

WHAT CAPITAL MATTERS? HOW FIRST-GENERATION, LATINX STUDENTS
AT HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTIONS APPLY AND TRANSITION INTO
GRADUATE SCHOOL

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my amazing mother. I am because you are. Thank you for always believing in me and pushing me to push forward, no matter what sacrifices we had to make. Thank you, mom.

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ABSTRACT

WHAT CAPITAL MATTERS? HOW FIRST-GENERATION, LATINX STUDENTS AT HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTIONS APPLY AND TRANSITION INTO GRADUATE SCHOOL

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Despite representing the largest ethnic minority group in the United States, Latinx scholars remain underrepresented in the professoriate. Although Latinx students are increasingly attending college, fewer graduate and even less continue on to pursue graduate school. Prior research has explained the challenges that first-generation college students encounter in post-secondary contexts, however this discourse is overwhelmingly focused on failure, and the research around first-generation students particularly is confusing given the various ways researchers have defined the population. Given that Latinx college students are likely to be first-generation, and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) educate 65% of all Latinx students in the nation, understanding the experiences of first-generation Latinx undergraduate students at HSIs who aspire to be professors and are applying to graduate school can help illuminate what factors help support this underrepresented group in pursuing a career in the academy. Using qualitative approaches, this study describes the experiences of first-generation undergraduate Latinx students in a grant funded academic program that provides them with a plethora of resources to help prepare them for graduate school.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT III

ABSTRACT..... V

LIST OF TABLESVIII

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION..... 1

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 9

First-Generation, Latinx College Students..... 9

Graduate Student Socialization 18

The Context of Hispanic-Serving Institutions 25

Theoretical Framework 30

Concluding Thoughts..... 36

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY 38

Data Collection 42

Participants..... 44

Analysis 46

Positionality 48

Limitations 49

**CHAPTER 4: I DARE TO DEARM”: HOW DIFFERENT FORMS OF CAPITAL
HELP FIRST-GENERATION, LATINX UNDERGRADUATES OVERCOME
THE CHALLENGES OF IDENTITY AND UNDERREPRESENTATION..... 51**

Aspirational Capital and the Role of Community Colleges 51

Navigational Capital and “Figuring Things Out” 56

“Getting a PhD is a Political Cct.” Resistant Capital as Motivation to Persist and Succeed..... 61

“Opening Doors” with Social Capital.....	68
Motivation to Succeed Tied to Aspirational, Familial, and Linguistic Capital.....	77
CHAPTER 5: “NOTHING REALLY SHOCKED ME...” THE ROLE OF THE PATHWAYS TO THE PROFESSORiate PROGRAM AND THE SOCIALIZATION EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-GENERATION LATINX STUDENTS	99
Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Pathways to the Professoriate Program	100
“I’m not going into it so blindly anymore...” Acquiring Social and Cultural Capital through Socialization	103
Rhetoric’s of Institutional Prestige During Socialization.....	107
Seeking Support Through Informal Peer Networks	113
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION, RECCOMENDATION, AND CONCLUSION	118
Discussion.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Recommendations for Practice.....	132
Implications for Research.....	136
Conclusion.....	139
APPENDIX.....	142
BIBLIOGRAPHY	145

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. HSI Pathways to the Professoriate First-Generation Latinx Program
Participants.....42

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Accounting for the fastest growing minority group in the nation, the Latinx¹ population represents 20% of people aged 18-44 in the U.S. (U.S. Census, 2015). Alongside the growth of the Latinx population, more Latinx students are entering higher education, yet remain underrepresented in graduate school and the professoriate. Only 5% of faculty of all ranks in the U.S. identify as Latinx (NCES, 2018). Given that the nation's demographics continue to shift, it has become increasingly important for the nation's professoriate to mirror the makeup of our country. To achieve this, more Latinx students must graduate college and pursue graduate degrees. Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) are uniquely positioned to prepare the next wave of Latinx faculty considering that they educate about 66% of all Latinx students in college (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities [HACU], 2019). HSIs disproportionately educate and graduate Latinx students in higher education, many of who would not attend college otherwise (Santiago & Callan, 2010).

As access to higher education becomes more readily available to underrepresented groups, more first-generation students are entering college. First-generation colleges students are broadly defined as students who are the first in their family to attend college, however within educational research this term has been conceptualized in numerous ways (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018; Toutkoushian et al., 2019; Toutkoushian et al., 2018). Toutkoushian and others' (2018) study on defining first generation college students in

¹ I acknowledge *Latinx* as a political term used to challenge the social construction of gender and sexual identities.

educational research found eight different definitions in which this term was operationalized to conduct research on this population. Among those definitions, there is also debate as to whether students whose parents have earned a post-secondary education outside of the U.S. can be considered first-generation college students given the different educational contexts (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018).

As first in their family to pursue a post-secondary education, first-generation college students have shared that having parents with limited knowledge of higher education as a barrier to their success in higher education (Holland, 2016; Rice et al., 2017; Terezini et al., 1996). The challenges that come with being a first-generation college student does not end after earning an undergraduate degree. However, most research on first-generation college students refer to studies using undergraduate populations (Cunningham & Brown, 2014; Tate et al., 2015; Vega, 2016). Not much is known about these students after they finish college. First-generation college students who pursue graduate school face similar challenges as they did as undergraduates like unfamiliarity with academic norms (Cunningham & Brown, 2014). These circumstances have inspired nationwide initiatives to increase the educational attainment of first-generation students. Federally funded opportunity programs and national organizations have created opportunities and scholarships in efforts to increase the enrollment and achievement of first-generation college students.

Latinx students are more likely than their peers to be first-generation, accounting for more than one third of first-generation college students (38.2%) at 4-year institutions (Saenz et al., 2007). Research on this population tends to focus on the challenges they encounter, the institutions they choose to attend, and their likelihood of failure (Choy,

2011; Engle, 2007; Thayer, 2000); however, less apparent in the literature are how first-generation, Latinx students succeed in college and graduate school despite the challenges they encounter (Gildersleeve, 2013; Pérez & Saenz, 2017; Pérez II, et al., 2018).

Since Latinx students make up a large portion of first-generation students in college, and HSIs educate a majority of Latinx students in postsecondary institutions, I argue that these schools are best positioned to inform our understanding of the challenges and barriers first-generation, Latinx students encounter during their pursuit to graduate school. Given that the experiences of underrepresented first-generation students are largely absent in the literature (Gardner, 2013), I argue that their socialization begins during their time in college. Thus, attention should be paid to understanding how they grow interest in pursuing graduate school, their experiences applying to graduate school, and that transition from college into graduate school.

This study sought to understand how first-generation, Latinx students at Hispanic Serving Institutions who aspire to become professors in the humanities navigate their senior year of college, the graduate school application process, and the transition to graduate school. What challenges and barriers do they encounter? How do they remain motivated?

Through my involvement as a research associate for both the Penn and Rutgers Center for Minority Serving Institutions (CMSI), I have been fortunate to be part of the research team for the Hispanic Serving Institutions: Pathways to the Professoriate program—a \$5.1 million grant funded partnership with the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation that supports 90 undergraduate scholars at three HSIs across the nation in their efforts to become faculty in the humanities. This study pulls from a larger

longitudinal study on increasing the Latinx professoriate by investing in students at HSIs.²

As a qualitative research study, my dissertation employed a secondary analysis of semi-structured interviews of the first-generation, Latinx students in the Hispanic Serving Institutions: Pathways to the Professoriate Program, focusing on how they navigate their pursuit to becoming faculty as first-generation, Latinx students. The following questions guided my study:

1. What are the experiences of first-generation, Latinx undergraduates in the Hispanic Serving Institutions: Pathways to the Professoriate program?
2. How do these first-generation Latinx students overcome the challenges and barriers they encounter along the process of applying and transitioning into doctoral study?
3. How does the socialization experiences that students in the HSI Pathways to the Professoriate program encounter effect the ways they transition into graduate school?

What forms of capital contribute to their academic aspirations and their ability to succeed at their HSI and graduate institution?

Latinx vs Latino/a or Hispanic

The origins of the term Latinx is hard to trace (Salinas & Lozano, 2019). However, researchers and activists point to the term emerging in a Puerto Rican psychological periodical where the author attempted to challenge gender binaries (Logue,

² The research team consists of: Marybeth Gasman at Rutgers University Graduate School of Education, Andres Castro Samayoa at Boston College Lynch School of Education, and Paola Esmieu at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education.

2015). The popularity of the term Latinx has sparked intellectual debates on language and inclusion. Created in attempt to “ungender” the Spanish language (Millian, 2017, p. 122), the intent of using the term is to include individuals who do not subscribe to gender binaries and to be able to represent a large group without misappropriating gender to everyone discussed within that term.

Throughout this paper, I use the term *Latinx* to refer to students who self-identify as Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx. I chose to use this term because it is the most inclusive and allows for me to speak to the communal experience of those with Latino/a or Hispanic descent. Latinx refers to individuals who can trace their heritage, ancestry, or ethnicity to Latin America. If I am to suggest that we must be more inclusive and equitable in our practices to best support first-generation, Latinx students, then I find it to be my responsibility to use inclusive terminology.

Hispanic Serving Institutions: Pathways to the Professoriate Program

The HSI Pathways to the Professoriate program provided me an opportunity to learn more about the experiences of students at HSIs had applying to graduate school, as well as an understanding the challenges they encountered as they aspired to become professors in their respective fields. Students participation in this program spanned multiple years—from the spring semester of their junior year into the first semester of their second year in a doctoral program. As participants of the program, they received an ecosystem of support that included their peers at their institution and other HSI campuses, faculty mentors at their HSI institution, faculty mentors affiliated with our predominantly white research institutions, and an HSI coordinator on their campus who organized events and is the “on-the-ground” support throughout the students’ time in the. Upon acceptance

into the program, each fellow was required to participate in a research-intensive summer seminar program where they received GRE preparation, access to faculty to develop their own research project, as well as participate in seminars and workshops focused on applying to doctoral programs. The three HSIs of this program are: California State University, Northridge, Florida International University, and The University of Texas at El Paso. The partnering research institutions that provide faculty mentorship and opportunities for students to visit their institutions are New York University, Northwestern University, University of California, Berkeley, University of California, Davis, and the University of Pennsylvania.

Significance of the Study

While data may suggest that Latinx students are receiving doctoral degrees at higher rates than ever before (Saenz, 2007), challenges remain with producing Latinx faculty. One of the most common challenges that first-generation Latinx students who aspire to become professors encounter is the lack of representation of their racial and ethnic identity in the classroom to serve as role models, which has an effect on their academic self-concept (Robinson et al., 2015). As the nation becomes more diverse, the racial and ethnic disparity among faculty of color has remained stagnated. In 2017, 76% of faculty including all ranks were white (NCES, 2019). While racial and ethnic diversity of the professoriate has grown in the past decade, gains by certain racial and ethnic groups vary. The increase in doctoral degree attainment for Latinx students between 1986 and 2006 increased by 140% (Hoffer et al., 2007). The National Science Foundation (2015) reported a 156% increase in Latinx doctoral recipients, yet the professoriate has not seen similar gains in Latinx representation. This is a clear indication that there is an

opportunity to further diversify the professoriate in regard to Latinx representation, but only small progress has been made. Myers and Turner's (2004) work on the lack of diversity in the professoriate emphasized the importance of the doctoral student experience in shaping an individual's aspirations toward the professoriate, thus more research should focus on how these experiences form career pathways for Latinx students. Furthermore, research on first-generation students who want to pursue graduate school suggests that these students encounter challenges when discussing the value of continuing their education past an undergraduate degree to their families causing them to question whether pursuing a career in the academy is worth it at all (Thayer, 2000).

This study sheds light on a program aimed to increase faculty diversity by investing in the institutions educating the most diverse student bodies—Hispanic Serving Institutions. This study contributes to the growing body of literature focused on first-generation college students with a focus on the intersecting identities of being a first-generation college student and identifying as Latinx. Moreover, the theoretical approach of focusing on the student's success and how they overcome the challenges and barriers they encounter as they apply and make the transition into graduate school adds a much-needed reframing on how the literature depicts the experiences of first-generation, underrepresented minority students.

Using a qualitative approach, this study describes the experiences of first-generation, Latinx students who aspire to become professors in the humanities. Through several semi-structured interviews over the course of three years, participants of this study discuss how their interests in pursuing graduate school developed over time. These

conversations reveal the experiences and challenges that have created different pathways for these students to achieve their goals.

This study will be a resource to first-generation, Latinx students in graduate school as the findings will suggest strategies that they can use to enhance their experiences. This study will also help faculty and administrators at HSIs consider what programmatic interventions they can create to cultivate an environment where their students know that graduate study and a career in the academy is a possibility.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I synthesize the literature pertaining to first-generation college students, characteristics of HSIs and how these institutions promote the success of Latinx students, and the socialization of graduate students. These bodies of literature tend to be specific to their topic areas, lacking the nuances that occur when they intersect. First, I will provide an overview of the history of the term first-generation college student and synthesize how we understand that the first-generation, Latinx population in higher education today. Then I synthesize how we understand graduate school socialization. As this study is focused on students at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), I then provide a brief history of the formation of HSIs and the role it plays in educating first-generation college students. Lastly, I share the theoretical foundations that guide this study.

First-Generation, Latinx College Students

The concept of first-generation college student can be traced back to the late 1970s during the National Coordinating Council of Educational Opportunity Associations (NCCEOA) (Auclair et al., 2008). This concept emerged when the NCCEOA convened to identify non-financial obstacles students faced when considering post-secondary education. It was later adopted on a national level and became popular as TRIO programs began to use it as an eligibility criterion for many of their programs (Auclair et al., 2008). The most widely used definition is a student who has no parent who attended a post-secondary institution. Researchers suggest that if either parent has some experience in post-secondary education then they should have acquired some social and cultural capital that can help their child seek higher education (Pascarella, et al., 2004). Given the debate

on how this term should be understood, national datasets like the ones provided from the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) around outcomes of students that contain variables such as parental education often allow for one to make a distinction within comparison groups whether the researcher wants to see the data between students with parents who do not have a post-secondary education, students who have at least one parent with a post-secondary education, or students whose parents both have a post-secondary education (Auclair et al., 2008).

While there seems to be a growing interest in understanding the experiences of first-generation students in higher education, Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) point out how the ways in which this population has been studied in the past has resulted in inconsistent and misguided conclusions. Given the contemporary focus on the experiences first-generation students have in college, Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) found:

From feelings of alienation as they transition to an unfamiliar space, including the uncertainty of navigating accepted social decorum, to the persistent fear of homelessness and starvation between academic terms, the status of being an FGS reveals policies, norms, and cultural processes of institutions that privilege the experiences and knowledge of “traditional” students, whose parents attended college (Dumais & Ward, 2010; London, 1989).” (p. 147).

Through their review of dozens of peer reviewed research on first-generation students, they show how these studies depict a limited understanding of this population. First, they note how inconsistent the literature defines this population having found 18 different definitions of this population within the 77 published studies they reviewed for their paper. For quantitative literature particularly, Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) found that these studies tended to have unrepresentative study samples and typically ignored how the first-generation status “is a circumstance born from other social forces” (p. 153). For

qualitative research, Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) call for more critical studies that consider race, gender, socio-economic factors, as well as other factors that cannot be captured in quantitative measures that is often ignored in research of first-generation students. They suggest that the term “first-generation students” is nuanced, and the characteristics of what makes a student “first-generation” is connected to many other variables that have been tied to student success. Ignoring how these characteristics intersect and effect the experiences of students limits what conclusions we can make about them.

Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) emphasize the role intersectionality can play in understanding the experiences of first-generation college students. Crenshaw (1989) conceptualized the term intersectionality while analyzing Title VII court cases to demonstrate the pervasive employment discrimination that Black women face. She found that Black women who reported discrimination were often ignored because the courts would nullify their accusations of racism by claiming Black men did not experiences racism in the work environment. When they filed for discriminatory claims based on sex, the court would issue rulings noting that white women were not experiencing sexism. Collins (2005) notes that the term allow for an understanding that multiple identities such as race, class, ethnicity, and age “operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities” (p. 2).

Toutkoushian, May-Trifiletti, and Clayton’s (2019) study and Toutkoushian, Stollberg, and Slaton’s (2018) study on how first-generation college students are defined in educational research found eight different ways that the population was defined in

published educational research. The level of parental education is what caused the different variations of the term. Some of these variations included: having parents with highest education attainment being a high school degree, having at least one parent with at least some experience in any type of college, having parents who may have earned an associate's degree but did not enter a 4 year institution, or having parents who had some college at a 2 or 4 year college but did not finish. Their research found that when assessing these different definitions, first-generation students are still less likely to attend and graduate college. While researchers are urging for scholars to have a clear, consistent definition for first-generation college students, the research suggests that this population (no matter what variation of the term) is less likely to earn a postsecondary degree.

First-generation, Latinx college students are at a higher risk for not completing a postsecondary degree when compared to other racial and ethnic minorities (Martinez, 2018). Research suggests that first-generation students begin college less academically prepared, report having lower educational expectations than their peers (Choy, 2001), apply and attend less selective colleges that are closer to home (Engle, 2007), and perceive to have less support from their families for attending college (Thayer, 2000). These findings contribute to why first-generation students are more likely to drop out of college or take longer than six years to complete a postsecondary degree (Cahalan et al., 2016). Research on first-generation college students tend to focus on this population as one group without a specific focus on racial or ethnic identity or at least a disaggregating the data of their outcomes by race (Dennis, et al., 2005). Representing over a third of all first-generation students in college (38.2%) (Saenz et al., 2007), first-generation, Latinx

undergraduates are underrepresented in graduate school and less likely to pursue a doctoral degree.

According to Olive (2008), “first-generation students make choices based on different worldviews than continuing-generation students; these views may be unique to their own groups and thus frame what students perceive and value about college” (p. 83). These students tend to have lower educational aspiration than students whose parents attended college (Terenzini et al., 1996). Furthermore, parents who did not attend college tend to have less direct knowledge of the economic and social benefits of a postsecondary education. Thus, some of these parents may prefer their children work rather than attend college (Lee et al., 2004). For first-generation students who come from immigrant backgrounds, a common expectation of their family is to continue to live at home and carry out family duties while attending college (Phinney & Haas, 2003). This may complicate their ability to do well as they are likely to not be as academically prepared as their non-first-generation counterparts and may have trouble juggling their familial responsibilities along with adjusting to the rigor of college coursework.

A substantial amount of research indicates that first-generation students perceive a lower level of family support and less knowledge of the college environment from their parents (Terenzini et al., 1996; McConnell, 2000; Olive, 2008; Kline & Alfaro, 2016; Liang et al., 2017). This is important to consider since other research suggests that parental encouragement, involvement, and overall support is one of the “best predictors of postsecondary educational aspirations” (McCarron & Inkelas, 2008, p. 536).

However, complicating these deficit-oriented understandings of first-generation students are the studies that demonstrate that if you control for certain variables, first-

generation students perform at the same level of their peers. Warburton et al. (2001) research highlights that preparation for college plays a major role on academic performance for both first-generation and continuing-generation students. When the preparation is equal, these populations perform at the same level. Ishitani's (2006) study found that although first-generation students were less likely to complete their degree at the same rate as their peers, the negative effect on college persistence was a "temporal" one that was tied to academic preparation before college and seemed to diminish overtime in college.

The research that considers the role institutions play in supporting first-generation students tends to focus their efforts towards academic integration and promoting a sense of belonging. Means and Pyne's (2013) study attributed the challenges first-generation students encounter to environmental factors of college that these students were unaccustomed to. This qualitative study showed how students experienced a friendly and a hostile environment where they talked about being empowered and disempowered on a regular basis, whether in the classroom and feeling underprepared or on campus unfamiliar with the norms and expectations of a college student. Their subsequent study in 2017 delve into how first-generation students overcome these challenges and what they attribute their navigation of the unknown to. These students explained that their peer networks with other first-generation or marginalized students offered support to them to continue to feel empowered and seek help. They also cited student organizations and on-campus resources and offices responsible for supporting underrepresented students of color and/or low-income, first-generation students as pivotal to their transition into college and their success throughout their time in college.

Ishiyama and Hopkins (2003) study compared the outcomes of first-generation students in a TRIO program (McNair) to first-generation students who were not in this program to highlight the benefits that these programs can have for first-generation students. The Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program was established in 1987 by the department of education to prepare first-generation, low-income college students or students from unrepresented minority groups for graduate school. Students involved in the program receive opportunities to conduct research and are provided with faculty mentors (Ishiyama & Hopkins, 2003). Their research found that participants of this program were more likely to graduate on time and be admitted to graduate school than students who shared similar characteristics as them but were not a part of this program. These findings suggest that programs like McNair that take an intentional approach to provide resources, mentorship, and research opportunities to low-income, first-generation students play a significant role in promoting academic success and graduate school ambitions among the students involved. This study, however, was quantitative and used survey data and outcomes data of the sample population to highlight their persistence. It provides insight on how the program helps these students succeed and what factors of the program students attribute to helping them navigate college and aspire to continue their education.

