Latino first generation college students?

---

---

---

---

---

- 9) Describe instances where you see or don't see good intergroup relations between Latino and White students.

---

---

---

---

---

- 10) Are there any other comments you would like to make regarding your campus racial/ethnic experiences?

---

---

---

---

---

## Appendix D. Focus Group Protocol

### Interview Protocol: (Focus Group Interview)

**Title of the Project:** Understanding the Perceptions of Racial and Cultural Campus Climate among Latino First Generation Students at a Diversity University

**Time:**

**Date:**

**Place:**

**Interviewer:**

**Pseudonyms:**

*Hello,*

*I'm a doctoral student at Rutgers New Brunswick conducting research on Latino first generation college students. Thank you for volunteering in my study. I am most interested in your thoughts and racial/ethnic experiences as a Latino student at Rutgers Camden. Hopefully, I will gain insight to help improve the Rutgers-Camden campus for Latino students.*

*Nothing you say will ever be identified with you personally unless you prefer. As you go through the study, you are free to take a break, or discontinue the study at any point.*

*We will be going over several questions, which will make it difficult to write down all your responses. May I receive your permission to audio record you? You may ask me to stop recording at any point.*

*Any questions before we begin?*

#### Ground Rules

- Be respectful to others when they are speaking.
- Avoid judgement.
- What is said here, should stay here.

#### Focus Group Questions

- 1) Have any of you personally experienced harassment and/or discrimination on campus (in-class, extracurricular activities, social settings, etc.) based on your race, ethnicity, and/or place of national origin? If so, please describe...

---



---



---



---



---

- 2) Do you have any Latino friends, associates or classmates who have experienced harassment and/or discrimination on campus based on their race, ethnicity, and/or place of national origin?

---

---

---

---

- 3) In what ways, do you feel the University is addressing campus issues relating to harassment and/or discrimination of race, ethnicity, and/or place of national origin? Please give examples.

---

---

---

---

- 4) Imagine that you are an administrator and you have been charged with improving the racial climate on campus. What suggestions do you have for improving the racial climate here on campus?

---

---

---

---

- 5) Are there any other issues related to the racial climate on campus that you would like to raise?

---

---

---

---

- 6) From your point of view, what should the institution do to foster a greater sense of belonging and improve graduation rates among Latino first generation college students?

---

---

---

---

---

- 7) During international week, the campus center temporarily displays international flags on the ceiling. Whether you have or have not seen the flags, how do you feel about them being displayed in the campus center to celebrate international week.

a) Probe: How do you feel that they are taken down after international week is over?

---

---

---

---

---

*Please feel free to write down anything else you may be thinking about related to the issues of racial discrimination and harassment. You may then turn your paper in so your experiences and opinions can be included in the study.*

*If you would like a copy of the study's results, please email [anar@rutgers.edu](mailto:anar@rutgers.edu) and you will receive a summary after the research study.*

***We thank you very much for your time and willingness to participate in this focus group study.***

Reflection notes: How was the enthusiasm, body language, mood of discussion etc.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Appendix E. Follow-up Email**

From: [Ana Rodriguez](#) >

RE: Missed question

Hide



February 15, 2018 at 10:00 AM

---

On Sat, Nov 11, 2017 at 12:56 AM, Ana Rodriguez <[anar@camden.rutgers.edu](mailto:anar@camden.rutgers.edu)> wrote:  
Hi Everyone,

I want to thank you for your time you spared me to help me with my dissertation. I appreciated hearing your stories. There was one question that I would appreciate you to respond over email. You can reply to me or reply to all if you choose.

What factors are helping you feel at home?

I look forward to hearing your responses!

Ana

## Appendix F. Survey

What is your Race/ethnicity? Puerto Rican ; Dominican

How can we help more students feel included, supported, valued, and welcomed on this campus?

I feel having a hispanic teacher would make students feel more inclined and empowered to work ~~with~~ and ask questions in the class.

Personally, I enjoy dancing so I would like a club that has hispanic dances from things like bachata, cumbia, salsa, etc.

---

What is your Race/ethnicity? Spanish → Puerto Rican

How can we help more students feel included, supported, valued, and welcomed on this campus?

Continue to do more activities like this one so people and students from different culture can interact together. Love the food by the way.