In 2015, nearly 30% of all doctoral students were first-generation students (National Science Foundation, 2015). A racial breakdown of this demographic reveals that Latinx students represented 36.2% of first-generation doctoral recipients. In terms of field of study, first-generation students were most represented in the field of education (29.2%) and least represented in the humanities (18.9%) (NSF, 2015). Research about

first-generation students in doctoral programs are limited and tend to focus on their attrition rates and the challenges they encounter in graduate school (S. K. Gardner, 2013; S. K. Gardner & Holley, 2011; Roksa et al., 2018). First-generation students in doctoral programs are less likely to have gone to research-intensive schools for both undergraduate and graduate degrees, more likely to require additional time to complete their degrees, and subsequently take on more debt than their non-first-generation peers (Hoffer, 2003).

Gardner's (2013) study on the challenges first-generation students face in doctoral programs suggests that beyond the financial barriers that graduate school presents to first-generation students (especially those who come from low-income households), these students have a limited understanding on how graduate school differs from college. This contributes to a harder transition and socialization experience where students experience feeling like an outsider or an imposter often, and they are less likely to cultivate important relationships with their peers and faculty that are critical to their success in their program and within their respective disciplines. Gardner's prior research (2007; 2011) highlighted the importance of socialization to avoid doctoral attrition. Students in this previous study often cited learning about critical information about their academic programs through older students and how important it was to form these informal and formal relationships with other graduate students. However, the literature around first-generation students has demonstrated how unlikely it is for these students to seek and cultivate these relationships.

Essentially, the literature surrounding the experiences of first-generation students is overwhelmingly focused on the forms of capital these students lack and how that plays

a role on their academic success and ambitions. While important to consider, it depicts a deficit-oriented picture of a demographic that continues to grow in our educational system. We know enough already about the barriers they encounter and little about what interventions and sources of support help these students succeed. While attention has been paid to programs like McNair and institutional support structures like specific staff roles or offices dedicated to student success, these studies are often focused on a specific educational context. More research is needed on what happens to these students after one education context and into another—what is that transition like? How do they compare to other students? Before we can answer these questions critically, it is important to consider our current understanding of graduate student socialization.

For this study, I am defining first-generation college students as students who are the first in their family to earn a 4-year degree. I choose to operationalize the first-generation term in this way because it captures the experiences of students who do not have parents who have earned a 4-year degree which is the prerequisite requirement in order to attend to graduate school. However, important to note is that the term is rightfully deserving of critique. How do the experiences differ for students whose parents have earned a 2-year degree in the U.S.? What about students whose parents earned 4-year degrees outside of the U.S.? The answers to these questions are important, however, understanding what first-generation, Latinx students are experiencing now in the nation can help our foundational understanding of their experiences in education before we explore the complexity of the term and how those experiences are nuanced based on different parental educational backgrounds.

Graduate Student Socialization

An important component of the graduate school experience is socialization. Socialization is described as the ongoing process where students learn the norms and expectations of their roles as (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). More often than not, first-generation and underrepresented students have a difficult time with socialization.

Socialization happens through social interactions in and outside the classroom. Espino (2014) suggests that for underrepresented students particularly, the socialization process happens in inclusive settings where faculty and non-underrepresented students are present and engaging with them as peers. For underrepresented students, the social capital cultivated during these interactions are cherished and relied on throughout their time in graduate school (Ramirez, 2017). These networks are essential for underrepresented students as they serve as resources for self-advocacy and navigating an environment where inequality can be pervasive (Green, et al., 2016).

Socialization in graduate school has largely been defined as the process in which an individual learns and adopts the values, skills, attitudes, norms and knowledge necessary for entry into a professional career within a specific field (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Weidman, et al., 2001). Golde (1998) describes it as a double socialization—where students are socialized into the role of graduate student and are prepared for life as a graduate student and life as a future academic. In attempt to understand graduate student success or attrition, considerable amount of research has focused on the socialization or lack thereof among doctoral students (Felder, Stevenson, & Gasman, 2014; Gardner, 2007, 2013; Taylor & Antony, 2000). Turner and Thomson's (1993) research suggests that socialization is a determining factor in doctoral student success.

The widely used framework breaks down socialization into four distinct developmental stages: Anticipatory, Formal, Informal, and Personal (Weidman et al., 2001). During the anticipatory stage, students begin to learn the culture, values, norms, and expectations of graduate school and the academy (McCoy & Winkle-Wagner, 2015). These students become aware of the behavioral and cognitive expectations of their field (Weidman et al., 2001). The formal stage involves graduate students receiving:

formal instruction in the knowledge upon which future professional authority will be based...Students are inducted into the program, practice role rehearsal, and thereby determine their degree of fitness, observe and imitate expectations through role taking, and become familiar faces in the program (Weidman et al., 2001, p. 13).

The informal stage involves students learning expectations through their interactions with older students and professors (Weidman et al., 2001) where students observe behavioral cues and act accordingly (Gardner, 2011). The personal stage refers to the phenomenon where “individuals and social roles, personalities and social structures become fused” (Thorton & Nardi, 1975, p. 880) and students’ part from their former ways (Weidman et al., 2001). At this point, students begin to focus on specific research interests and become more involved with publishing, presenting, and service (Weidman et al., 2001).

Unlike the model suggests, other researchers have posited that this socialization can occur during undergraduate study too, and it is through this socialization process that students decide to pursue graduate study. In a study exploring the experiences of aspiring graduate students in a summer bridge program, McCoy and Winkle-Wagner (2015) argued, “the anticipatory socialization process begins during a student's undergraduate education. It is during this period that the aspiring scholar begins the development of a scholarly habitus” (p.425). Furthermore, Winkle-Wagner and McCoy’s (2016) research

demonstrates how summer programs focused on graduate school preparation demystifies aspects of graduate school that underrepresented (and largely first-generation) students either know little of or nothing about. In their qualitative study linking the cultural and social capital students receive at summer bridge programs and their socialization into graduate school, one participant shared how they pursued graduate school in English because of the passion they have towards the subject yet did not know how they would be able to use that degree post-graduation. They shared,

“I chose the English literature major basically because of personal interest. I didn’t think of building a career out of it . . . I felt like the English literature major was useless to me. It was only useful for personal development and not for anything else. So, doing this institute . . . I’ve realized that there is something that I can do with the English major that is not just a dead-end role, which is what most people think . . . The program has opened up my world more” (p. 191).

Had this student not had the exposure to what career prospects they may have after pursuing a terminal degree in English, the tension of not knowing whether it was a wise decision could have had negative effects on their ability to acclimate and succeed in a graduate program.

Most theories focused on the socialization of graduate students were developed at times when the graduate student population was overwhelmingly male and White (Ward & Bensimon, 2002), thus these theories are not nuanced enough to account for the increasingly diverse populations in higher education today. It is important to consider Yosso’s (2005) idea of community cultural wealth as a guiding perspective to the socialization of graduate students because it considers forms of capital that are not acknowledged or considered in the Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) graduate socialization framework. Research about underrepresented ethnic minorities, especially in

education, often focus on what these populations lack, instead of how they succeed despite the inequitable resources and capital they have access to.

Contemporary research on graduate student socialization has increasingly become more race conscious (Felder et al., 2014; S. Gardner, 2008; Twale et al., 2016; Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016), however they rarely explore this phenomenon by different disciplinary and institutional contexts. In a qualitative case study of Black doctoral students pursuing terminal degrees in education at a large, urban, private research institution in the Northeast, Felder et al (2014) explored how race played a role in the socialization of the graduate students in their study. They found that the Black students' socialization experiences were affected by their race in different, but noteworthy ways where they were encouraged and supported by faculty who shared their race, but they also were exposed to the challenges of being stretched thin as an underrepresented academic. They also noted how their socialization experiences were affected by conversations about race in the classroom, where these students often had to take on the burden of facilitating these conversations because faculty were unwilling or ineffective at guiding these conversations. Depending on the outcomes of these types of conversations, they can be incredibly taxing and exhausting to underrepresented students in the classroom. Within the socialization framework, considering race during the informal stage, Felder et al (2014) suggests that “for underrepresented students who are marginalized during the doctoral process managing conflict is critical to building relationships with members of an academic community who can support the acquisition of research skills required for success and degree completion” (p. 26). Race, will indeed,

effect their overall experience in graduate school. Understanding that will help students navigate this experience in ways that can help prepare them to be successful.

Since more scholars have pointed out the limitations of socialization frameworks, the Weidman, Twale, and Stein (2001) model has been updated to reconsider the role identity had on graduate students of color (Twale et al., 2016). Recognizing the body of research that points to the inequitable experiences of graduate students of color, Twale et al (2016) point out why it is important to consider identity, as involvement graduate preparatory programs like McNair and/or attending a Minority Serving Institution (MSI) can play a role in how incoming students interact with faculty. Specifically, Twale et al (2016) note,

...presence at a historically black college and university (HBCU) or a program targeted for undergraduate students of color may contribute significantly to student persistence. Program persistence among doctoral students at HBCUs relates to purposeful faculty-student interactions... [these students] engagement with faculty advisors tended to be more positive than students who engaged only with faculty on research projects. The importance of being an undergraduate student of color in the McNair Program, for example, served as a means to enhance student socialization and academic integration; booster self-confidence; integrate socially, network, and participate in learning communities; affirm abilities, and support to degree completion (p. 84).

They conclude their paper noting that based on contemporary research that incorporates identity in socialization, they would change their framework to explicitly consider institutional and disciplinary culture, faculty climate, student preparation, and the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that entering students, professionals and practitioners have.

In Gardner's (2008) study on doctoral student socialization of underrepresented populations in graduate education (women, students of color, older students, part-time

students, and students with children), she argues that “the topic of marginalization in regard to socialization...treats graduate education as a monolithic enterprise” (p. 34). Her research highlights how the experience is not the same for all students, varies by discipline and institutional context, and how these nuances matter and play a role to a student’s success. Gardner’s previous study (2007) compared the socialization of students in chemistry and history and demonstrated the differences of disciplinary culture in aspects of socialization and seeking support. What she found, however, was that despite the cultural differences among their specific disciplines, the actual administrative process of earning a terminal degree was commonly understood by explanation of former and current students. Learning about the norms of the field and the life of an academic was mostly attributed to mentors and advisors, however, the day-to-day aspect of making progress towards degree completion tended to be shared from student to student.

Gardner’s (2008) study found that students described their socialization as an attempt to “fit the mold” of graduate school and the academy. Gardner argues that an assumption of the socialization process requires doctoral students to “transform” themselves into scholars and adapt to the norms of their discipline and the academy noting how this can be difficult and may negatively affect the experiences of underrepresented students in graduate school. Her research provides recommendations for graduate programs to consider how to alleviate some of barriers these underrepresented student face as well as encourage others to conduct more research that considers the roles identity can play in the socialization process.

There have been few studies that frame socialization using Bourdieu’s social reproduction theory (Gopaul, 2011; Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). In attempt to

address the normativity associated with graduate student socialization, Gopaul (2011) relates different concepts of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction along with different stages of graduate socialization. Gopaul (2011) explains how a student's habitus "may mediate their ability to cultivate important faculty and peer relationships as well as to understand the prodder practices and processes of doctoral education" (p. 14). Gopaul (2011) suggests that understanding cultural and social capital in the context of graduate student socialization can provide insight on the inequitable structure and process of doctoral study, noting how the process is often understood and operationalized in ways that prioritize full-time students who are fully funded and have opportunities to publish. The concept of field can speak to the "rules of the game" in the academy, where graduate students at every point of their socialization, learn more about the role of their faculty advisors, and the importance of networking (Gopaul, 2011). Winkle-Wagner and McCoy's (2016) study focuses specifically on cultural and social capital and considers Yosso's community cultural wealth model to argue that underrepresented students use these forms of capital to navigate their experiences in education and how opportunities to be part of summer programs for graduate school and their ability to incorporate their identities into their experiences helped them recognize the capital they bring along with them.

Underrepresented students who are inadequately socialized into graduate school report feeling othered and isolated (Havlik et al., 2017). In a study of first-generation college students at a predominantly white institution, Havlik et al. found that students felt isolated and alone, and felt that they were seen as less than and disadvantaged compared

to their white peers. These feelings contribute to the reasons why many underrepresented students do not persist and complete their graduate degrees.

The Context of Hispanic-Serving Institutions

Research attempting to assess HSIs should consider its history and how that history frames the way these institutions have been studied and understood in the realm of higher education. In 1983, Congressman Paul Simon (D-IL) first used the term “Hispanic Institutions” to describe higher education institutions that enrolled at least 40% Hispanic students in efforts to pass legislation to improve the quality of these institutions (Santiago, 2006). While the legislation was not passed, this signified a growing interest to fund institutions that educated large amounts of Hispanics. In the mid 1980s, several leaders in the Southwest created a coalition to advocate on behalf of institutions with high percentage of Hispanic students for federal funding which still exists today as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) (Santiago, 2006). This coalition, HACU, coined the term “Hispanic-Serving Institution” as a way to group together institutions throughout the nation that had a “critical mass” of Hispanic students.

After an unsuccessful lawsuit against the state of Texas for inequitable funding policies towards institutions along the Texas boarder that served a high proportion of Hispanic students (*LULAC v. Richards*, 1987), in 1989 Representative Albert Bustamante (D-TX) introduced the “Hispanic-Servings Institutions of Higher Education Act of 1989” to provide more funding to improve HSIs and expand Hispanic education attainment (Santiago, 2006). Although it was not passed, it laid the groundwork to recognize these institutions for future legislation and was later incorporated in the reauthorization of the

Higher Education Act in 1992 when reintroduced by Senator Claiborne Pell (D-RI) (Santiago, 2006). This legislation was passed as a competitive grant program and established a federal definition for HSIs under Title III of the Higher Education Act.

Under the “Developing Institutions Program,” HSIs were defined as:

...accredited and degree-granting public or private nonprofit institutions of higher education with an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at Least 25 percent Hispanic students; and assures that not less than 50 percent of its Hispanic students are low-income and first-generation students; and another 25 percent of its Hispanic students are either low-income or first generation college students. (Santiago, 2006, p. 7).

In 1998, this definition was tweaked in the reauthorization of the act where first-generation status was removed as a requirement and the need to prove that 25 percent of the Hispanic students were low-income. The program was also moved to Title V (from Title III) to differentiate it from programs aimed towards HBCUs and TCUs (Santiago, 2006).

Unlike Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) that have institutional missions to educate specific populations, institutions can become HSIs based on their enrollment of Hispanic students. The University of Puerto Rico system, Boricua College in New York City, and the National Hispanic University in California are among the few higher education institutions whose missions are intentionally directed towards the education of Hispanic students. All other institutions have become HSIs because of an increasing Hispanic enrollment. Institutions that meet eligibility requirements to be considered HSIs are eligible for federal funding aimed to increasing support their efforts in serving Hispanic students. Title III funding is focused on increasing the number of Hispanic students

attaining degrees in STEM fields and/or improving transfer rates or articulation agreements between two-year and four-year institutions for STEM. Title V funding helps support HSIs to advance or expand educational opportunities to improve the degree attainment rates of their Hispanic students. These funds can be used in a variety of ways to help support an institution's intent on improving Hispanic students' success.

According to the Department of Education, this grant can fund new equipment for teaching, facilities, faculty development, tutoring and other academic support programs, teacher education, student support services, and more.

Despite having fewer resources and being underfunded (Conrad & Gasman, 2015), HSIs are more likely to educate students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, many of whom are first-generation, and/or from low-income households. HSIs disproportionately serve non-traditional students—many who work full time, may take breaks throughout their time in college, need developmental education, and/or live at home and commute to school (Nuñez et al., 2011). Although eligible for federal funding because of their designation, this funding is competitive and only 25% of HSIs actually receive federal funding for being HSIs (Nuñez et al., 2015).

Unfortunately, these factors are not taken into consideration when assessing and comparing these institutions to their predominantly white peers. The literature surrounding outcomes at Hispanic-Serving Institutions that compare them to predominantly white institutions (PWIs) often compare graduation and retention rates, but do not account for variables known to complicate these rates, such as socio-economic status of the students enrolled, whether students work full-time, among many other factors (Nuñez et al., 2015). Literature suggest that when comparing PWIs with HSIs,

you need to have better comparison groups (Rodríguez & Galdeano, 2015). For instance, the outcomes of Latinx students at HSIs are not that much different than at PWIs, but the way it is studied portrays HSIs as inferior, when in fact they are producing similar amounts of Latinx graduates with far less resources (Rodríguez & Galdeano, 2015).

More 2 to 4-year colleges and universities are enrolling at least 25% of a Hispanic student body, thus HSIs are the fastest growing subtype of minority serving institutions (MSIs) (Nuñez et al., 2011). As the Latino population continues to grow and disperse to other cities and rural areas, more institutions are likely to see demographic changes on their campuses and eventually become HSIs. However, just because an institution meets the criteria, does not mean they are necessarily “Hispanic-serving.” Laden’s (2004) research on HSIs called attention to the analyzing HSIs critically to understand what makes them HSIs and how the designation affects the institution’s approach to providing access and degree attainment to Latinx students. Garcia’s (2017) research investigates this manufactured identity by examining these institutions using organizational theory and learning about students, staff, and faculty experiences at these institutions. While many constituents may not be aware of the HSI designation, or what it entails, Garcia found that the staff and faculty do have a commitment to serving the local community and their Hispanic students, and the students do recognize their significant presence on campus.

Since 1994, when the federal government began recognizing HSIs for Title V funding, the number of HSIs has more than double from 189 to 409, representing 12% of all higher education institutions—serving 18% of all U.S. college students, 65% of all Latinx college students (Santiago & Galdeano, 2015). HSIs produce about 40% of Latinx

students who earn bachelors in the U.S. and 54% of Latinos who earn STEM degrees (Nunez et al., 2015). Since HSIs educate such a large proportion of Hispanics in postsecondary education, many of whom might not attend college otherwise, the development and success of these institutions are critical for realizing our nations higher education and workforce goals (Excelencia in Education, 2015). Despite this rapid growth, Latinos in higher education are still graduating at much lower rates than their white counterparts. However, as more institutions achieve the HSI designation, institutions have begun developing programs to increase the participation and attainment of Latino students in their campuses.

Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI) are being examined to create programs to address the recruitment and retention of Latino students (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). While two-year community colleges are the most frequent type of HSIs (Núñez et al., 2011), very few studies have focused on students attending HSIs at research-intensive institutions which is an institutional type whose enrollment of Hispanics is increasingly growing. HSIs are known for being located in areas with a high Hispanic population (Santiago, 2006). For institutions in states like California, for example, many of the research institutions (like the UC system) are becoming HSIs and more research is needed on understanding how these institutions actualize that institutional identity, and how become more “Hispanic-serving” after receiving this designation.

Considering the demographic HSIs educate, largely first-generation, low-income, Latinx students, these institutions have the potential to populate graduate programs with their graduates. Although research suggests that underrepresented, low-income students in highly selective research-intensive graduate programs are likely to have gone to highly

selective, research-intensive undergraduate institutions (Hoffer, 2003), it does not mean that HSIs are not and cannot produce competitive applicants. Given that educational research tends to focus on the elite, highly selective, and well-resourced institutions as models of excellence, I argue that we should pay more attention to the institutions that “do more with less.” HSIs are educating the highest proportion of Latinx students in post-secondary education therefore our focus should be on how they are successful at this endeavor and how we can help improve that success.

Theoretical Framework

Guided by frameworks incorporating Bourdieu’s social production theory (1977, 1986) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), I will demonstrate the need to complicate our understanding of these intersecting topics in efforts to improve our understanding of the experiences of Latinx, first-generation students in post-secondary education.

Valencia’s (1997, 2010) research on deficit thinking theory suggests that students fail in school because of their internal deficits or deficiencies, and this failure can be linked to “linguistic shortcomings, a lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behavior” (p. 6). Furthermore, it suggests that low education attainment is tied to a lack of motivation to learn, without acknowledging institutional inadequacies. I argue that research on first-generation students in general, and about Latinx students in particular, tends to focus on the failure of these populations. While it is important to draw attention to the rates at which first-generation Latinx students succeed compared to their peers, not

enough attention is paid to how they succeed and what environments or factors contributes to that success.

Anti-deficit theory attempts to rectify our understanding of these populations by focusing on identifying factors that contribute to student success. Harper (2010) refers to this theory as an “instead of” framework where researchers “deliberately attempt to discover how some students of color have managed to succeed” (p. 68). For example, instead of focusing on the lack of resources students may experience during college, or how racist stereotypes may negatively affect academic performance, Harper’s (2010) research on Black men in STEM focuses on how they succeed despite these circumstances. Rather than adding to the literature to understand failure, this line of research provides opportunity to change the narrative in attempt to demonstrate success. Though this approach intentionally avoids focusing on failure, it is important to note that it does not ignore challenges and circumstances that can complicate one’s ability to succeed. Special attention is given to how individual overcome the barriers they encounter, however those challenges and barriers are noted and not ignored.

Contributing to the likelihood of focusing on failure for underrepresented populations is the notion that underrepresented students, like Latinx, first-generation students, lack forms of capital that are considered instrumental to one’s success in education. Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1986) conceptualized a social reproduction theory where he defines concepts of habitus, capital, and field to explain the creation and reproductions of social classes. Within the field of education, scholars often use his theoretical concepts to “assess and explore the social stratification within and reproduced by education systems” (Gopaul, 2011, pp. 13-14). Habitus has been defined as “a way of

describing the embodiment of social structures and history in individuals—it is a set of dispositions, internal to the individual, that both reflects external social structures and shapes how the individual perceives the world and acts in it” (Power, 1999, p.48).

Although one’s habitus may not determine how someone acts or behaves, someone’s habitus predisposes them to act in ways that their social structures have shaped them. In reference to doctoral education, Gopaul (2011) suggests that a student’s habitus plays a role in their ability to cultivate meaningful and important relationships with faculty and peers, which has been shown to be associated to students acclimating well to the process of doctoral education. When considering first-generation students then, this concept of habitus can be used to explain why these students have a harder time transitioning to graduate school. Gardner (2008) points out in her study of first-generation doctoral student socialization that underrepresented students experience a socialization that does not fit their lifestyle and suggests that this tension of having to become acclimated to a normative, rigid culture can explain the attrition rates of these students.

Bourdieu (1986) identifies four main types of capital: economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. Economic capital is often associated with power and is linked to money and other forms of material wealth. Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as the “aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network of essentially institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 248). This refers to one’s networks and relationships, such as family, and membership to organizations and/or institutions, and how those networks can provide access to resources that can also serve as other forms of capital. Cultural capital is understood by Bourdieu (1986) as the language skills, cultural knowledge, mannerisms, and preferences one has

by their class status and upbringing. There are three states of cultural capital—embodied, objectified, and institutionalized (Bourdieu, 1986). The embodied state refers to one’s dispositions such as how they speak, what music they prefer, etc. The objectified state signifies one’s access of cultural goods like books, instruments, and art. The institutionalized state is a result of one’s involvement in an institution like earning education credentials at a school. Symbolic capital is often referred to the honor or prestige that is associated with someone based on the other forms of capital they possess. Collectively, Bourdieu suggests that these forms of capital speak to one’s advantages and social standing. If we are to believe that these forms of capital contribute to one’s ability to succeed in life, or in education specifically, then that would explain why Latinx, first-generation students are more likely to fail, as they are commonly written about as lacking these forms of capital.

However, Bourdieu’s (1986) idea of cultural capital does not consider important aspects of one’s life that can contribute to their overall success in their attempt to upward social mobility. Although research supports the notion that students who are first-generation often cite not having access to information about college, struggle financially, and encounter other challenges during their time in educational institutions (Auclair et al., 2008), unique aspects of their identity as underrepresented, first-generation students help motivate them to thrive and succeed in these environments. To combat this, Yosso (2005) argued “cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed by the middle class, but rather it refers to an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are valued by privileged groups in society” (p. 76). By taking a critical, anti-deficit approach to evaluating different forms of capital one can possess, Yosso (2005) identifies

aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital as forms of capital that marginalized people possess, aiding their social mobility efforts like pursuing graduate school. As defined in Yosso's (2005), here are the definitions of these different forms of capital:

Aspirational capital is “the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. This resiliency is evidenced in those who allow themselves and their children to dream possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to obtain those goals” (Yosso, 2005, pp. 77-78).

Linguistic capital refers to the different language and communication skills students bring with them into the college environment (Yosso, 2005). This goes beyond the actual languages students can speak. It honors their experiences as translators, knowledge seekers, and the ability to code-switch.

Familial capital refers to the social and personal human resources students have in their environment, which includes their immediate and extended family, community networks, and peers (Yosso, 2005)

Social capital is similar to Bourdieu's concept and defines it as “peers and other social contacts [that] can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions” (Yosso, 2005, p. 79).

Navigational Capital refers to a student's skill and ability in navigation social institutions like educational spaces (Yosso, 2005). It places value in the experiences students may have navigating exclusionary spaces, or figuring out how to thrive in a new, unknown space (like college for first-generation students).

Resistant capital refers to the “knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). According to Yosso (2005), this form of capital is passed down from parents and community members who have a historical legacy of engaging social justice, thus leaving students of underrepresented backgrounds to leverage their education to enter society prepared in solving challenging problems affected by inequality.

Pérez’ (2017) research on the success of Latinx men at two selective colleges uses Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth model to demonstrate how their success is “rooted in the knowledge, skills, and resources accumulated prior to college” (p. 126). Pérez (2017) found that these men’s “aspirations to graduate from a selective university were nurtured by hearing stories about the hardships parents endured in the US” (p. 126), which he then connects to linguistic capital and how these stories developed resistant capital that helped these men develop oppositional behaviors to cope and overcome adversity in college.

Lastly, Bourdieu’s concept of field has direct connections to how we can understand the experiences first-generation students have navigating postsecondary education. Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of field recognizes it as a structured space where relationships and different forms of capital interact. This space has a set of “rules” that is understood by the actors in the field. It is dynamic, constantly changing, and one’s “power” in a field is associated with whether or not they possess the capital that is valued in that field. Considering all of Bourdieu’s concepts (habitus, capital, and field), he defines his theory of practice as the interaction of one’s habitus and capital within a field, which produces one’s practice (or behaviors). These actions are connected to one’s

dispositions, informed by their habitus, and the capital they possess. In an educational context, if we are to believe that this theory of practice can explain how individuals navigate postsecondary education, then we can make connections to the challenges that first-generation students face, especially when they are underrepresented, underprepared, and underserved throughout their time navigating different educational contexts.

Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) theory of practice together with Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model creates an opportunity to analyze our current understanding of the experiences of Latinx, first-generation students in a nuanced way that prioritizes how they succeed despite the barriers that they encounter throughout their time in postsecondary education. The following sections of this chapter delve into the literature of specific topic areas while drawing on some of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts to complicate our understanding of these student's experiences and pointing out gaps in the research to help inform how we can better serve these students.

Concluding Thoughts

Due to demographic shifts of the nation and the increasing need of a post-secondary education for financial stability, it is no surprise that Latinx students and first-generation students are both increasing rapidly in attending college. Even though they are less likely to graduate on time or finish their undergraduate degree, their attainment rates have been growing. However, they still remain significantly underrepresented in graduate programs and they have high attrition rates in doctoral programs.

Research suggests that the challenges Latinx, first-generation students experience in graduate school can be linked to forms of capital they lack and an ineffective

socialization experiences (Gardner, 2013; Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). While this may be true, one must consider: How are we defining first-generation students and how does that effect the way we understand their outcomes and experiences? What is “effective” socialization? Do all students experience socialization the same way? The answers to these questions effect the way that we study and understand these populations.

Only recently has the socialization literature around graduate students began to focus on race and identity (Felder et al., 2014; Twale et al., 2016). For the studies that do, they do not focus on institutional context from undergraduate into graduate school. How does it differ, if at all, from institutional type? For Latinx, first-generation students in particular, how is attending an HSI play a role in this phenomenon? Do students attending HSIs have a smoother transition into graduate school than those who do not?

Furthermore, the most common factor among the literature around first-generation students focuses on different forms of capital that they may or may not possess. While important, I argue that too much attention is paid to “traditional” forms of capital (wealth, parental education, etc.) and not enough to what critical scholars have argued are forms of capital that are often unacknowledged and instrumental to the success of marginalized students (resistance capital, navigational capital, etc.).

More research is needed on Latinx, first-generation students who attended HSIs and are pursuing graduate degrees to understand their experiences, and how institutional policies and practices can change to promote their success. If representation continues to play a major role on the aspiration of young underrepresented youth, then it is important for our educational systems to fix the underrepresentation of these populations in graduate school.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study emerged from the persistent underrepresentation of Latinx faculty. Given demographic shifts in the nation, it is unsurprising that more Latinx students are entering college than ever before. Of the increasing Latinx population in postsecondary education, nearly one third of these students at 4-year institutions identify as first-generation college students (Saenz et al., 2007). While research suggests that first-generation (and underrepresented minorities in general) face obstacles related to lacking capital to promote success in college (Choy, 2011), their increasing presence in higher education is resulting in a wave of first-generation graduate students who aspire to enter the professoriate. Although aggregate data depicts an increasingly diverse professoriate, gains by specific racial and ethnic groups vary. While doctoral degree attainment for Latinx students grew 140% between 1986 and 2006 (Hoffer et al., 2007) and another increase of 156% between 2002-2012 (NSF, 2015), only 6.5% of doctorate recipients are Latinx despite this ethnic group representing 20% of the population aged 18 through 44 (U.S. Census, 2015).

Furthermore, the gap in doctoral degree attainment between students of color and White students at selective doctoral-granting institutions is notably wide and pervasive (Felder et al., 2014). In 2013, Latinx students made up a mere 3% of doctoral degree recipients at Ivy League universities (IPEDS, 2013). This is notable as research suggests that students attending highly selective graduate programs may be more likely to become faculty members (Hoffer et al., 2007). This is not to argue that highly selective graduate programs are better environments to prepare faculty than other institutions, but that

students at these institutions have greater success in becoming faculty after attending these institutions. In sum, while data suggests that Latinx students are increasingly earning doctorate degrees, thus improving opportunities for the professoriate to diversify, challenges remain in these students becoming faculty.

Educating nearly 65% of all Latinx college students (Santiago & Galdeano, 2015), HSIs produce about 40% of Latinx students who earn bachelors in the U.S. and 54% of Latinx students who earn STEM degrees (Nunez, 2015). These institutions provide an environment with diverse faculty and staff, offer same-race role models, provide educational environments to make up for poor primary and secondary education, and prepare their students to succeed in the workforce and/or graduate/professional education (Núñez et al., 2015). For these reasons, I argue that HSIs can provide insight on how to diversify the professoriate with more Latinx faculty.

Funded by the Andrew W. Mellon foundation, the Hispanic Serving Institutions Pathways to the Professoriate program (HSI Pathways) is a partnership between the Rutgers Center for Minority Serving Institutions (CMSI), three Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and five doctoral-granting research one universities with the aim to help prepare 90 scholars at the three HSIs become faculty in the humanities.

My dissertation specifically focuses on the experiences of the first-generation, Latinx participants who are part of the first two cohorts of the program. For this study, I defined first-generation college students as students whose parents or guardians do not have a 4-year degree. Given that my sample drew from a grant-funded program that provides additional resources to help students achieve this goal, I was interested in uncovering:

1. What are the experiences of first-generation, Latinx undergraduates in the Hispanic Serving Institutions: Pathways to the Professoriate program?
2. How do these first-generation Latinx students overcome the challenges and barriers they encounter along the process of applying and transitioning into doctoral study?
3. How do the socialization experiences that students in the HSI Pathways to the Professoriate program encounter through the program effect the ways they transition into graduate school?
4. What forms of capital contribute to their academic aspirations and their ability to succeed at their HSI and graduate institution?

To answer these questions, I conducted an intrinsic single case study with multiple units of analyses given the different people who I interviewed. Case study research is a qualitative approach in which a researcher “explores a real life, contemporary bounded system over time through detail, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Creswell, 2013). Yin (2003) offers five rationales to explain why case study research is useful. Two of these rationales have guided me to conduct a single-case study. Having a single case study allows the researcher to focus on a critical case in testing theory, and since this project is part of a larger longitudinal study, I came back to this study and research questions at different points in time. By focusing on one case, it allowed me to observe and record how certain conditions change over time. According to Mills, Durepos, and Wiebe (2010), an intrinsic case study is a study where the case itself is the primary interest of the study. Rather than trying to draw conclusions about a phenomenon through a case, an intrinsic case study is driven by a desire to know more

about the particularities of the case being observed. Intrinsic case studies are exploratory in nature, and in this study, I was interested in gaining insight on the experiences of first-generation, Latinx students to inform our understanding of their experiences more so than extending theory or producing generalizable claims in supporting this demographic.

Research Sites

The institutions selected for the Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Pathways to the Professoriate program were based on their production of bachelor's of arts degrees and geographical diversity. Considering the growing, geographical spread of Latinx communities, we targeted states with higher proportions of HSIs. Our institutional partners include the following HSIs: Florida International University; University of Texas at El Paso; and California State University, Northridge. The following institutions are our predominantly white research institutions which we refer to as majority research institutions (MRIs): New York University, University of California, Berkeley; University of Pennsylvania; Northwestern University; and University of California, Davis.

Florida International University (FIU) is a public four-year university in Miami, Florida. Founded in 1965, FIU is Miami's first and only public research institution. It is a doctorate-granting highest research activity university (Carnegie Foundation, 2019). It enrolls 56,718 students, of which 64% identify as Hispanic. Half of the full-time undergraduate students receive Pell grants. In the year 2017, FIU awarded 6,219 baccalaureate degrees and 29 doctoral degrees to Latinx students. FIU retains 88 percent of first-time undergraduate students after their first year and has a 58 percent 6-year graduation rate.

University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) is a public four-year university in El Paso, Texas. Founded in 1914, it is the 2nd oldest institution part of the University of Texas system. It is a doctorate-granting highest research activity university (Carnegie Foundation, 2019). It enrolls 25,078 students, of which 80% identify as Hispanic. 62 percent of the full-time undergraduate population receive Pell grants. In the year 2017, UTEP awarded 2,795 baccalaureate degrees and 50 doctoral degrees to Latinx students. UTEP retains 74 percent of first-time undergraduate students after their first year and has a 40 percent 6-year graduation rate.

California State University, Northridge (CSUN) is a public four-year university in Northridge, California. Founded in 1958, it is part of the California State University system. It is considered a comprehensive masters granting university (Carnegie Foundation, 2019). It enrolls 41,319 students, of which 45% identify as Hispanic. 62 percent of its full-time undergraduate population receive Pell grants. In the year 2017, CSUN awarded 3,321 baccalaureate degrees to its Latinx students. CSUN retains 80% of first-time undergraduate students after their first year and has a 50% 6-year graduation rate.

Data Collection

This study employed a secondary qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews from a larger, longitudinal study of 90 students who are part of the Hispanic Serving Institutions: Pathways to the Professoriate program. Over the course of the participants' time at the HSI campuses and during their first year in a doctoral program, we interviewed the students involved in the program to learn about their educational

journey and their experiences in the program. This study specifically focused on the first-generation, Latinx students in the program.

Data collection came in the form of semi-structured interviews and collecting documents. I conducted interviews with the participants of the programs as well as collected data through documents associated with the program. Each participant filled out a demographic survey prior to their first interview. As they progressed in the program, they completed additional surveys related to applying to graduate school and feedback on certain programmatic aspects of the programs (their mentorship relationship with faculty, attending a program-related conference, and graduate program visits with our MRI partners).

The program is intended to run from January 2016 until December 2020 (60 months). As of now, the programs first two cohorts have graduated from their HSI undergraduate institution and most have begun doctoral study in the humanities. I interviewed participants about the experiences of being first-generation, Latinx students as they pursued graduate education in the humanities at three distinct moments: (1) their initial selection into the program during the summer research intensive seminar; (2) after they applied to graduate programs; (3) during their first year in graduate study.

The research team conducted interviews in-person at the participants HSI institution. Every summer, the research team for the longitudinal study traveled to the three HSI partner campuses during the research-intensive summer seminar program. During this time, the student cohorts are developing original research projects with their faculty mentors and attending seminars on theory, graduate school application preparation, and receiving GRE prep. These first interviews allowed the research team to

build rapport with the cohort, as we discuss their background, family history, educational journey, and their aspirations to become professors. The subsequent interviews were done via teleconference; however, it is important to note that the research team interacted with the students throughout their time in the program through campus visits, graduate school visits, and a conference specific to all those involved in the program (the cross-institutional conference).

Participants

Interview participants were individuals affiliated with the HSI Pathways to the Professoriate Program. As my dissertation is focused solely on the first-generation, Latinx students in the program, I used purposeful sampling to determine which interviews and documents were part of my analysis (Creswell, 2013). To determine eligibility, I reviewed the interviews of each participant and cross-referenced them with the data collected through the demographic survey they complete before their first interview. I defined first-generation college students as students whose parents or guardians do not have a 4-year degree. Students who report not having a parent or guardian who has completed a 4-year degree in the US and identify as Hispanic or Latinx were included in this study. Across the three HSIs, the lead PI and research team interviewed 90 students.

In order to secure these interviews, the lead PI and research team worked closely with the HSI campus partners to identify an appropriate time in the summer to speak with the students. Before our site-visit, these students were asked to complete the demographic form. When we meet with each student, we start by ensuring their anonymity and that

findings from the interview will be reported in the aggregate to help improve the program and to assist with learning across higher education.

Table 1. HSI Pathways to the Professoriate First Generation Latinx Program Participants

Institution	Pseudonym	Racial or Ethnic Identity	Gender Identity	Major
CSUN	Adrián	Latino	Man	Sociology
	Berenice	Xicana	Woman	Deaf Studies
	Bonnie	Latino	Woman	English and American Literature
	Daniela	Mexican	Woman	History
	Gerado	Mexican American	Man	Philosophy and Religious Studies
	Juliana	Hispanic, Mexican	Woman	English and American Literature
	Octavio	Latino	Man	Spanish Literature and Central American Studies
	Renee	Salvadorian	Woman	Linguistics and Chicano/a Studies
	Uma	Latina, Mexican, Chicana	Woman	English and American Literature
	Xenia	Afro-Latinx	Woman	Sociology
FIU	Cristina	Latina	Woman	English
	Cristobal	Mexican	Man	Geography
	Esteban	Spanish and Cuban American	Man	English and American Literature
	Grace	Hispanic	Woman	English and American Literature

	Queen	White, Hispanic	Woman	American Literature
	Zara	Latina	Woman	English and American Literature
	Doris	Hispanic	Woman	English and American Literature
	Fatima	White and Mexican	Woman	Communications
	Fercho	Mexican-American	Man	History
	Fernanda	Hispanic	Woman	English and American Literature
UTEP	Ileana	Hispanic/Chicana	Woman	History and Chicano/a Studies
	Jesse	Hispanic, Mexican	Woman	Art History
	Lino	Hispanic/Latino	Man	Art History
	Umberto	Hispano	Man	History
	Vileen	Mexican-American	Woman	English and American Literature
	Zerafina	Mexican	Agender	English and American Literature

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and uploaded into NVivo for Mac 11.4.1. As this data is part of a larger, longitudinal study, my specific study on first-generation, Latinx students in the program employed a secondary data analysis, which Heaton (2008) defines as the re-use of data collected in primary studies that include “field notes, transcripts of interviews and group discussions and observational records” (p. 506).

This method allows for researchers to investigate new questions using pre-existing qualitative data. Given that the interviews for the larger, longitudinal study are semi-structured, and the questions tend to be broad and open-ended, the data is rich and can be analyzed in a number of ways depending on the inquiry in mind. Along with the interview transcripts, I analyzed institutional documents, which included email exchanges with the students and their HSI coordinator, notes from meetings with all institutional partners, surveys sent out to students before their interviews, and notes taken during visits to each partnering HSI institution which are all part of the longitudinal project's field notes.

To analyze the data collected from the interviews, I referred to my notes, which represent my reflections and observations immediately after the interviews. I also listened to the recorded interviews again and jotted down notes and reviewed the transcribed interviews. After reading the transcriptions, I coded the data by generating themes that emerge through the interviews. I used In Vivo coding, as described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) which “uses words or short phrases from the participant’s own language in the data record as codes” (p. 74). This method honors the participants’ voice and seemed most appropriate to not only use the voices of the participants in the coding process, but also pay special attention to shared experiences of the scholars through the codes that were generated. The coding process allowed me to see how prevalent some of the themes that emerge are in the study, which help me to understand how we make meaning of the experiences of the students interviewed, and whether their participation in the HSI Pathways to the professoriate program is helping them with their aspirations of becoming professors in the humanities. After an initial wave of coding, I engaged in axial

coding which helped me refine and combine codes that were similar to each other (Creswell, 2013). Throughout data collection and time of analysis, I used a constant comparison approach in which I compared my notes and codes to emerging themes of the study.