What is your Race/ethnicity? Hispanic

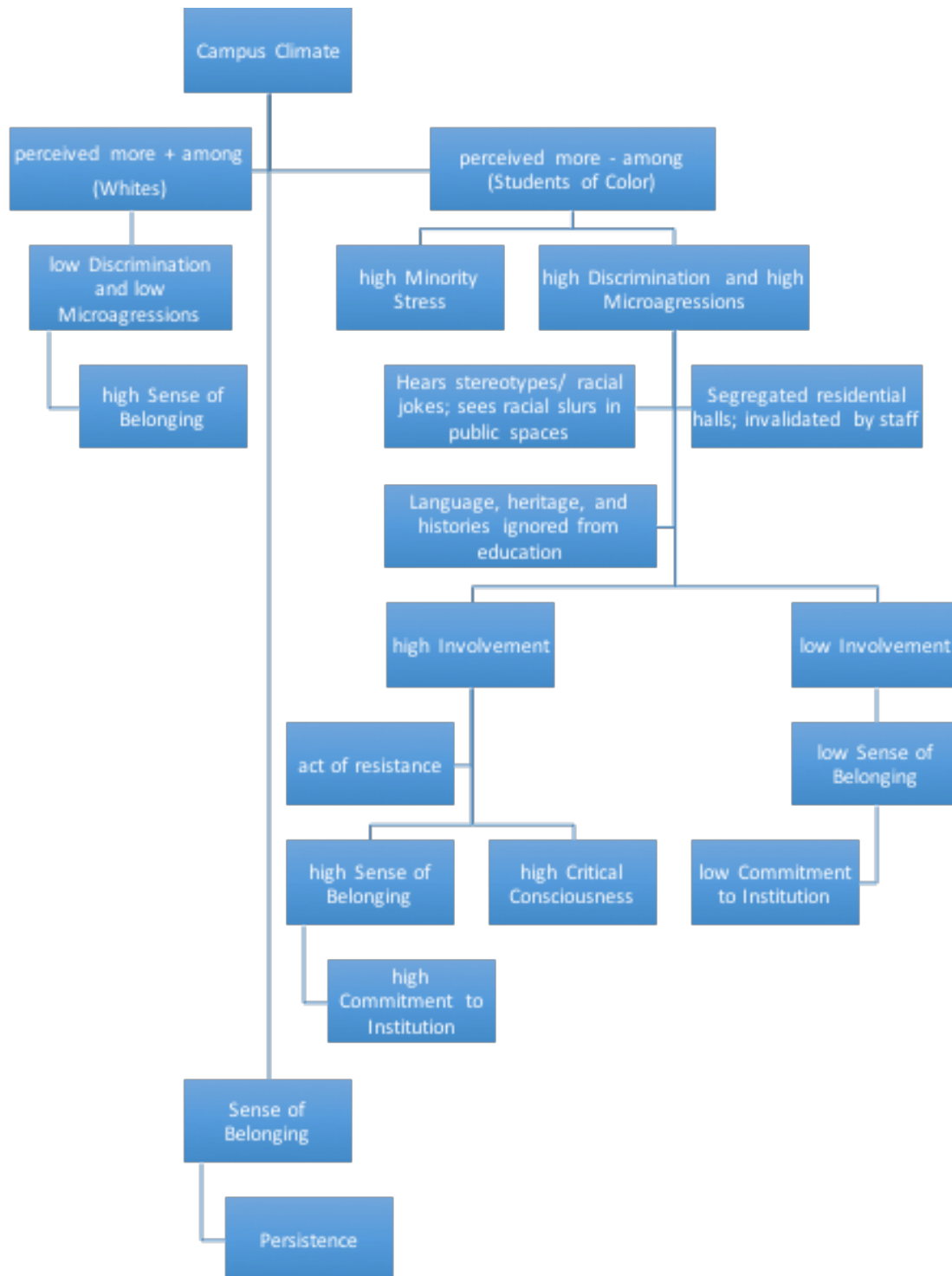
How can we help more students feel included, supported, valued, and welcomed on this campus?

Have more events that are Hispanic; all Latin countries represented not only Dominican and Puerto Rican ~~represent~~ the only thing that was Mexican at the Dia de los Muertos event was the Mariachi other than that it was white washed and a bit offensive.

What is your Race/ethnicity? Latina ♡

How can we help more students feel included, supported, valued, and welcomed on this campus?

Don't let us have a voice but help  
us be HEARD

**Appendix G. Logic Model**

(Rodriguez, 2015)