Positionality

I recognize that I am a first-generation, Latinx student currently in a doctoral program with the aspiration to become a professor in education. I grew up in a diverse urban city, attended private school from pre-K until 12th grade, and went on to private, research-intensive, selective institutions for both my undergraduate and graduate degrees. Given the attention institutions like the ones I've attended receive in supporting underrepresented groups, and the tension I feel based on my experiences at these institutions, my research aims to bring attention to the institutions I see doing the lion's share of the work—HSIs. Understanding my positionality is important, as I seek to highlight what factors and areas of support are helpful in promoting the success of first-generation, Latinx students and how HSIs are best positioned to do this. However, I acknowledge that these institutions are not monolithic, and that each has their own unique challenges and opportunities for growth.

I come into this research with a great appreciation for pipeline programs like Pathways. As a beneficiary of a different opportunity program, I acknowledge that I may have a biased perception of pipeline programs. I am aware that ideally, I want to highlight the efficacy, usefulness, and ability to replicate these types of programs because I find them incredibly important for Latinx scholars in higher education.

To prevent my role and positionality to negatively affecting the quality and validity of the study, I am using perspectival triangulation as described by Ravitch and Carl (2016) in relation to my participant selection. My participant selection will be “intentional, [with] systematic inclusion of a range of participant perspectives to seek range, nuance, complexity, disagreement, and generative tension in perspectives and in the data set as a whole” (p. 196). The literature review I conducted substantiates the reasoning of why the experiences of first-generation, Latinx participants of the Pathways program are important.

Limitations

While this study is qualitative, and thus not generalizable, the purpose of this study is to complicate the ways in which we think about and conduct research on first-generation, Latinx students and capture the nuances of individual experiences that quantitative analysis ignores. The primary units of analysis were the first-generation, Latinx students in the program. However, it is important to note that there are environmental and institution specific conditions that may very well have affected the experiences of the students in the program mentioned in the interviews, which is why the notes I took during site visits, and the data included within the numerous survey forms were part of my analysis. Research on first-generation, Latinx students tends to highlight that many of these students also come from low-income households. While this holds true to the majority of the students in the sample, it is important to note that there are first-generation, Latinx students in the program who do not come from low-income households and may have access to certain privileges that has also helped them in their

pursuit to becoming a professor. These students are kept in the analysis because they too share obstacles with their first-generation peers.

Since this study was situated at three HSIs, there may be an inclination to make generalizations from findings of this study to all HSIs. I caution readers to recognize the rich diversity of HSIs (Núñez et al., 2016) and understand that they vary in size, program offerings, institutional resources, and institutional type. However, that does not make the findings of this study any less significant. At the crux of the program is the idea that if you provide students with resources and intentionally invest in the academic and social development of these students with purposeful mentoring and adequate graduate preparation, then they should have the opportunity to pursue a terminal degree of their interest. I recognized the value and potential that HSIs have in producing the future Latinx professoriate and wanted to demonstrate how to help make that happen with a program like this. Through this study, I hope to inspire institutions to consider how they can invest in their first-generation, Latinx scholars who may have never considered graduate school had they not been told that they can do it.

CHAPTER 4: I DARE TO DEARM”: HOW DIFFERENT FORMS OF CAPITAL HELP FIRST-GENERATION, LATINX UNDERGRADUATES OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES OF IDENTITY AND UNDERREPRESENTATION

This chapter centers the experiences of the first-generation, Latinx students in the HSI Pathways to the Professoriate Program and how they link their aspirations to attend graduate school and become faculty to their experiences as a marginalized, and often underestimated student. Using an anti-deficit approach by incorporating Yosso’s (2005) idea of community cultural wealth, I demonstrate how their experiences in education have provided the resilience needed to carve their own pathway to the professoriate despite the challenges that they encounter.

Aspirational Capital and the Role of Community Colleges

By virtue of their relatively low tuition rates and flexible entry requirements, research suggests that community colleges attract many students who may not have the capital or resources to apply to other institutions (Hagedorn, 2004; Morest, 2013). The growing body of research on community colleges suggests that social capital, institutional support, and student engagement with faculty have an essential role on a students’ educational aspiration (Conway, 2010). Community colleges contribute to higher education equity by providing access to underrepresented minority students and helping them prepare for further education (Bailey & Morest, 2006). However, community colleges are often overlooked as an entry point to academia, especially for doctoral education. Furthermore, the literature surrounding the importance of community college either focus on access and degree production, or on STEM initiatives. This chapter, however, centers the importance of community college for students at Hispanic Serving

Institutions who aspire to become professors in the humanities and draws attention to how these institutions are models for providing access and opportunity to Latinx students.

Of the twenty-seven participants in this study, ten began their post-secondary education at community college. Many of the students in the HSI Pathways to the Professoriate Program identify as one or more of the following: Latinx, first-generation college student, low-income, and/or non-traditional college student. Some students are undocumented, have children, or are the main provider for their families even while being in school. Considering all these factors, many of them shared that community college was the logical first-step considering its affordability and convenience. When asked about his decision to go to college, Lino, a twenty-six-year-old student at UTEP, shared:

I graduated high school and I went directly to El Paso Community College (EPCC) because I didn't want to come to UTEP first because of money, money-wise, because it is way too expensive, and then EPCC at least you have money left over for ... your expenses.

It was important for Lino to be able to help his family financially during college. Given the lower tuition rates at EPCC, Lino was able to start college without having to take on debt. This was also true for Xenia, who shared that as a co-parent to her younger sibling, community college was the most affordable option that allowed her to step in to help take care of her family.

Outstanding Faculty Support

When asked about their aspirations to become professors in the humanities, many of our participants shared anecdotes of the professors they had in community college. Some of them specifically recall conversations they had with their faculty mentors at

community college who encouraged them to consider pursuing graduate school and becoming a professor. When asked to talk through his academic aspirations and decision to pursue doctoral study, Adrián, a twenty-three-year-old self-identified Mexican-American, Latino, shared:

I should start, kind of in the community college. When I was still in there I had a geography teacher who called me, he had a, it was like an assignment in the syllabus where you have to meet with him in his office, just to discuss your goal with education, which I think more teachers should do, because it's great to at least get to know your students on a one on one basis at least once in the year, and I came in there not knowing what I was going to say. I knew sociology was my thing, but then I blurted out I wanted to get a PhD and I wanted to become a professor, because I've always liked tutoring in a sense, or at least feeling like I can have some sort of academic conversation with somebody, and then after that I knew, okay, okay, a Ph.D.

Pursuing a doctoral degree was something he blurted out when asked about his goals in education. However, that conversation resonated with him and it became a goal. He then talks about how this teacher and a sociology professor helped him plan his way to getting into a doctoral program. He explains that this interaction led him to seriously think about a career as a professor and his passion for sociology. This passion was directly tied to his interactions with a sociology professor at his community college. He said:

I didn't find a passion in it until I took my first sociology class in my second semester, and I just, the teacher just blew me away, the way she made me see the world differently. She put terms to things I had experienced, that I had seen, that I had never thought of before. She taught me about using different lenses to look at the world, and that just opened up so many doors for me, and made me look at the world so differently, and so I knew that this was going to be my passion, that this was something I had to pursue, and I ended up putting in applications for several CSUs, and I got accepted to all of them.

Having shared what it was like to be in schools with low expectations towards low-income, minority students, and never receiving any attention from teachers or administrators about going to college, it only took one positive interaction with a

professor at community college, who gave him the vocabulary to describe and understand his experiences in school, to inspire him to persist in community college and transfer to a 4-year institution.

Both Xenia and Adrián credit their sociology professors at community college for their ability to push through to earn an associate's degree and move on to a four-year institution to get their bachelors, and eventually pursue graduate school in an effort to become a professor. While they both had a positive experience overall in community college, they were both aware that if not planned correctly, they could get stuck there, never completing a degree or taking the right classes for what they wanted to do after community college. However, the outstanding faculty support they experienced at their community college helped them avoid those situations. Xenia shared,

I had a sociology professor at my community college that actually mentored me to transfer out. I had no idea how to transfer out, I was just taking random classes... By then, I had already taken three courses with her, three classes, sociology classes, and she had already kind of taken me under her wing, and she was very like you need to get out of here because a lot of you guys get stuck here in community college and you guys never get out, or you guys take forever, you get too comfortable. So, she was very persistent about you need to do this, did you do this deadline, did you meet with this. She really pushed me to get out of community college because I was there for a while, I would say like on and off like five years. And then I was like I'm not going anywhere, and I think sometimes when you don't have a mentor, you feel like you're a sitting duck. You're just there floating. Everybody else is, all of the other ducks are going in front of you and you just feel like you're floating and you're just like I don't know exactly where I'm going or what I want. She made me feel better about not knowing what I wanted precisely but she's like well you have to go in that direction. So, yeah, she was really helpful.

After being inspired by a sociology professor in community college, Xenia was driven to complete her associate's degree as soon as possible so that she had better chances in pursuing her goal of becoming a professor. This professor has both remained one of

Xenia's mentors throughout her time in post-secondary education, but also a role model for what Xenia can become. Xenia aspires to give back to her community by teaching at the community college level and inspiring students like her to see how education can help propel their careers.

It is important to note that there are instances where students do not feel adequately supported at community college, and how this can hinder their ability to persist in school. Iris, a self-identified Chicana at UTEP, was a non-traditional undergraduate student. After graduating high school, she was forced by her mother to enroll in the local community college in order to stay at the home. However, Iris noted, that without anyone in her family with experience in college, she went in blindly. Her story did not focus on being academically prepared—what she lacked was an understanding of how college would be different than high school. She shared:

...I went to a community college here in El Paso right out of high school. I went and nobody told me that Tuesday and Thursday were TTH. So, I was only going to my Tuesday classes. Then I was waiting for the bell to ring at college. So, I was always late. Then I was looking for the cafeteria because I was free lunch, of course. So, I was like where do I eat? Where do I go...the one professor, the one that I was missing her Thursday class, she ended up getting really upset at me and she was like why aren't you coming to class on Thursdays. What is your problem? She wasn't sympathetic to me being able to explain so I dropped out. So, I dropped out of college and I never went back. I was like I hate school.

Her negative experience at community college deterred her from pursuing a higher education for 10 years. After working different jobs over the years and realizing that her career prospects were limited without a college education, she decided to return to community college and credited her introduction to college course at the community college to helping her understand how to be a college student.

Navigational Capital and “Figuring Things Out”

Many of the participants shared that their parents encouraged them to go to college. A significant number of participants claimed that their parent’s migration into the United States was driven by the opportunity for their children to get an education. However, as first-generation college students, the encouragement to pursue a post-secondary degree sometimes was a cause of frustration, as there was pressure to go to college without much understanding around what it entailed or what needed to happen to get into college. Doris, from UTEP, shared: “my parents have always pushed us to go to college without understanding what college is.” Given the time and financial commitment of college, and Doris’ struggles with not knowing what to pursue in college, she experienced tension between having to help support the family financially while pursuing an education. Her parents not being able to understand why this was a challenge added to that pressure.

When explaining her journey in education, Fernanda, talked about how college was always the next step after high school, and even though she had an older sister who went to college, she did not receive any help. She explained:

My parents really didn’t know much about navigating education, so my mom always told me something. Just learn how to read and you’ll be okay. I don’t know if it’s because of this, but I just come from a family that didn’t really know anything about college, so I had to figure it out on my own. My older sister did go to college, but she didn’t really help. She’s like six years older than me, so I just kind of figured it out myself.

Given that first-generation students do not have parents who can help them apply to college, the participants relied on what they were told in school or on the internet about college. Some of the participants received messaging early on from their school that

deterred them from thinking that they would ever go to a four-year school. Adrián, a student at CSUN, reflected on his experiences in high school and said:

There was a lot of problems. I saw a lot of inequality in my school. I saw preference of teachers for either white students or students from higher socioeconomic status. I remember walking around school with some of my friends, and then the security would follow up because they thought we were about to do something illegal, stuff like that. Little micro-aggressions that just made me feel like I was unwelcome, and then [there were] just random occurrences that didn't make me want to be there, the whole structure of it, how you can't decide exactly what you want. Obviously there has to be a curriculum in place, but I felt like what I was learning was never going to really serve me. All through high school I didn't really, I was always told that I was intelligent or that I was a good reader, good writer, but I never really envisioned myself going to university just because of different experiences I had with administrators or educators that would kind of like, kind of shunned me a bit and then I still decided to go to community college, because my friends started going.

Adrián did not consider college but felt the need to apply since many of his friends did.

However, once in school, like many other of the participants, Adrián began to think about what he wanted to get out of it, and how to make the best of the situation.

First-generation college students start off their time in college figuring out how to navigate the institution without access to family members with direct college experiences. This obstacle is even more pronounced at the graduate level, when the rigor is heightened and discipline-specific norms are expected to be followed (Vasil & McCall, 2018).

Consistent with Ramirez (2017) study on first-generation college students, the participants in this study relied on faculty, staff, and peers to figure out how to navigate their institution. A lack of knowledge about navigating college at home led these students to seek the help they needed in order to get by, which directly links to Yosso's notion of navigational capital. Navigational capital refers to the student's ability to navigate social institutions like college (Yosso, 2005). This idea of having to "figuring it out" themselves

was apparent throughout their time in college, as they thought about graduate school, and through their time in the Pathways program.

When asked to describe some of the valuable skills acquired during the summer seminar, many of the participants shared becoming more comfortable asking for help proved to be valuable to their success in college, applying to graduate school, and making the transition into doctoral programs. Adrián from CSUN shared:

I would say reaching out to people. I struggled in the beginning because I kind of placed myself on an island and I didn't really reach out to people. I would mostly stay in my room and that made, that amplified the stress 100 times over. I think I learned over my senior year to reach out to people. Even though we're not colleagues yet, I learned what collegiality meant by actually setting the lines and meeting them and talking to people about their research and my research and how we can, our relationship can be mutually beneficial. So, I think it's just talking to people more, learning that academia is really not just about yourself. It's not the individual. It's everybody working together.

Through his involvement with the program, he learned about the collaborative nature of academia and that speaking about his struggles with others helps him overcome them as he realizes that he is not the only one facing challenges. Berenice, another student from CSUN, thought that the idea of asking for help should be a given, but acknowledges that sometimes it is not. When asked about what was one of the biggest lessons she learned during the summer seminar, she said:

I would think, the first that came to mind was asking for help. I know that sounds very mundane but in reality, it really did save my life in the summer seminar and in my academics in general. So, that's the first one, I would say is just asking for help, knowing how to ask questions from your mentors like what do you want in particular, what do you need to succeed.

Daniela agreed with Berenice and adds the potential pitfalls of not asking for help. She shared:

I think if you don't, it will start mounting up and it gets really scary. You should always reach out for help because there's always help for you. Sometimes it's scary to ask for help but it's necessary sometimes and especially during something that's so high like the summer seminar. It's pretty crucial to know when to ask for help.

Time and time again, participants in the study talked about how invaluable it was to ask their professors and peers questions about college and applying to graduate school.

However, "asking for help" about navigating an institution is a lot different than seeking help financially. In the next section, I go over how participants in the study navigated the financial barriers they faced as first-generation, low-income students.

Navigating Financial Barriers

Hispanic Serving Institutions enroll lower-income, first-generation students in higher proportions than other institutional types (Galdeano, 2015). By virtue of being a federally designated HSI, these institutions enroll at least 50% low-income or first-generation college students. Due to the rising Latinx population, it is no surprise that higher education institutions in regions with a high Latinx population are HSIs. These schools are a reasonable choice for low-income students as they tend to have lower tuition rates and are likely to be located close enough where the students can still live at home and support their families (Nunez et al., 2011). That was the case for many of the participants in this study, who admitted that their decision to enroll at CSUN, FIU, or UTEP was directly tied to the affordability and/or the convenience of location. Despite its affordability, however, some of the low-income, first-generation participants in the study demonstrated their use of navigational capital that helped them persist despite significant financial hardships they faced. Cristobal, for example, shared:

My classes were first semester and second semester, my classes were Tuesdays and Thursdays and I don't have the best car in the world, and it's a long drive. So, second day in school I got into a car accident driving here because the turnpike is something else... I said you know what, my classes are Tuesdays and Thursdays. Instead of driving here, I'm just going to stay on campus and I'm going to just finally to survive from Tuesday to Thursday and just come back home on Friday. So, that led me to decide to sleep here at FIU. So, I would sleep in my car. Tuesday nights I would sleep in my car, wake up Wednesday, and I would go shower at the gym, study, and then sleep Wednesday night, wake up Thursday, shower at the gym, eat food. I would bring lunch from home and I would just drive back home Friday.

Beyond the safety concerns of commuting to school, Cristobal observed how his peers who lived on campus had a different experience than he did. He felt that they were able to immerse themselves with FIU and their academics and wanted to do so similarly. While he couldn't afford to live on campus, he knew he had access to the libraries and the recreational center as a full-time student. Though not possible to live on campus, he found a way to experience what it would be like to be on campus outside of the time he had to be in class. He added:

So, I did that because I wanted to have the full experience of being submerged in education fully. I always walked past the apartments and I said wow, I'm struggling with this and people have the opportunity to actually live here. I said wow, if I ever have the opportunity, I know that I would be at my max because when you live at the university, you basically have more time to be able to study. All of your time is devoted to studying and being productive.

For Vileen, a self-identified Mexican-American, who moved several times as a child because of financial hardships attributed her ability to figure things out in school because of how her mother figured out how to put her and her siblings through school while being homeless and living in a car for a year. She said:

So, I started off in Chino and then we moved to Ontario, California and then financial problems happened and then we ended up homeless. At that point we just kind of, we wrote my aunt's address for my school forms and I kept going to school, but we lived out of our car... we kind of lived out of the car for a whole

year. My dad moved to San Francisco, left us all. We had no income. My mom didn't work. My mom didn't speak English. So, that was really hard for us to try to communicate that. She ended up getting a job at Goodwill, and so she worked through that. She learned English. She went to, the school provided English learning classes for my mom, so we all went with her. She would go after school to go pick us up and we ended up staying for three hours. She would ask the teacher a lot of questions.

Vileen discusses how she learned the importance of asking questions and seeking help.

Although homeless, Vileen remained positive and attributes that to the strength and perseverance she observed from her mother, and how her family had always managed to ensure educational opportunities despite the financial hardships they encountered.

“Getting a PhD is a Political Act.” Resistant Capital as Motivation to Persist and Succeed

Rooted in the legacy of resistance of subordination by people of color (Yosso, 2005), resistant capital refers to the knowledge and skills cultivated through oppositional behavior that challenges the status quo. Despite feelings of marginalization, isolation, or inadequacy in school, participants in the study shared that they overcome these feelings by feeling a sense of responsibility that they are part of a larger purpose to make the academy more inclusive, and to demonstrate to others like them that they can thrive in these environments too. Consistent with Vasil and McCall's (2018) study on why two generation women pursued doctoral degrees, many of the participants of this study were driven to pursue doctoral study to enact change in their respective fields and create opportunities for their communities. Their identities and misrepresentation in academia further motivated participants to persist in education.

Academic Interests Tied to Identity

Many of the participants claim that their academic interests and desire to become a professor were tied to their blooming curiosity of how their racial and ethnic identity shaped the way they experienced education in the US. For example, Iris initially wanted to pursue a STEM major with hopes of finding a lucrative career, however, that changed after she took her first Chicana literature course. For the first time in her life, she was learning about herself. She said, “when I started to read this literature, I started to realize that I was written into here and that it was a culture that my grandmother gave me that was here, that I had been denied.” As a Mexican born and raised in El Paso, Texas, Iris had a lot to say about her family’s resistance to the politicized history of the term Chicano/a. She grew up learning to adopt American culture and resist embracing her Mexican heritage. By taking courses in Chicana literature, she was able to meet with professors and scholars who were able to connect her with parts of her own identity that she was unaware of, and this inspired her to pursue history and Chicano/a studies as her majors.

Doris, another participant from UTEP, had a similar upbringing to Iris. She shared,

I was raised very much in a home that rejected the idea of idea of being Mexican because both of my parents were born in a time where it wasn’t good to be labeled Chicano. That was the politicized term. It wasn’t good to be Mexican. You wanted to be just American. My mom still refers to herself as Texan. She refuses to say that she is Mexican American or anything like that. So does my dad.

To maintain some connection to her Mexican heritage, Doris cherished cooking with her family. Despite the apparent resistance to claim their Mexican culture, Doris’ family still cooked Mexican food and she learned about her ancestry and family’s stories through conversations over cooking traditional dishes. She said:

Because my parents ... in their rejecting, they still make the traditional foods that, my mom has a recipe book where she writes the story of how she got the recipe and then the recipe. So, she's making that for me as she remembers so that I can have that when she's gone. So, I feel connected to these people who are eating the same things even if it's a variation different things. So, I feel connected to my past through that because my mom writes her stories. That's how I found out who I was... I learned about my identity as a Chicana through cooking because that's all I heard from my parents. That's the only time I would get stories from my mom about her family was when we were cooking something, making a recipe. So, I wanted to go to culinary school and be a pastry chef because I grew up making *pasteles* and everything like that. I wanted to put that out into like a professional sense, make it fancy like French cuisine is. But my mom told me no you need to go to college and get a real degree before you can go. So, I didn't want to waste money going anywhere else, so I just came to UTEP. I majored in anthropology.

Once an anthropology student, Doris learned about the field of food studies and became interested in marrying her interests in cooking with learning about her heritage and culture through food. One experience in particular that solidified her interest in pursuing the professoriate was finding out how her voice in the classroom helped others learn. She shared,

I was speaking about how I felt about food deserts and how it's so hard for people to criticize the Mexican American diet of certain communities and how healthy they can be and the emergence of diabetes when they don't have access to fresh vegetables and fruits or anything nutritional for their children, especially in areas of economic disparity where fast food is cheaper than any kind of vegetable you can get. I was just speaking really passionately about it and the professor just, there's a lot of professors at UTEP that will just let you speak and won't be like excuse me we have to move on. They'll just let you say it. Another student came up to me and she said I'm so inspired by what you said. Thank you so much for opening up other peoples' eyes to the struggles of the community.

As she became more engaged in this line of work, she found her passion of sharing knowledge in the classroom, which inspired her to consider becoming a professor in that field.

Renee, a participant from CSUN who identifies as Salvadorian, connects her interests to pursuing linguistics and Chicana/o studies to the assumptions that the Chicana/o experience is very similar to other Spanish speaking cultures. She said:

I think El Salvador as a whole, or Central America, has just throughout its history has just been continuously undermined. I think that just, I take a lot of inspiration from my parents in the Salvadorian community because I think there's a lot of resilience in us because what we have gone through as Salvadorians and Central Americans. I think the way that informs my research is definitely because I think when Salvadorians have migrated here, and I see this in my parents as well, I think though we try to make active efforts in maintaining our culture and heritage, there's also a lot of pressure to assimilate, not only to, quote, unquote, Anglo-American lifestyles and cultural ideologies, but also to the larger Spanish, the Mexican-Chicano community as well, because they have an established community here for a very long time. I think the Salvadorian and Central American experience is unique because we not only face struggles within our own communities, and the United States, but we also face struggles with other Spanish communities, or Latino communities, yeah. I think I take inspiration from that because what I want to bring to the table is like, yes, there are some overlaps with the Mexican community. But the Salvadorian experience, Socio-linguistically, is a lot different from a lot of these other mainstream Latino cultures. Yeah, and so I guess what it means for me to be Salvadorian is just linguistically it's a whole lot of fun because we have this slang, this accent, this, it's so much fun. But I think culturally, it's just a lot of history that's been traumatic, but it's also been one to be proud about.

Through her academic training, she has a thorough understanding of the Chicana/o experiences, and her research juxtaposes that history with Central American history and socio-linguistics to highlight the nuances of her culture in hopes to distinguish the Salvadorian experience as unique and important to understand.

This phenomenon, where students merge their racial or ethnic identity with their academic interests, has been studied to understand how students integrate what they learn about themselves through academia and how it affects their self-identity (Syed, 2010). In this study, participants constantly referred to how this is what sparked a commitment to their field and interests in becoming a professor. Whether they were denied an accurate

portrayal of their history, or they were determined to add nuances of their identity to combat homogenous understandings of pan-ethnic identities like “Latinx,” the participants in this study discussed how their pursuit of a doctoral degree as an opportunity to resist against their marginalization and underrepresentation in academic settings.

Claiming Space in Academia

As participants of the HSI Pathways to the Professoriate program, the participants are familiar with why the program exists. Conversations about initiatives to diversify the professoriate acknowledge the underrepresentation of Latinx faculty and the disparity among Latinx doctoral students compared to their White counterparts. Along with these conversations about the program, Latinx faculty mentors, graduate students, and speakers share the candid advice on how to navigate graduate school and academia. One of the messages that was reinforced to the participants is that educational institutions and academia, in general, was not built for them. However, many of the participants already came in with that understanding too and feel that claiming space in academia is necessary in order break down barriers that continue to plague American higher education and prevent other marginalized students from educational opportunity.

When asked to reflect on her identity and experiences in school, Berenice, a self-identified Chicana studying deaf-studies who is also undocumented, shared:

I'm going into spaces that are not mine, like they're not built for me, like when, like academia, it's a lot of research is based on us, but never by us, so it's like I'm going somewhere where it's like, I know I'm not the first one, and I know I'm not the only one, but it's like rare to be a woman of color, also undocumented, and I'm also low income and just everything, also like queer, and just all my intersectionality, it's just hard, and coming into spaces where I don't know how it's going to be...I know I will find support, I'll find a way because I always have.

She has this yearning to contribute to research about her identities but realizes how the educational system is not welcoming or set up to promote her success.

Zara, a student at FIU who self-identifies as Latina, attributes her realization of how her academic interests are tied to her identity and her desire to combat oppression through the mentorship of her Latinx literature professor who is also the coordinator for the program at FIU. She shares:

One of the greatest things about going into college, I had her in my first semester, I was taking US Latinx Literature. I had never been in an English class that was all Latinx writers. Knowing that there was a space in the academy was really exciting to me, and it felt really empowering. Ana had always, throughout the entire seminar, she keeps reminding us that there is a big ethical imperative in doing what we're doing and that what we want to do, and the classes that we want to teach, and the theory that we want to teach, very much concerns actual lived experiences. There's a sense of reestablishing someone's humanity that goes into thinking about oppression and thinking about post-coloniality. What we do is important. There is a space for us. It's not just that we have to carve out a space but that it's a very important space that needs to be occupied.

This realization that her work matters and is part of claiming space in academia serves as a constant reminder to her of why her research and her goal of becoming a professor is part of a larger, necessary movement to make space for other aspiring Latinx professors.

Xenia, who identifies as Afro-Latinx, recognizes her ambition to get a PhD as a political act. When asked about her identities and how it has influenced her academic interests and ambitions, she shared:

Identity is complicated. I feel that, especially when people, what they see is what they think, so if I identify as something, as Afro-Latinx, it's always like, really, why, or like oh. So, it's a lot of I have to explain myself, or something. And then sometimes people don't even acknowledge that. They'll just say, no, you're just Hispanic, or, no, you're just Mexican, or you're just Guatemalan, or something like that. And it's like, no, there's a reason why I identify as that, because there's a history there. It's more like I see it as a political act where this is how I identify, and this is how I present myself. It's like I'm not afraid to be who I am, or I'm not afraid to claim my roots, or anything like that. So that's how I feel about my

identity. I'm passionate about my identity. That's why I'm like the bigger my hair the better, where it's like everything I try to do just for myself is a political act. Getting a PHD is a political act. I feel like we sometimes aren't very conscious of how political we actually are, like I don't like politics, but we are very political in what we do, and how we dress, and everything.

She proceeded to share some of her experiences in the classroom and how she has to manage racial microaggressions and sexism in order to be heard in the classroom, which reminds her why it is important for her to be in these spaces—to actively resist patriarchal norms that constantly plague her experiences in education.

Creating a “better world”

The accumulation of resistance capital aims to transform oppressive structures for a more equitable society (Yosso, 2005). As aspiring professors, participants explained their interests in teaching in efforts to ensure that future generations of students are not denied the opportunity to learn about themselves and their culture. While Iris and Doris were brought up to assimilate to American culture and not embrace their Mexican heritage, their exposure to Chican/o studies empowered them to embrace those identities and commit to a career in educating others about it.

While Cristobal did not feel that he was denied the opportunity to learn about his culture, becoming a teaching assistant at his campus (FIU) gave him a sense of purpose to create a “better world” through teaching. His great experience with professors coupled with the opportunity to teach have motivated him to see how rewarding it can be to be a professor—not only for himself, but for the possibility of being part of positive change in the world. He shared:

I've been really privileged here at this institution. I've had great opportunities to work with great professors... Last semester I had the opportunity to be a learning assistant and that just completely helped me a lot seeing education not as a student

but also as an instructor because we also had to take a pedagogical course on how people learn, how students learn. So, the ultimate goal for me is to teach one day. I definitely want to teach one day because it's a great feeling to be able to put seeds into other students' minds that are developing it. I feel really passionate about teaching. . . . If I'm able to teach every semester, I can help [my students] develop the skills needed to develop research skills and to educate. I'm hoping to build a relationship with students that if these ten students go out into the real world and do great things, they might contact me and email me. 'Hey [Cristobal], could you help me with these? Could you recommend me something?' Then so just me by myself trying to change the world and now I have ten students which I've helped developed a foundation, so what the impact is great as an individual in society. Ideally, I understand limitations, so I can't say that we're going to rebuild the whole world but from my perspective, I think about making better decisions. If those ten students that year that go out into the world then get great positions, maybe it would help to have a bond and a connection with the students. They go out into the real world and those students are making an impact in the community. As little as those changes may be, I think that would be a better world.

Whether its broadening the reach and impact of ethnic studies or modeling effective teaching practices of their role models, these students have coupled their passion of learning and teaching to a responsibility to give back to their communities in positive ways by becoming professors.

“Opening Doors” with Social Capital

Yosso's (2005) conceptualization of social capital refers to the networks of people and community resources. She argues that individuals create or access opportunity through their personal connections with other individuals and community members. While a first-generation student may not have parents to rely on for information about graduate school, the connections they make with older students on campus, or their professors can prove to be valuable in helping them figure out what they need to do to pursue graduate school. As participants in this study discussed how they navigated their educational journey at their home institution, many of students talked about the

instrumental role specific individuals had in order for them to learn about Pathways program.

Research suggests that social capital is associated with positive outcomes among college students related to achievement, retention, and sense of belonging (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Soria & Stebleton, 2013). For first-generation college students in particular, multiple studies have shown that these students are less likely to initiate contact with faculty and peers to form relationships that will help them persist in college (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Soria & Stebleton, 2012). Schwartz and others (2017) study on social capital among first-generation college students found that academic advising and interventions aimed at these students had a strong effect on first-generation students acquiring social capital. This study also found that when students are targeted for support and explained the benefits of creating peer networks and strong relationships with faculty, they can have access to social capital that leads to more opportunities.

One of the most significant benefits of the Pathways program that participants in this study reflected on was access to a community of peers and mentorship to develop themselves academically and socially in preparation for graduate school. As first-generation college students, many of them admitted being completely unaware and unprepared to apply to graduate school, and it was soon after being accepted into the Pathways program where they learned exactly what they were getting themselves into.

The Importance of Having a Community of Peers

The students at all three institutions were appreciative of the diversity of academic interests within the cohort, and the supportive nature that has been cultivated within the

program. For many of these students, this cohort community has provided them with a community of academic inquiry that they do not have with their peers outside of the program or their family. Reflecting on a field trip to an academic conference, Adrián shared:

On the way back I was on the train with five other people in my cohort, and we were just having an interdisciplinary discussion, and it took us everywhere. It took us from the meaning of like, like everything being an illusion, you know, God, politics, everywhere and I just loved [it]. I felt like a real academic, and that's where I really felt myself shine, where we had somebody in philosophy who does Latin American philosophy, linguistics, ethnic studies, myself, sociology, religious studies, and there was overlap in our theories. It felt so natural. It felt incredible, honestly, and getting to know each of them and their struggles and how motivated they are. Their wins are my wins, and I feel like truly like a blossoming of true friendship with them.

Being able to have both an academic and casual conversation on life, or particular topics in a certain field, has shown Adrián and others in his cohort the importance and benefit of belonging to a community. While there may be several students in a given cohort applying to the same graduate programs, rather than feeling competitive towards each other, the cohorts have become encouraging and supportive. Berenice discussed how the cohort created a group text chain through the phone application GroupMe to encourage each other through the hard times of applying to graduate school, have sporadic conversations about theory or topics that come up in class that are related to the interests of members of the cohort, and to simply plan informal gatherings to study or work on applications for graduate school. This cohort community has provided each participant with a peer group that understands the challenges that come along with being first-generation and applying to graduate school.

In terms of the academic rigor of the program, the seminars that the participants attended during the summer are research intensive and heavy on theory. Many of the students reflected on how helpful they were to each other when a particular theory or idea was hard to understand. Iris, for example, shared that learning about Critical Race Theory was transformational to her because she felt that her ideas and identity were being erased by the White race and learning about this theory aligned with her thoughts. She came to appreciate her cohort more when she saw how intrigued they were by Critical Race Theory and that when she shared how it made her feel, others agreed.

By having the program structured with cohorts, these scholars were able to form academic and personal relationships with their peers in ways that they were not accustomed to doing with family. While participants shared their understanding that graduate school and the academy can be isolating, especially as a minority, these students have seen how being part of a cohort in this program demonstrated the power of having community. These relationships formed amongst each other has encouraged them to keep pushing through this process and was a constant reminder to them that they were not alone.

Social capital among peer communities has helped the participants during their time in graduate school too. Upon matriculating to a sociology graduate program in New York City, Adrián had trouble getting an emotional support pet approved by the graduate housing department. However, encountering that challenge led him to connect with another Chicana in the graduate dorm who has become a mentor for him. He shared,

It was kind of hard getting everything, like all of the documents that the graduate center wanted, as far as to show this is an emotional support animal, and I need this animal and all of that. But then there's also been, I guess, the

unexpected was the social networks of students of color that I've been exposed to. So, the other person who has a dog in this building, she's a Chicana. She went to UCSB... I look up to her, and she's been a lot of help, putting me in contact with people.

These networks of underrepresented, first-generation graduate students have become a major source of support for participants who have matriculated into graduate programs. They have reflected on how these networks are more than just a helping hand during their time in graduate school, but also colleagues which they expect to collaborate with for research.

The Significance of Individual Interactions with Faculty and Administrators

As first-generation college students, many of the participants had learned by their junior year of college what a pivotal role individual interactions with professors and administrators can have in terms of accessing support structures and opportunity. When asked about when she began to learn about graduate school, Ileana, a student at UTEP, reflected on her experience with a director of a nonprofit creative writing program. She said:

The director at the time she became kind of like a mentor for me. She was getting her master's here at UTEP in creative writing. She was telling me all about that and how much she loved it. She wanted to be a professor at community college because she wanted to teach more than research or things like that. So, she was kind of my inspiration of wanting to go and be in the professoriate. That's when I kind of learned what graduate school was and what being a professor was. She is still my mentor and I still send her things to read and edit and we're Facebook friends. We do a lot together. So, it wasn't until 15 that I kind of knew what it was but at 12 I knew that's what I wanted to do.

At the age of 12, Ileana began thinking about a career as a professor and graduate school. Her connection with this creative writing master's student would flourish over the years

and become one of her main sources of support when navigating college and applying to graduate school.

For students like Berenice, who is undocumented, finding people she can trust was challenging, but worthwhile and instrumental to her success. As a fearful student, especially in today's socio-political climate, Berenice was hyper-aware of her surroundings and what she can and cannot share with her professors and administrators. However, she did not feel this in the presence of people who were involved with her campus' (CSUN) DREAM center. The faculty and staff affiliated with this space on campus were her main supporters throughout her time at CSUN. She shared:

They're guiding me like oh, you could do this if you want. You could do this, don't be sorry, you can do this. They've thrown all these positive reinforcements at me, and I'm like wow, I would love to be able to do this someday. Like this is what they get to do? That's so cool. To me, it's like something I can't, because they're both very well-known in their fields. They could have gone anywhere else. I don't know where I'll end up, but their job is literally inspiring others to be the best students. That's just beautiful to me. I'm so sorry. I don't like being emotional, but like, yeah. That's, to me, what I want to do. And obviously research. I know it's not [just] teaching.

Her connection with the faculty affiliated with the DREAM center exposed her to the aspects of being a professor that are not just about teaching and producing research. Their ability to cultivate an environment for her and others to be the best students possible inspires her to want to do the same.

As a fellow in the HSI Pathways to the professoriate program, each student is assigned a faculty mentor on their campus, but they also have the support of faculty at our partner institutions, students at each of the HSI campuses, and a coordinator at their respective campuses. Throughout the interviews with the participants, they brought up

the special role these people have played in their endeavors to apply to graduate school.

When asked about were the most beneficial aspects of the program, Fernanda shared:

I think my favorite thing has been, aside from the mentors is that there are so many people on this campus that are interested in our program that there is someone at the College of Humanities. She was the Special Assistant to the Dean, and she was at the kickoff. She has been meeting with me like two hours every other week. She's not being paid or anything, just the lure of being part of something like this, I already see it opening doors. That has been really helpful, aside from having my mentor from the program, he is helping me with like CV stuff and academic conferences, giving opportunities, and then to have this other unofficial mentor, who is helping me with developing a time line to do the lit review, get focused on the research, that has been good.

Beyond the communal support network that the program aims to create for its participants, this student in particular has been able to develop a positive mentorship relationship with someone who is aware of the program on her campus. This has exposed her to more opportunities and support that was unexpected but graciously accepted.

Zerafina, a student at UTEP, was happy with the support her mentor provided that went beyond keeping her accountable to completing her work. She appreciated her mentor's candid advice on academia and opportunities. She shared,

[He] answers my questions a lot about academia. He gives me realistic answers. He tells me don't say yes to everything, learn how to say no even if it seems pretty prestigious, your own time is valuable as well. Don't get so caught up on the achievements or prestigious things. Do what you want to do. If it feels right for you, you should do it.

In an environment where it is easy to get caught up on earning prestigious awards or opportunities, Zerafina's mentor reminds her to stay grounded in doing what she is passionate about.

The coordinators of the Pathways program at the respective HSI campuses have proven to be one of the most valuable assets to the students in the program. Beyond

managing the program at the HSIs, these coordinators have informally stepped in as academic, financial, and crisis counselors. They have served as letter writers and champions to the work that the students in the program are completing as they are applying to graduate school. These coordinators have invested time to get to know the unique needs of their cohorts and have done their best to create an environment to promote the success of their students. When talking about a coordinator, Daniela says:

Oh my God. [They have] been amazing, obviously. I think that we all know how amazing [they are]. We know we're [their] priority and I think that pushes us sometimes to perform. [They] just think of everything. [They are] very considerate. [They] need to know every single step of the way. I don't know. [They are] great... the best. We know [they] care and that's kind of great for us, I think to have someone that we can go to for basically everything and [they] can kind of point us in the right direction. It's great.

The coordinators play an enormous role on how this program functions at the respective HSI campuses. Through the interviews with the participants in this study, it is clear that they attribute their ability to reach out to different people and being comfortable asking for help to the relationships they develop with their coordinators.

As fellows to the Pathways program, each student was able to visit graduate schools that were affiliated with the program (University of Pennsylvania, Northwestern University, New York University, University of California, Davis, and the University of California, Berkeley). Given that students are often encouraged to visit graduate programs to meet with faculty and make a lasting impression with the graduate community, the students in the program had a scheduled visit where they were able to meet with faculty that they were interested in working with, graduate program coordinators, and current graduate students. For students that would eventually be admitted and matriculated into the partner institutions, these visits were cited as one of

the major reasons why they decided to apply to these institutions in the first place. Xenia, a CSUN student who was initially interested in entering a doctoral program in Sociology, became aware of the field of performance studies and how it aligned more closely with her interests after speaking to one of the faculty members during the graduate program visit. She said:

For performance studies at Northwestern it was actually a coincidence. When I went there, I was going to apply for the sociology department. I went back in October when we had our choice to go to the schools for campus visits and when I was in Northwestern, I was talking to faculty members. I was talking about my project and he's in performance studies and he's also one of the MRI's or mentors. He came up to me and he said your stuff sounds like you should be in performance studies. I was like what? He actually told the coordinator; you know what I need to have a meeting with her one on one and she needs to apply to performance studies. So, he was trying to convince me to apply to performance studies and me being the kind of person I am I was like yeah just inform me what it is. I was curious about it. I had a meeting with him, and he told me what performance studies it was about and how was really interdisciplinary. I told him about my work, and it was a fit. That's how I chose to apply to Northwestern's performance studies. But it was because a faculty member reached out to me and really broke down what performance studies is in that specific institution because it varies in different institutions. But if it wasn't for that I would have applied to sociology. I'm happy that he took the initiative to come up to me and really listen to my work and say I know it will fit for you, especially me being kind of naïve in terms of what all these programs really are in terms of like their innerworkings. So, for him to take the time to listen and set up a meeting with me even though I wasn't scheduled to have a meeting with him. There actually wasn't even anybody from sociology who I guess could schedule to talk to me that visit. So that was interesting too. That also made me think about well what departments are really welcoming and which ones are not.

Xenia's conversation with this one faculty member changed the way she approached applying to Northwestern, where she would end up being accepted into and becoming a doctoral student in their Performance Studies department. The connections that this program facilitates among the students in the program and faculty across the nation can have a lasting, positive affect on the students like it did for Xenia.

Motivation to Succeed Tied to Aspirational, Familial, and Linguistic Capital

Although Yosso (2005) defines six distinct forms of capital within her community cultural wealth model, it is important to point out that many of these forms of capital intersect, overlap, and nurture each other. In this section, I highlight three different forms of capital that were constantly brought up in relation to each other—aspirational, familial, and linguistic capital. Familial capital refers to resources and support a student brings in with them from their connections to their family, community, and kinship ties they have with others. Aspirational capital refers to the “hopes and dreams” students have even in the face of real or perceived barriers. (Yosso, 2005). She argues that the “resilience is evidenced in those who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals” (p. 73). This inherently includes the family within its definition, and I observed what an important role the participants’ family had in their ambitions to pursue the professoriate.

Adrián, who had shared that he had a negative high school experience, did not anticipate going to college. However, by working full time at a fast-food restaurant and reflecting on the struggles he has seen his family go through despite working all the time, he saw the potential in continuing his education. He said:

I was working at Taco Bell full time and I just didn’t see any future in that. I saw my parents struggling. I saw my uncle, who works every day of the week and only has one afternoon off. He works like two or three jobs, and I saw no future in that. I didn’t want to be living with my parents all the way until I’m 25, or past it, like other people I knew, so I felt like I had to at least try something. I had to at least get out there, and I thought it would be easier if I had at least had my friends there, so I could see them throughout the day or at least talk about my experiences with them.

Part of his hesitation to going to college was not knowing what to do, how to apply, and feeling like he did not have the support of his high school. However, the friendships he made in high school were enough for him to be encouraged to apply to the community colleges that his friends were applying to so he had people he can connect with about navigating college. However, his initial motivation was to not have to struggle like his parents do to provide for the family. Iris, as a non-traditional college student, returned to community college after working at a local bank for 10-years and being unable to advance in her career because she did not have a college degree. This feeling of being “stuck” was enough to get several students to consider going to college.

Daniela, a student at CSUN, was initially interested in becoming a history teacher but with the encouragement of her older brother, she began to think about becoming a professor. She shared:

I always wanted to be like a teacher, you know, when you're little I was like I want to be a teacher. Always, because I love teaching, or I would tutor here, and I love it, and so high school, I was like oh, I want to be a teacher, and my brother was like if you're going to be a teacher, be a professor. Why settle? And so, I was like oh, okay.

The participants who have older siblings who are college educated, like Daniela, have experienced significant encouragement from these siblings to pursue further education.

Vileen, a student at UTEP, inspiration to go to college at a very young age was tied to her experiences with her older sister in an early-college. She said:

My older sister, since she went to the early college, she told me this is what my professors do. I was like I don't get it. Can you talk to me about it? So, she would take me to her classes. I would miss school in middle school, and I would go to her college classes. It was really fun. All of my sisters were amazing that we'd go to classes with each other. I don't have class. I do, so we'd go tag along or my little sister, she'll come with me to class now and she's like it's so interesting. No wonder you're in school. My support is them. They love me and they're actually,

they call me every night just to say we're so proud of you. Everything that you do is amazing. They make me cry countless times because they tell me this and they just say that I'm the person in the family who has had the most education or who is going to pursue the most education on both sides. They just tell me no matter what you do, you're the person who is the most successful because I'm pushing for what I want and I don't let anyone tell me this is who I am, this is what I believe. I don't let them affect who I am. I just use that to help me prove that I'm the right person, who I want to be.

Vileen's initial curiosity to learn about college led her to experience college classes as a middle-school student. From there, her passion for learning grew as well as the support she received from her siblings. Here you can see how the capital is transformational for the family, as Vileen and her sisters continue to support share the experiences of learning in the college classroom with each other, which is reflected by the pride and support she receives from her sisters about her ambitions.

"If not me, then who?" Representation in the classroom

The aspiration to becoming a professor was often tied to racial and ethnic identity and the lack of representation of those identities in the classroom. Scholarship on the role of racial or ethnic identity of faculty members can have on students suggests that faculty of color provide an opportunity for all students to build intercultural competencies while also serving as a role model for students of color in the classroom (Madyun et al., 2013). While many of the participants were inspired by their teachers and professors, some of them were also driven by the fact that they were inspired by the great teachers they had but none of these teachers shared their identity. Jessie, a student at UTEP, shared:

So, I think it's just like, first you're idealizing them. They know all of this information about what you love and then they do all of this research and they help their students. I was looking at my program and you sort of see them as a way to, inspiration and influence. I was really inspired by both of my professors, two of them. I've noticed that I couldn't recognize myself with them just because there's no Latinos in my program professor-wise. It's just like can I be a

professor. I want to be a professor for that, not only to research, teach, and keep learning [about] everything [that] has to do with art but also to represent that properly, just because I didn't [have that].

Jessie recognizes and honors the professors that inspired her to consider pursuing a Ph.D. and become a professor, but she also reflects on the absence of role models who are Latinx.

Grace, a participant from FIU, attributes her inspiration to becoming a professor to her experiences of having women of color as professors. Up until she had women professors in college, her idea of a professor was a white man, and the curriculum she had experienced did not reflect her experiences as a self-identified Hispanic woman. She said:

I never really saw myself as a professor but then actually being in the lectures and seeing women of color because when I thought about professor, I just thought about a white male. So, seeing one of color like a Hispanic professor has really empowered me because it's like I can make it and I'm here now... Seeing my professor a black woman and that was kind of empowering because hey, this is a reachable goal. I can contribute to this. So that's what I want to be and even if I can't be [that professor to future students], I think just through literature that I want to assign, maybe they'll be inspired or empowered.

Having seen women of color as professors in college introduced the idea to Grace that it was an option for her to consider. Her love for literature and teaching, coupled with the realization of the underrepresentation of woman in academia, inspired her to apply to the Pathways program and consider a career as a professor to inspire others to feel empowered to do the same, or at least see themselves in what they are being taught.

Vileen also attributed her inspiration to wanting to become a professor with the way she began to understand her identity as a Chicana in relation to the importance of making sure that that identity is not forgotten or overlooked. As an aspiring Chicana studies graduate student, she grew frustrated that what she was learning in her Chicano/a

studies classes were not being acknowledged or validated in other classes. Often times, people did not know the relevance of Chicano/a studies or the history of the Chicano movement. Vileen shared,

For me, it's important to get that history out because we forget who we are as people. My sister didn't know who Cesar Chavez was because they never taught her in school. So, I taught her everything that I learned. I was like okay; this is what you're going to learn. Then I would have mini sessions with her and teaching her. So, teaching her kind of makes me happy because I was like she's learning about this and she's asking me questions. Then I have more questions to ask because she asked me something I don't know. I tell my coworkers too I'm a Chicana and no one knows what that is here. Even in El Paso people don't know what a Chicana is, so I have to tell them. Me just letting them know who I am and kind of giving them a quick information session about it, it makes me happy and it makes me realize I can do this for the rest of my life. I can tell people about my history all day. It's something that I love and so that's why I knew that I was in the right place because I could talk about it and love every second that I talk about it.

Vileen found a sense of purpose in teaching others about Chicana/o history, which is rooted in the emotional impact and validation she felt when discovering the field in college. Her aspiration to become a professor is connected with this desire to educate others in something she found to be transformative to her experience in schooling.

This sense of responsibility intensifies for the participants who are in graduate programs and witness the underrepresentation in the classroom and within the field. Iris, a student at who graduated from UTEP and is now a doctoral student in a History at a graduate program in Iowa claimed that what she heard about the state of Latinx representation in the academy is reflected in her graduate program in relation to the faculty and graduate student body. She shared:

Just like from everything that we learned in HSI about diversifying the academia, it is definitely needed. I can see now here, being at the University of Iowa it is definitely needed. I'm like I still want to be a professor. I want to teach and do my part for the community, having clear engagement and stuff, and I don't think that

is something that is going to change for me. I know it is going to be difficult for me to get a job in the beginning, and maybe it won't be. Maybe I'll get a job readily, but I don't want to be deterred from this path because other people tell me it's not possible. I kind of just say yeah, yeah, okay, but then I think about it, and I'm like well, I'm a bad ass Latina that is going to be a professor. I'm going to get a job. Maybe you're not, but I will.

Even when hearing negative messaging about the job prospects for academics in the humanities, Iris passion for history, coupled with her commitment to diversify the professoriate, continue to motivate her to pursue this career.

Consistent with Bandura and Walter's (1977) research on social learning theory, participants in this study benefited from having role models that shared their racial and ethnic identity. Karunanayake and Nauta's (2004) study on the relationship between race and students' role models and career aspiration, participants in this study shared that having teachers and role models who shared their identities as first-generation, an underrepresented minority, or a woman helped them see themselves capable of becoming professors. While the literature tends to focus on this experience while students are undergraduates, this study gave insight on how this manifested once they were in graduate school and encountered less faculty and peers that shared their identities.

The Role of Teachers and Professors

Participants in this study cited their teachers or professors as their initial inspiration to becoming a professor. Often amazed by their teacher's pedagogy, participants shared numerous examples of how their personal interactions with a particular professor, or the awe they in the classrooms of these teachers excited them about the opportunity to be that teacher to others. Zara, a student from FIU,

I had the great honor, pleasure, and privilege of having [this professor] last semester, and she reached out to me I think after my first paper. She really liked it

and she said I am part of this program, and I really think that you'd like it, so if you want to be a professor, I encourage you to apply. And of course, I did because of her. I wanted to be a professor because of her, because I didn't know before. I wanted to do English. That's all I knew. I didn't really know my career path after. And I had two classes with her that first semester, and I loved her, and I loved the way that she taught. She's so kind, and so passionate about what she does. My parents always are like I don't fall in love with the subject, I fall in love with the love that my teachers have for the subject. She's so passionate, and genuine, and open to everything. It was, somebody asked her a question once and it was this really difficult question. It was, so she does Continental Philosophy, and I don't remember what the question was, but it was about analytic and sort of going against what she was saying, and she answered it so gracefully, and I wanted that. And she made me fall in love with it, and I wanted to get other people to fall in love with literature and philosophy.

All it took was one interaction of encouragement to apply to this program and consider becoming a professor for Zara to pursue a career that allows her to continue her passion of English. The insight that Zara's family has in Zara's disposition towards her love of particular subjects is worth noting. While the content can be transformational and interesting to an individual, the way that it is delivered is important. Zara's awe in her professor's intellect and teaching style amplified her passion of English, and throughout her interviews Zara often reflected on becoming the professor the one she once had.

Some students had these experiences earlier in high school. Like Zara, it seems like Juliana's love for literature emerged from her admiration of how she was taught literature from one of her high school teachers. She shared:

In high school I had this amazing art teacher named Renee... She only taught art but my junior year of high school she picked up an English class and somehow luckily, I ended up there. Honestly at this time I was kind of like what is it that I want to do, what is it that I'm going to be, those kinds of questions. Her English class was just nothing else compared to any other English class. It was just above all of the other classes that I've ever taken because she mixes art with it and perception and your own interpretation and analysis. I thought that was really incredible. She assigned us *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. The way that we looked into that and its connection to the 1930's and racism and everything that that book entails I just thought that it was a masterpiece. I really always tell

people this because it's just funny. One day I was taking a shower and I was just thinking about Harper Lee's book in there and I'm like, wow, this woman really did all this in a book... I was just in complete awe. That's when I realized like you know what, books are your thing. Books are your thing because I just love how they connect and they let you live so many different lives and tell so many different stories about different people. That's why I love it.

The way that her English teacher in high school taught had a lasting impression on how Juliana looked at literature. Once she was in college taking classes on young adult fiction, she found a pathway to make a career out of her passion of reading books. Throughout our conversation, Juliana constantly reflects on the impact her teacher Renee had in her academic development and how appreciative that this teacher was willing to write her a recommendation letter to join the Pathways to the Professoriate program.

Despite many of the participants reflecting on negative experiences in school – whether it was in schools like Adrián, who felt that the school had low expectations of their ability to succeed, or Xenia who had heard from others that she would not be taken seriously as a graduate student from a CSU compared to applicants coming from more selective institutions—it only took one positive interaction with a professor to leave a lasting impression on these students to consider becoming a professor.

Family history and Linguistic Capital

Linguistic capital is understood as the various language and communication skills that a student brings into their college environment (Yosso, 2005). While an emphasis is usually placed on the advantages of bilingualism or code-switching, Yosso (2005) also argues that students of color often have been engaged in a storytelling tradition of recounting oral histories passed down from their families. Embedded in familial capital are these stories that are passed down. Throughout the interviews, the participants shared

countless stories of their family's history and how that has motivated them to become professors. As an undocumented, first-generation, low-income Latinx, she constantly refers to the Pathways to the Professoriate program as a gateway to opportunities her parents wished they had.

Daniela, a student from CSUN, knew from a very young age that she would go to college. Her parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico for the educational opportunities. She shares:

My parents are immigrants from Mexico. My mom never made it past, I think the first grade. My dad got a sixth-grade education. He's very proud of that. That's the most he could get. My parents moved, they had two brothers in Mexico, my brother is in Mexico, and then they moved to LA, and then they had the rest of us there. They moved so that we could have these opportunities, and my grandma was very against that. She was like why do they need an education? They don't really need it. My mom was like no, I didn't get one, so my kids get to get one. All of my brothers, we were the first generation to go to college, or at least tried to. My eldest brother did really well. He went to Boston University, Northeastern and MIT, Harvard Business, and the rest of my other one's kind of stopped at community college, and I'm going to CSUN.

Despite her grandmother's cultural, patriarchal views on education for women, her mother ensured that her and her siblings would pursue education. Having older siblings who went to both community college, a 4-year institution, and graduate school, Daniela observed college-seeking behaviors and decided that starting at CSUN was the best option for her. She did not want to get "stuck" at community college and recognized the constant encouragement she received from her older brother who had gone to a four-year institution and graduate school. This brother was the one who questioned if she was considered becoming a professor of history when she expressed interests in teaching history in high school.

Given that the different forms of capital in Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model often overlap, the resistance capital that Doris acquired by her passion to learn more about her Mexican heritage that was purposely downplayed by her family is also tied to the linguistic capital she attained when she cooked with her mother. As mentioned before, she said, "my mom has a recipe book where she writes the story of how she got the recipe and then the recipe. I feel like I learned about my identity as a Chicana through cooking because that's all I heard from my parents." She cherishes these recipes and stories and aspired to become a professor to learn more about her culture and identity as a Chicana to that she can help be that person for other students.

Combating the Imposter Syndrome with Linguistic Capital

One of the most significant challenges that students in the Pathways to the Professoriate program encounter while they apply to graduate programs and during their first year of graduate school is the imposter syndrome. Clance and Imes (1978) defined the imposter syndrome as "an internal experience of intellectual phoniness" (p. 241). Discourse on the imposter syndrome emerged to explain what women in high-achieving positions experienced when they did not feel like they belonged in the workplace (Clance & Imes, 1978). Their study uncovered that the women believed they were not as smart as others believed them to be and attributed their success to luck or mistakes, thus constantly were fearful of being discovered as a fraud. While the term originated in studies related to employment, research suggests that first-generation college students feelings of being underprepared are amplified with their circumstances of being the first in their family to go to college (Gardner & Holley, 2011; Stebleton & Soria, 2013; Sherman, 2013) As participants described their experiences dealing with the imposter

syndrome, it was often tied to their identities as first-generation students—as Adrián once said, “I don’t know what I don’t know.” However, through the opportunities afforded by the Pathways program, the relationships they formed with their peers and mentors, and their experiences in academic spaces since being in the Pathways program, these students have developed mechanisms to overcome these feelings of doubt towards themselves and push through these challenges in efforts to achieve their goals.

Being able to name the challenges they encounter has been helpful to them to overcome it. As Fernanda began feeling anxious about applying to graduate school and doubting her ability to complete the Pathways program, she shared:

I am going to be honest; at first it was like paralyzing. It almost seemed impossible. There were times I was like I don't think I can do this, I can't. I think the approach they have was to express that we were dealing with imposter syndrome, and so that was something that was kind of universal, across the board. They told us you're going to go to institutions where you're going to be the only person of color, and kind of like building up workshops and building up things that will help us cope with that and help us have the confidence and develop those skills has really been helpful.

Learning about the imposter syndrome, and how universal it was, helped Fernanda develop coping skills in dealing with it. Vileen found comfort in the universality of the imposter syndrome within her cohort too. While she expressed that she felt many of peers in her cohort were more advanced than she was in their understanding of concepts, learning that they were also dealing with the imposter syndrome helped ease the stress it had on her. She said:

The one thing that stood out to me the most was the feeling that all of us feel the kind of [have] imposter syndrome, and so feeling that you don’t belong in academia was like a feeling that they had all had and they all shared, no matter their background. And so that was very comforting for me just like overall as a person to know that it’s not just me. It’s like the people who I respect and also feel those things.

Similar to Fernanda and Vileen, Uma found relief in learning about the imposter syndrome and seeing how prevalent it was amongst her peers and for first-generation students in particular. She said:

I think it was just sort of self-doubt that kind of troubled me, not so much about getting the work done. The imposter syndrome is really common, especially for first gen like everybody feels that when they are applying to grad school. So, I didn't hesitate to ask for help if I needed it but yes, my mentor and Heidi if I was ever feeling that way, they would kind of just talk me through it I guess and that was really helpful. So, I didn't get too overwhelmed by the emotional impact of it.

Beyond recognizing how common it was, particularly for first-generation students, Uma developed better help-seeking behaviors to prevent those feelings from affecting her emotional health.

As the students in the Pathways program learned more about graduate school, participated in graduate-level seminars, and visited graduate programs, they shared instances of posturing and the feelings of intimidation, but within those experiences, they also reflected on how they managed to cope with those feelings and develop habits to grow more comfortable with themselves and their ability to speak up in academic spaces. Early on in the Pathways program, many students claimed they were intimidated by their cohort members—who seemed to have a better grasp of theory. Queen shared,

Then when I got here last week, so we did the retreat. Let me tell you, the imposter syndrome was real. It was heavy because everybody's dropping names about theorists and their favorite author and the enlightenment and deconstruction and is our reality even our reality? So, I feel like I'm constantly playing catch-up, especially everybody in HSI [Pathways to the Professoriate Program] is so smart. I know that I got into the program but the imposter syndrome, and I told [my coordinator] this the other day. She's like what do you expect. You're in rhetoric. Everybody's in comparative literature and they're taking deconstructive ethics. You don't need to. I was like okay, that made me feel better.

Queen felt reassured after hearing that her peers were trained in these ideas for their current undergraduate majors. After learning that, she placed less emphasis on what knowledge she lacked compared to her cohort and focused on what ideas she can bring to the program, which helped her see the value she brought to her cohort.

Doris developed a strategy to become more confident in speaking up in the classroom. While reflecting on moments of intimidation from the questions being asked in class, or her contributions in class compared to more advanced students, Doris said:

As far as imposter syndrome and speaking up in class, I've started, for me, I got over that pressure of saying something stupid by answering the lowball. The professors will always throw the easier questions out there, so I kind of started building up my confidence by answering those. And then, once I had some thoughts organized, I would kind of go for more complicated answers and stuff like that. But I think to just kind of like, that was a little bit of a quota for myself. I said I'm going to speak up in class one to two times, each class, and I think that that really helped me to overcome that feeling of imposter syndrome.

She was able to get over the imposter syndrome in the classroom by committing to speaking up at least twice during each class. By answering “lowball” questions, the questions that she was confident in answering, she was able to build up the confidence to contribute in class. As she grew more confident, she became more engaged. Rather than feelings of “faking it” being viewed as negative experience (Sherman, 2013), Vileen’s strategy helped her tremendously; and she credits her commitment to becoming a professor to the exhilarating feeling she would then have when her contributions in class provoked interested conversations in the classroom.

Another coping mechanism that was shared among several participants in this study is the “fake it until you make it” mentality. Adrián shared:

I felt like they were so much more eloquent with their speaking and so much more sure of themselves. I walked away feeling like okay, you know, if I'm not as

secure as them, I can fake it till I make it, you know, and then more interaction with them made me see that they were just as, I don't want to say insecure, but just as, just as, ah, they had doubts as well, and I felt like I could relate to them more.

He was uncomfortable speaking up because he felt like everyone was more confident. To cope, he got to know everyone better and find ways that he can relate with them which helped alleviate the feelings of him not belonging. Vileen claimed that the “fake it until you make it” mentality taught her how to become more confident. When asked how she overcomes the imposter syndrome, she said:

One of them is kind of faking the confidence, like pretending that you are there and that you know exactly why you're there and just like pretending that you have all that confidence, because once you pretend, then you actually start to feel that confidence, and you actually start to really embrace it. And another thing was not having or being able to talk to people and trying to relate with them on simple things like talking about, oh, what kind of TV shows do you like, or what kind of things do you do in your spare time? So, it's like bringing people back down to, oh yeah, we're out here. We're all part of academia, but we're also people... so trying to connect with people on that, because then that makes you feel more calm and makes you feel more like okay, these are people who have outside lives and who aren't always intimidating, so you can connect with them on that level. Well, actually, I've been doing it in my everyday life, like in little interactions. I had with people and just little things of kind of faking it, like fake it until you make it, that kind of mentality.

By not allowing her feelings of doubt prevent her from connecting with others, she had the opportunity to participate in panels and be a guest speaker in programs at her school. While these opportunities made her nervous, she relied on this “fake it until you make it” confidence to push through and take advantage of these opportunities. She proceeds to share that hearing audience members come up to her after these programs to talk about how her story or speech was inspiring showed her how she can perform the confidence that she does not always believe she has. Then when she reflects on what she has accomplished, she begins to feel more confident about herself.

The Complexity of Familial Capital – Support, Conflict, and Misunderstanding

Familial support for first-generation, Latinx students is complex. While there is research that suggests students may be unsupported to pursue education because of the responsibilities expected of them from their family (Sy & Romero, 2008; Kline et al., 2016; Liang et al., 2016), my study adds to a countering perspective where families may not be able to support students financially, but serve as an emotional support system even when they do not understand what the student is going through (Cavazos et al., 2014; Carey, 2016; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017). Furthermore, I found that many participants in this study reflected on their family's migration to this country to be tied to educational opportunities in the U.S. Students who may have more challenges pursuing education because of familial circumstances often cite financial challenges or it is related to gender and the patriarchal cultural norms that their parents may subscribe to (Dennis et al., 2010; Berg & Tolefson, 2014; Carona et al., 2017; Heredia et al., 2018). This held true for some participants in my study. Daniela, a student at CSUN, mentioned that her grandmother was against her parents moving to the United States for better educational opportunities. Her grandmother protested and Daniela said, "She was like why do they need an education? They don't really need it." Her grandmother felt that Daniela and her siblings were better off finding work after high school and helping around the household. Nonetheless, all the participants in this study had the support of their family. However, while the families of the students may be supporting and proud, many students discuss the complexity of that support due to not understanding what they go through as first-generation college students, aspiring professors, or as scholars in fields that their families do not agree with or understand.

The pressure of being first in the family to go to college came up frequently in the interviews, but for the most part, this was a motivational factor. Although they often talked about the disconnect they had with their family about their academic interests, their ambition to pursue education was a source of pride for their families. While the participants had the support to pursue graduate school, many of them spoke about the challenges with having a family that does not quite understand what their academic interests are, the decision to pursue graduate school, or the excitement they have to be part of the Pathways program. Adrián explains how his family reacted to his excitement of being accepted into the Pathways program and said, “there’s always kind of, not a language barrier, but some kind of barrier with trying to get my parents to understand what this all entails, and what a big deal it was. They were happy but didn’t really know how to express it or anything.”

For the students who have supportive families that do not quite understand their academic interests or their ambition to go to graduate school, some participants shared ways they attempt to “translate the field” and their experiences to help their parents understand. As a first-generation college student, Adrián brings up how he tries to explain academia and sociology to his parents, especially when they want to understand why he is feeling overwhelmed about applying to graduate school. He says,

Then just that language barrier with my family, trying to talk to them about what a PHD entails. I can’t talk theory to them ever. I learned everything in English and trying to translate it to Spanish. I’m trying to think is it sociology or how can I explain that. There’s also my girlfriend who, she’s psychology but there is some overlap there and then trying to explain things to her helps me, I think, in trying to become a professor one day, trying to put my thoughts into something the general public can also swallow is helpful. When I went to North Ridge, I was the first in my family to get into a four-year institution and you hear little ways that they brag about you. We went to, my dad took me to do something at the mechanics

and he was talking about how I used to be so much as a little kid and now I'm going off to a PHD program and all of that. I was like Dad, just stop.

“Translating the field” to Adrián is an opportunity to practice describing his work to a broader audience. Despite the lack of understanding from his family, he knows that they are proud of him which is evidenced by how his father brags to his friends about Adrián's success at CSUN and ambition to earn a doctorate. Renee also discusses how she finds ways to make her academic interests sensible to her parents. She shares,

My parents have been supportive since the get-go. I don't think, like my family doesn't understand it entirely. I don't think they know what it means to be in grad school, what it means to pursue a PHD, how demanding it is. But I think they just understand that, I think they just really see that being a professor is really cool, and a really stable profession, and what not. I guess when I'm speaking to them about my goals, and about linguistics in general, they definitely don't understand what phonology is, what morphosyntax is. I hardly understand what it is right now. But I think what's also easier for them to understand, what's my keen interest, is Socio-Linguistics. It's like how does language interact with social aspects, social issues, etcetera. My parents find that really interesting, because I think Socio-Linguistics can be explained a lot easier and I guess colloquial terms. So, yeah, and they're just super supportive, and they see me working so hard.

However, this can be more difficult for the students who are pursuing topics that are controversial to their family's beliefs. Iris, for example, is interested in Chicana/o studies and history because it was a part of her identity that she had been denied of as a child.

When discussing her family's reaction to her decision to pursue Chicana/o studies and history as a Pathways program student, Iris shared:

So, it's been really difficult for me because when I told my mom, mom I'm going to change my degree to Chicano studies. She was like what is that and I told her, and she was like that's not you. You're not a Chicana because it's a very derogatory term in what she thinks. She thinks that it's a gang member, they're just a bad person... She said well I hope you have; you make a lot of money off off our people. She said that to me and it's something that has stayed with me to this day. She conveniently does not remember saying it because now that I'm in this program she's very proud because she has bragging rights now so she can tell her friends oh my daughter is a Mellon Fellow and she's; you know. So, it's been

really hard for me because my mom doesn't understand what I'm doing but yet she brags... The rest of my family is like why are you 32 and still trying to get a college degree without working. Why aren't you bringing in money? Then of course my family is very patriotic like I was telling you. They're very Texan. So, they're very much like you don't even know what it's like to be Mexican. You don't know what you're talking about. My aunts and uncles grew up in the 70's so to be Mexican at that time was a no-no.

While her mother was initially unsupportive of Iris pursuing a field like Chicana/o studies, she eventually had a change of heart after Iris has been accepted to the Pathways to the Professoriate Program. Iris shares that the prestige associated with the program has helped her mother accept Iris' academic interests, however, this is at times is a point of frustration as Iris feels that if the program was not associated with Mellon or marketed as selective and prestigious, then her mother would not have come around to support her academic and professional endeavors.

While Octavio has a supportive family, he sensed some defensiveness from his parents towards his interests in doing research on immigration. As a first-generation college student who is also a first-generation American, he understands that his parents do not understand what he is going through, and while they have always been supportive, they tend to shy away from conversations about his family's own immigration history. He reflects,

“[my mother] is supportive in the sense that she's like this is all amazing and I'm proud of what you're doing, and this is great. But in terms of like more personal conversations of like oh I learned this, this kind of sounds like this thing that kind of exists between us like in our family dynamic. She was like I wouldn't know, kind of like dodging, defensive.

Considering the socio-political context we are in today, Octavio believes that the topic may be sensitive to his parents due to fear of unsafety or being “outed” as immigrants.

While that fear exists, his parents still continue to support his ambition to become a professor.

The most tension the students experienced in this study despite claiming to feel supported by their parents' stem from having to go away for graduate school—especially for students who are expected to help their parents financially. Cavarrubias and Fryberg's (2015) study on first-generation college students describes this tension as “family achievement guilt.” Becerra's (2010) study on perceived barriers of Latinx students in college claims that students report not wanting to burden their family with worry and wanting to help the family out financially as two reasons to want to remain close to home for education. While many students talked about the fears around going away for graduate school, it was not until they had been admitted to programs far from home that they felt pressure and guilt for considering moving away from home. Upon being accepted to a Ph.D. program in New Jersey, Zara said about her parents, “they are conflicted, and they're really happy that I am happy but also in that they will really miss me, and so, they want me here all of the time. And I leave on Friday, and my mom is already crying like every other day.” For some students, their parents cannot understand why they do not just choose to pursue graduate school at their current institution.

Reflecting on her parent's support, Doris shared:

I think even if they don't understand they try to be supportive. My dad is very much like I don't know what you're doing but okay. My mom tries to be more involved for support reasons, I think. She doesn't want me to fail and she knows I'm my own biggest critic. They're very supportive now except for the fact that they don't want me to leave. My dad is like you can't do it at UTEP? I'm like no there's no Ph.D. in English here, sorry.

The tension of leaving home is heightened for students who take on certain responsibilities in the household. Xenia, for example, considers herself a co-parent to her younger brother. Since her father has never been involved with her family, from a very young age Xenia took care of her brother outside of school hours and always attended parent-teacher conferences and translated everything to her mother. Upon being admitted to many programs across the nation, including several at her home state, Xenia's mother had trouble understanding why she would choose to move to the mid-west for graduate school. Xenia said:

So, my mom is very proud. She is sad. At first, she didn't understand. At first, she wanted me to go to Merced, because she didn't really understand the whole thing of like, well, for her, it's like isn't any university, aren't all universities the same? It's a university; what's the big deal, kind of thing. My mom at first, she was kind of like she thought that I could just pick where I want to go. She was like can't you just go to San Diego or something. I was like well it's not up to me where I want to locate But I think now she's coming more around to it and to like okay you're going to leave. What's that going to look like? It also depends where I go. For example, if I were to go to Merced that's not too far away from where I live. It's a couple of hours but I don't have to fly and I'm not in a different state. For Chicago that's where she's like that's so far and also that's so cold. I guess she feels kind of nervous and so am I what it's going to look like when I'm gone. I am like a co-parent. So, I do a lot of taking my brother to school and go to parent teacher conferences and I do a lot of translating. I'm the one who talks to administration if there's an issue. I'm still a kid at heart so I'm always playing with my brother. Me and him are super, super close. I'm like his mom. I'm like momma bear every time something happens. So, I think it's a lot of adjusting into how involved I'm going to be and how involved I can be. So, I think it's just kind of like a fear of not knowing what that's going to look like. She doesn't stop me from wanting to reach, wanting to go somewhere else. She understands that it's just a thing I have to do. It's also a conversation about money. So, it's a lot of like well if they're going to offer you the best package and its somewhere where you don't have to take out a loan and somewhere then that's what you have to do. We don't have the money to pay for your tuition or whatever expenses.

While she feels very supported by her mother, Xenia recognizes how circumstances with her family will change if she goes to graduate school far from home. While this makes

her decision to go away more difficult, she is comforted in knowing that her mother wants the best for her and will be supportive, no matter the circumstances.

Despite almost every student discussing the challenges they face explaining their academic interests to their parents, by the time each student applied to graduate school, they all had the support of their parents. While many of them admit that their parents still are unaware of what they are doing, education, in general, is valued and seen as a pathway to success to them and their families. Consistent with prior research on the myth that Latinx families don't value education (Ceballo et al., 2014; Hernandez et al., 2016; Valencia, 2002), participants in my study were raised understanding the importance of education. The families of the participants of this study played a significant role in why these students were driven to become professors. As first-generation college students, the participants in this study see their academic journeys as an opportunity to become the resource for future first-generation students.

Concluding Thoughts

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight the forms of capital that first-generation college students acquire as they enter and persist in educational spaces. Using Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model as a lens to understand the experiences of the participants in my study, I was able to frame their experiences in postsecondary educational contexts in a way that highlights their moments of perseverance and strength despite the challenges that they encounter.

Whether it was viewing their hardships in education as a privilege given the their circumstances at home, or the drive to pursue education to for a larger, political act of resistance, the participants of my study attribute their passion and perseverance towards

pursuing graduate school and becoming a professor so that they can become the resource and inspiration for students like them in the future. As Zarafina said in her interview, “if not me, then who?” They see their participation in this program as both an opportunity and responsibility to show students with similar circumstances that they are needed in academia.

Important to note, however, is that the financial, structural, and cultural barriers that they do encounter are pervasive and can complicate their pathways to degree attainment. While I stress the importance of taking an anti-deficit approach to their experiences in order to inform our understandings of what can help first-generation, Latinx students thrive in higher education, we must continue to note what barriers continue to exist along their way furthering their education.

CHAPTER 5: “NOTHING REALLY SHOCKED ME...” THE ROLE OF THE PATHWAYS TO THE PROFESSORIAL PROGRAM AND THE SOCIALIZATION EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-GENERATION LATINX STUDENTS

Prior research has emphasized the role socialization of doctoral students has on graduate student success and preparation for academic careers (Austin, 2002; Gardner, 2009). Socialization is widely understood as having four distinct stages: (1) anticipatory, (2) formal, (3) informal, and (4) personal (Weidman et al., 2001).

The *Anticipatory stage* refers to the point where students begin to learn the culture, values, norms, and expectations of graduate school and the academy. This happens through formal instruction, mentorship, or in interacting with others who share knowledge about graduate education (Weidman et al., 2001).

The *Formal stage* occurs when students receive “formal instruction” in the discipline in which they aspire to become experts in. This includes being formally inducted into a program where students begin to practice being in the field and are observed by experts (Weidman et al., 2001).

The *Informal stage* refers to the knowledge acquired through personal interactions with other, more senior, graduate students and faculty mentors where students pick up on discipline or field norms and expectations and begin to act accordingly (Weidman et al., 2001).

The *Personal stage* occurs when the student’s personal identities “merge” with their scholar-identity and they begin to see themselves as experts and contributors to the field (Weidman et al., 2001).

Socialization in educational contexts is frequently linked to Bourdieu's (1979, 1964) concepts of cultural capital, field, and practice (Gopaul, 2011). Cultural Capital refers to the skills and knowledge that may be rewarded in a particular setting. When considering graduate school socialization, scholars often posit that different forms of cultural capital can be acquired during the socialization process. According to Gopaul (2011), the concept of field are the rules of the game in the academy and practice is the interaction of an individual's disposition, capital, and understanding of the field. Thus, for underrepresented first-generation students who are often understood as lacking capital and understanding of the field, socialization is an important factor to consider to promote their success. This chapter focuses on the how the participants of this study describe their socialization experiences of graduate school as fellows of the Hispanic Serving Institutions: Pathways to the Professoriate Program. After a thorough overview of the structure and sources of support the participants have access to as a fellow of the program, I demonstrate how this program provides the students with opportunities to learn more about graduate school and life as an academic in efforts to help them prepare for a successful transition into doctoral study.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Pathways to the Professoriate Program

Research suggests that the doctoral student experience is influential in shaping one's aspirations and qualification into becoming a faculty member (Turner & Myers, 2000). Given that HSIs educate such a large population of Latino students in higher education, the Rutgers's Center for Minority Serving Institutions (CMSI) developed a program specifically for HSIs. The HSI Pathways to the Professoriate Program is

structured to provide the necessary support that enables the scholars selected to persist through graduate school. Informed by research on Latinx student achievement and graduate student socialization, scholars selected for the program have access to a plethora of resources aimed to support their aspirations to becoming faculty. These resources include: faculty and graduate student mentorship, peer mentorship, a focus on the graduate school application process, GRE preparation, opportunities to conduct and present research, funding for research and graduate school applications, opportunities to visit graduate programs at no cost, and a dedicated staff member on their campus to support them throughout the time in the program.

The HSI coordinator organizes the on-campus portion of the program, which includes the summer research intensive seminar. They serve as the point-of-contact for students of the program at their campuses. They provide these students support while providing academic and social programming throughout the year. They organize faculty mentors, manage logistics of the program, and are seen as both academic and financial advisors to the students of the program.

The HSI faculty mentors work with the students on their respective campuses beginning in the second semester of their junior year and continue mentoring students through their eventual matriculation into doctoral programs. They guide students through their independent summer research projects as well as lead sessions during the summer seminar about graduate school, theory, methodology, and life in academia. They are active participants in the on-campus programming and assist students with their applications into graduate school.

The faculty mentors at the partnering research institutions work with the students during their senior year. In conjunction with the HSI faculty mentors, these faculty provide academic and social support for students during their research development. Some of these faculty also provide sessions during the summer research seminar. These faculty participate in the graduate program visits that the students have the opportunity to attend. These faculty have aided in the drafts of personal statements for graduate school and writing samples for many students in the program.

While each partnering HSI campus had the autonomy to structure their program to best fit the needs of their students, each summer seminar had to meet the following requirements: 42 hours of methods and theory instruction, 24 hours of independent research time, 22 hours of GRE and graduate school preparation, 16 hours of mentoring and information about transitioning into graduate school, and 16 hours up to the discretion of each HSI campus. Many of our partners planned their respective summer programs to exceed these requirements so that their students were well-prepared to complete their research project and be ready to apply to graduate school in the Fall.

Within 5 years, 90 students (30 from each HSI) were selected for the program. Each cohort consisted of 30 students—10 from each HSI. The fellows were selected during their junior year. Upon acceptance, they received a faculty mentor, support from the HSI coordinator, a mentor through the CMSI, along with financial, programmatic, and academic support that is provided through the activities from the program. During the summer before their senior year, participants of the program attended a research intensive and graduate school application preparatory summer program, featuring faculty from the partnering research institutions.

“I’m not going into it so blindly anymore...” Acquiring Social and Cultural Capital through Socialization

Upon acceptance into the Pathways program, these students are inundated with information about graduate school. While a bulk of the programming occurs during the summer seminar, soon after their initial acceptance into the program, students are inducted into the program and learn more about the goals and expectations. With the goal of the program to diversify the humanities professoriate with more Latinx faculty, these students hear about the state of Latinx representation in the academy. They also learn general information about applying to humanities doctoral programs. Many of the students admit that until they hear this information, they were completely unaware that applying to graduate school was different than applying to college. When asked what the major lessons were learned during the summer seminar, Fercho shared:

For me, I think it was just being exposed to what grad school is, how to apply to it. I’ve never had anyone in my family seek higher education, especially not into grad school. So, for me, everything was relatively new. I knew it was something that I wanted to do, but it was also really foreign to me. So, after going through the summer [seminar], I feel like I am a lot more prepared now, and I know in a sense what to expect, and I guess I’m not going into it so blindly anymore.

As first-generation college students, many of the participants figured out the college-application process while applying, and before their involvement with this program, they thought that they could have approached applying to graduate school similarly.

The anticipatory stage of their socialization took place during the first couple of weeks of the summer seminar where the students sat in numerous workshops and panels about the process of graduate school and the experiences of the faculty mentors of the program. Gerado, a student at CSUN, found this information invaluable and changed his approach to creating relationships with faculty after being part of the summer seminar.

He realized that the relationships he creates with faculty go beyond the request of a letter of recommendation. He shared:

We also had programming on how to ask for a letter of recommendation and kind of the rapport that you have to develop with your professor and how that's kind of like a precursor to developing relationships in terms of networking and also having healthy relationships with the kind of like co-faculty... It was explained to me that once you're a grad student, they still see you as students but there's a level of understanding that these are your future academic peers, I guess I would say, in the workforce. So, the relationships are really important in terms of finding resources, finding support, and finding your committee members. So, in that sense, that's kind of how I learned to develop those relationships and also personally for me, being kind of people-oriented was really hard for me, so I had to kind of really push myself to make sure I go out there to talk to my professors and develop relationships with them. That was one of the things that I found to be important because I know that once I get into grad school, that's going to be a lot like, it's going to happen more often than I had previously been exposed to during my undergrad. So, it's one of the things I prioritized once we got out of the summer seminar.

As someone who describes them self as introverted, the programming in the Pathways program exposed Gerado to the need for him to branch out, seek support, and develop strong relationships with faculty.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, many students in the program were inspired to become professors because of the teachers they had throughout their life or the passion they had developed in their specific fields of interests. However, many of them also admit to not knowing how to become a professor and what a professor does beyond teach in the college classroom. When reflecting on what was learned from the summer seminar, Adrián shares:

I think what I learned the most wasn't necessarily about any of those particular subjects. I think [the summer seminar] laid like a foundation for my knowledge of what grad school was, because I really, at that point, I really didn't know. Even at the point where I was applying, I really didn't know what academia was. I knew I wanted to be a professor. I didn't know to what extent research was a part of it. And like navigating being a faculty member and tenure and all of that, so I think

being able to, the summer seminar really laid the foundation for things for getting to know what graduate school was going to look like and what the job there was going to look like, afterwards, and things that I'm encountering now, I'm like okay. I was already exposed to that. I already knew that this was going to come, such that kind of like I wouldn't have known, otherwise. I would have come into graduate school, not having known specifically that this was going to be something that I had to do. So, I think in that sense, that's what I got the most out of summer seminar.

Despite knowing he was passionate about sociology and wanted to become a professor, Adrián had no sense of the importance of research, the requirements of tenure, and what it was like to be a faculty mentor until he was introduced to these realities by the programming within the summer seminar. Learning the field, as Bourdieu would describe it, would be the most helpful part of the summer seminar for Adrián. When asked to describe, specifically, what he means about learning about academia, he says:

I guess just in terms of how the game should be played; how the whole, everything in terms of how you are going to get to the next step. So, I have the step of getting his paper in, getting this grant money. How I'm going to get into grad school. How I'm going to get into each of my different fellowships. How you should be cashing in on what you are doing, but also how it is networking. There are these different components of how to get ahead, exactly what you are supposed to do, and she shows us how, sometimes it's just being able to put yourself out there in a way that people will see you and will want to choose you. You won't be trying to get into their program, they're going to be trying to get you in there. How you are going to show yourself in that light, is what I would say.

Another lasting impression the summer seminar workshops had on the participants is how important it was to curate a specific list of graduate programs that align with their academic interests was to their overall success in applying to doctoral programs. While every student can apply to as many graduate programs as they wish to (and can afford), the program emphasized the importance of finding a “good fit” for the students. They were advised to consider programs that had faculty who can support their interests. Students were also advised to consider how their interests can be supported by

more than one faculty member in a given program to both help their chances in applying to graduate programs and to consider options that had adequate support to promote their success. Renee felt that this was the most important lesson she learned about graduate school. She said:

The most important part is identifying faculty and then reading about their research and making sure that you're a good fit and that there is enough similarities between what they're doing and what you're doing. So, yeah, that was definitely what guided me the most is making sure that there were more than one faculty member that I could work with and that I wanted to, that were doing similar, not necessarily the same thing but had similar interests to my own. So that was the most important advice that I got.

Resources were also distributed to the students on how to discern which programs were best positioned to support their work. When asked on how Xenia finalized the list of schools she would apply to, she reflected on these resources. She said:

That came from a panel we had over the summer that talked about fit and the right fit and how that's important not only for your future career but also for your mental health and kind of like a very holistic kind of approach to that. And also, the fit being important to being admitted. If your work doesn't fit what that department is doing you're not going to get in because there's nobody there to support you. So that came from that summer panel that we had about fit. We were very, we even did like a worksheet kind of like where we see each other, what's important to us. Is recognition important to you and kind of things like that and to kind of help us break down the kind of institution we want to work in. That's how that kind of came about. That was a really important message that was kind of really kind of put in our faces like okay fit is important not only for admissions but also for your own sanity. Is your work going to flourish in these places, in these institutions and it all depends on the fit. So, we had a workshop where that whole day since the day was so long that workshop was about learning about fit and then doing the worksheet and then doing some research. We just did research on faculty members and different institutions and seeing if and finding if the fit was right for us.

Prior to their exposure to information about graduate school and academia, as first-generation college students, these students had little to no understanding on how applying to graduate school was different than applying to college and what life of a professor was

like. While this information proved to be valuable and useful to their preparation to applying to graduate school, sometimes this information was communicated in negative, fear-provoking ways, as described in the next section.

Socialization is often understood as a process that begins during the first year in graduate school (Weidman et al., 2001; Gardner, 2013). However, this finding demonstrates how it can begin as early as students are engaged about the process of applying to graduate school. Considering the nuances among different disciplines, it is important that we begin to think about socialization to graduate school as a longitudinal process prior to matriculating into graduate school. Given the emphasis socialization plays in a student's success and persistence in graduate school (Gardner, 2013), this study further supports the notion that we should reconsider when to start "socializing" students to graduate school.

Rhetoric's of Institutional Prestige During Socialization

As fellows of the HSI Pathways to the Professoriate Program, the students learn about the existence of HSIs and what it means to attend one. All participants of this study were unaware of the federal designation, but after learning about HSIs, they begin to connect that identity with their experiences of being underestimated in educational spaces. Posselt's (2016) research on graduate admissions sheds light onto how an applicant's undergraduate institution's may create biases about the applicant's ability to succeed in graduate environments, and the students in the program experienced this phenomenon early on in their college career just by deciding to attend the "local" school. When reflecting on her decision to attend CSUN, Berenice shared,

It's like we just have to work so much more than other students, in like R1s for example, or privates, whatever the case may be. So yeah, but coming to CSUN, I just decided I was going to make the best of it, because it also depends on the student, if they can just like half-ass suck, so then I had to, I had like the hostile mentality, like you have to make your way... so coming to CSUN was a blessing. At first it was a curse, because I hated CSUN. Everyone in my high school came here. It was just really bad. I thought I was just, they called it Bravo 2.0, Bravo, my high school, it's just like everybody came here. Everybody got accepted, and I worked so hard in high school, and to see those seeds not bloom was just devastating, but now I look back, and I just laugh, because this is where I was meant to be anyway.

As an undocumented, low-income, first-generation students, CSUN was the affordable and safe choice for Berenice, despite the bad reputation it had in her high school. She felt that she had to work extra-hard to be considered for opportunities that other students from R1 institutions likely have access to. Daniela, another student from CSUN had a similar impression of CSUN. She reflected:

Because we don't have a doctorate program at CSUN. I know we're not, people don't think we are a good standard, from like [UC Northern California]. CSUN writers are really bad, like they're not good, and we hear stuff like this all the time. It's not anything new. This is stuff we hear. I just remember that we've like heard this before, we've heard other people will say, from like a CSU, and so we know that. We're very conscious of that, so that's why we push each other so much, because we're like all right, gotta keep truckin. We got to do it, and so we will. I think it helps us, gives us a little extra passion for it.

While there is a sense that students at CSUN are not set up to succeed in places like graduate school, rather than allowing this reputation to discourage Daniela from trying, it motivates her and her peers to push each other and prove that idea wrong.

While many of the fellows were unaware of the HSI designation prior to becoming part of the program, some students shared that the association of being an HSI may affect how their degree is valued by others. Fatima shared:

I just feel like giving CSUN, a school like CSUN, where we do serve a lot of Hispanics, a title like that, I think in the long-run, for example, it's going to

make my degree look less than other schools. I feel like giving a school the term HSI, Hispanic-serving institution, a lot of the times I feel like other people are going to say, well, you know, that school doesn't really live up to [UC Western Pacific University] standards, or schools like [Northern California University], big school names, where we weren't really challenged, professors had to take us and show us how to write a correct thesis, how to write properly, how to read properly, as opposed to these other schools where you don't have that many students to where it's Hispanic-serving.

While reflecting on the term, Fatima innately suggests that the designation lessens the perceived quality of the education the institution can provide. This can have broader implications to how current and prospective students may feel about the institution once they learn of the federal designation. Fatima's feelings towards the designation was shared among other participants. Fernanda said:

I just keep thinking about...how there is a perspective that students that come from schools like CSUN don't read like students that come from somewhere else...it makes me want to explore whether or not some school that is labeled an HSI is automatically deemed like you're not good enough, you know.

Since learning about the designation, Fernanda has associated the reputation that CSUN has among the state and, like Fatima, attributes that the HSI designation may play a role in that reputation. While not being critical of the term or the designation, Fatima's perspective demonstrates how the reputation of an institution can be affected negatively for serving the students that need the most support.

These feelings about their campuses were shared among fellows at all three HSI campuses. When asked about her institution's reputation, Doris shared:

Everybody is pretty negative when it comes to UTEP. When you're in high school everybody is like oh I guess I'll go to UTEP. I have to go to UTEP or UTEP is my fall back because I know they're going to accept me. Things like that, it's very much nobody wants to go to UTEP. Everybody hates UTEP. Even people that come here they're like UTEP.

Queen, a student at FIU, had this to say about her institution's reputation:

So, if you went to FIU, you were like, you obviously didn't do too good. So, and we had an advisor who's like why are you just going to go to FIU. So, there was that whole reputation. Nobody talked about the benefits of FIU and nobody wants to say that FIU is actually beating FSU in a lot of its rankings. Nobody wants to talk about it because FSU has this giant reputation. So, then I grew up with that stigma of FIU is the college around the corner. Why would you go there?

Despite these negative reputations, many of the fellows admit that these schools were the most accessible and convenient for them to attend. Whether it was the institution's commitment to offer residential tuition rates for undocumented students, a financial aid package that covered all their tuition, or the ability to be able to still help support their family while going to school, these institutions, despite their negative reputations, end up offering the participants in this study the opportunity be the first in their families to earn a 4-year degree and expose them to graduate school.

Faculty and Graduate Students as Vectors of Amplified Doubt

As the students learned more about the Pathways to the Professoriate program, they also met faculty mentors across the nation. These interactions, however, were not always positive. Daniela, a history major, noted how a visiting faculty mentor from one of the partner institutions had told the program coordinator that their institution "would be lucky if one of the them would get into a Ph.D. program," at the faculty's institution. This was also the messaging they received when this mentor talked about applying to graduate school. While this may have been well-intentioned and speak to the hyper-competitiveness of doctoral admissions processes, rather than instilling hope and encouraging students to apply, the students were left feeling doubtful of their abilities and many students did not consider listing that mentor's institution as one they wanted to

learn more about. Fernanda also recalled when another faculty mentor of the program gave a workshop on graduate admissions that she found alarming. She shared,

There was also we had some guy come, and the statistics of the amount of students that come from Hispanic Serving Institutions that get into PhD programs, and it's like less than one percent, and so that in itself was like oh my God, we're going against the statistics. There's only a limited amount of time to do everything that you have to do. There was a moment where I was like this is so much, but I think what helped me pull through was just the fact I told myself I got picked for a reason, and even though there were things I was lacking, I know, I'm aware that there are a lot of deficiencies, and me as a candidate, the CV is not padded up, the fact that I didn't have, I wasn't actively working on pursuing a PhD.

Although still motivated, these types of messages early on in the program would cause a lot of stress to many of the students of the program.

Another message that the students are hearing from faculty is the scarcity of jobs in the humanities, and how they should consider other careers. When talking about one of her mentors in her department at UTEP, Jessie said:

It's more like one professor in particular in my program. He's someone you would look up to. He went to [UC Northern California], got his master's and PHD at [New York Elite University]. He helped start the art history program and he's really helpful and I'm not trying to, I like him a lot. If you ask him what would you think about me applying to a PHD, he's like think about it. If you're really ready, maybe you should take a year off to try to sort of figure yourself out because that's sort of what he did. Also, he'll be like humanities are going down. There are no jobs.

She continues to share that the idea that there might be no jobs scares her, but nonetheless her passion for Art History motivates her to keep trying and hope for the best. However, not every student is like Jessie. Although in graduate school, many participants talk about the tension of being a humanities doctoral student and hearing from their mentors that there won't be many jobs for them available when they finish.

Interactions in the informal stage, with graduate students, often reminded the students in the program that they are not the traditional graduate student from a prestigious university, however, these interactions made them more driven to succeed in graduate school. When Xenia visited Northwestern as an admitted student, her interactions with her peers heightened the differences of their academic and social preparation for graduate school. This is what she remembered most about that visit:

I guess like all of the kind of other things that are attached to that, I guess, being poor, being a person of color, being from Cal State. So, kind of how the things that are attached to that is you're not prepared enough. I think that's what it was. You're not up to par as everybody else. You didn't have the same education as everybody else. I think that's what it was attached to really because I don't think that they could tell that my pants were from Target. I think it was more of that of not being seen for my potential but more of these exterior labels. I think that's what I was worried about they're going to know. I would tell them where I come from or I would say what school I was coming from or I'd say that I'm currently not even done with my undergrad and working on my undergrad. It was a lot of that and then somebody right next to me saying I come from Princeton or I come from Stanford. It was a little bit of like okay because you would get certain reactions. Oh, I'm from Cal State Northridge and then somebody would say oh I'm from Stanford. They're like oh okay. So, it's kind of like, I don't even know if you would call it microaggressions but just like these feelings that kind of come about. It could be sometimes just really in my head, I think. But there's a reason why that exists.

These feelings of difference would follow her during her transition into a doctoral program at Northwestern where she would struggle to find her voice in the classroom and speak up against microaggressions from her peers. As a first-generation Afro-Latinx women, Xenia did not know how to deal with sexism in the classroom. After being frustrated that a man in her class was constantly receiving praise for ideas that she felt she had shared before, she decided to speak up for herself. She recounted:

I felt good. I was nervous in the beginning because I didn't want to, there's always this thing of well she's just being a bitch or she's just complaining. She's just jealous because nobody is complimenting her. So, I was nervous that those

ideas were going to kind of come from that. But the professor was really supportive in the space we had in that classroom. After that we started a conversation about language and a conversation about male privilege. Then after the class ended a couple of women in the classroom came up to me and they're like I'm happy you said that. We've been thinking about that for weeks now. Then the guy who was taking up a lot of space he came up to me and he apologized, and we had a whole conversation. I was like we'll just do better next time. You could have spoken out instead of me because that was kind of your place to speak out because you're in a privileged place versus me, but I just think you can do better next time. We still talk; we're still friends and everything. I see him now and then. It was fine. I think also that that space that the professor created in that classroom gave me that ability to say that and I felt safe saying that. I felt supported by my classmates and my professor.

While Xenia recognized that her interactions with this classmate and professor was off-putting at first, her decision to speak up about it boosted her confidence in the classroom as she received support from other women in the classroom. The professor was also receptive to her complaints and provided a supportive environment for Xenia to express herself and create positive change in that classroom.

Seeking Support Through Informal Peer Networks

Research on graduate student attrition suggests that one of the major barriers that graduate students face are bureaucratic, systemic issues related to degree registration and degree progress (Nesheim et al., 2006). This barrier is more likely affecting first-generation students who are unaware of who to turn to when something goes wrong. Given that graduate study processes likely differ on the departmental or program level, graduate students find themselves relying on other, more senior graduate students for information rather than administrators and program coordinators. For students of color particularly, research suggests that they rely on other students of color to find out where to find support socially and academically in graduate school (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy,

2016). This was evident with the participants who have matriculated into graduate school and immediately sought out support from peers who were also first-generation, low-income, or underrepresented.

Adrián, a student from CSUN that matriculates into a doctoral program in NYC, claims that the friendships he made with other students of color at his graduate school as an essential part of his support system as a graduate student. He began to seek this support after having a difficult time with the graduate housing department about his move to NYC. After connecting with another resident in the building who was Chicana and went to school in California, Adrián was able to meet other students of color throughout the graduate school. He shared:

She's not in my program, but she knows a lot of people in my program, a lot of people of color, that we kind of created the support group, and a few weeks ago, we met up for drinks and for food, just catching up, and somebody in their seventh year just pretty much is finishing up and already has a job lined up. He's going to be an assistant professor, tenured track, and we were celebrating for him. It felt good, having those ties with each other.

It was important for Adrián to have community with other students of color in graduate school, especially outside of his specific discipline in sociology. In terms of practicing healthy mental health habits, Adrián cherishes the connections he was able to create outside of Sociology so that he does not feel the pressure to always “perform” in his discipline.

Octavio, a student from CSUN who recently entered a doctoral program in American Studies in New York City said his two biggest challenges during his first semester in graduate school was contributing in class in generative, interesting ways, and readjusting into an academic space where there are fewer students like him. He

particularly notes that many of the professors he has were first-generation college students, however, his cohort and students in the program, more often than not, come from college-educated families and prestigious universities. He finds it hard to relate to them and it sometimes intimidated to speak up in class. However, attending first-generation graduate student socials and having informal conversations with the peers he is intimidated by has helped him overcome those feelings. He shares:

Well they are all contributing something, I have to contribute something. I have to say not what I think they want me to say. I have to say what I am going to say—what my actual engagement with the material was. Because they put time and effort in putting a cohort together with people with different understandings of things and so I'm trying to push myself to talk about what my actual thoughts are and to feel comfortable sharing those with people. It's just, you know, difficult, or it was difficult at first when you sort of feel when you talk to people when coming from an HSI and everyone in the room is all-ivy it can be a little intimidating. But it has gotten easier. Part of it is talking to people who are going through the same thing and other first-gen folks. I think it was actually talking to the people who were intimidating me the most and learning that they are struggling too.

The most common challenge that participants faced during the transition into graduate school was the imposter syndrome, but these feelings, like mentioned in the previous chapter, were eased once they began to have informal conversations with peers and realize that everyone was feeling similarly. The socialization process during the summer seminar, and in their first semester of graduate school, provided these first-generation students the opportunity to cultivate the capital research suggests is essential to graduate student success (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Soria & Stebleton, 2013). While some of these experiences may be negative, all participants reframe those worrisome, stress-inducing experiences as opportunities of growth. Their resistance to failure has gotten them this far, and these challenges and barriers are seen as just another obstacle to overcome rather than a signal to stop and give up.

Concluding Thoughts

The findings in this chapter demonstrate the how socialization to graduate school can occur before a student enters a graduate program. As suggested by Winkle-Wagner and McCoy (2016), early exposure to graduate school coupled with academic and professional mentorship was incredibly helpful to the participants of this study and all the students that are part of the HSI Pathways to the Professoriate Program.

First-generation college students have a lot to benefit from early socialization into graduate school. My findings suggest that without academic support and mentorship, many of the participants of my study would have approached the graduate application process similarly to how they applied to college. Furthermore, many of the participants admitted that they always wanted to become professors but were not informed as what that career entailed beyond teaching in a college environment. By interacting with current graduate students, learning about the professoriate as a profession, and speaking with different graduate program representatives, the participants of this study were comforted knowing more about the profession and what to expect in graduate school.

Beginning the socialization process earlier for prospective graduate students, however, does not necessarily limit or avoid exposure to assumptions about their academic preparation based on the institutions they attended. While the information they were receiving about graduate school and becoming a professor was helpful to their development of scholars, it also included moments of doubt and negativity from the people in the program that were supposed to help them. The participants of this study had to manage their academic preparation and mentorship while coping with mixed messaging on whether or not they would be taken serious as applicants. However, the

socialization they are experiencing within the program has also equipped them with coping habits and supportive networks to help them persist despite the feelings of doubt they may experience based on what they hear others say about their academic preparation. If anything, they pull from the capital that they have mentioned in previous chapters to resist the narrative and expectation of them to fail.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION, RECCOMENDATION, AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the experiences of first-generation, Latinx students at Hispanic-Serving Institutions who aspire to become professors in the humanities in an academic program aimed to support their academic and professional endeavors. As pointed out in the literature (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018; Toutkoushian, May-Trifiletti, & Clayton, 2019), a bulk of the research on first-generation college students has been conducted on the undergraduate level. Few studies explore first-generation college students pursuing graduate degrees (Cunningham & Brown, 2014; Gardner, 2013; Martinez, 2018), suggesting that the challenges of postsecondary educational environment ends once completing undergraduate study. This study, however, was part of a larger, longitudinal project in which the participants were interviewed both during their time as an undergraduate student applying to graduate school, and as a first-year doctoral student. This study reveals the challenges that persist into graduate study and ones that first-generation college students encounter for the first time when in graduate school. Additionally, rather than focusing on what prevents these first-generation college students in succeeding, this study took an anti-deficit, asset-based approach using Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model to demonstrate the forms of capital that first-generation college students bring into their educational experiences and how they cultivate more capital as they navigate post-secondary education.

Another unique aspect to this study is the focus on their socialization experiences throughout their time in the HSI Pathways to the Professoriate program. Socialization of

underrepresented, first-generation college students in graduate school has been seen argued to be one of the most essential aspects of the graduate student experiences that can lead to persistence and degree completion (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). This study examined the lived experiences of 27 Latinx first-generation college students that were fellows of the HSI Pathways to the Professoriate Program, a graduate school preparation program aimed to diversify the humanities professoriate with more Latinx faculty from Hispanic-Serving Institutions. This study aims to educate the necessary stakeholders to better support the growing Latinx, first-generation population in graduate school.

As access to postsecondary education continues to grow, more first-generation Latinx college students are entering college and graduate school. However, our current understanding of first-generation college students is misleading. Due to inconsistent definitions and non-representative sampling (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018), the conclusions of much of the research on first-generation college students depicts this population as lacking the resources necessary to succeed in postsecondary environments. Too often, studies of first-generation college students lack the nuance necessary to understand that the many different identities that first-generation college students have complicate the way that they experience education. Given that many first-generation college students identify as an ethnic or racial minority, or low-income, the term has been used as a proxy for many other “at-risk” groups, resulting in a problematic, and often negative depiction of these student’s ability to succeed. This study, however, is about first-generation college students who describe their experiences beyond the frame of being “first-generation.” Whether they shared their undocumented status, what it was like to be the only woman of color in the classroom, or the challenges they encountered as a low-

income student, the participants in this study recognized how their intersecting identities played a role in their experiences in education and found innovative, useful ways to overcome the challenges that they encountered.

This chapter provides an overview of the key findings of this study. By taking a qualitative approach, I was able to learn more about the educational experiences of the 27 participants in this study. With my questions guided by Bourdieu's theory of practice (1986), Yosso's community cultural wealth model (2005), and Weidman and others (2001) framework of graduate student socialization, I was able to tease out the different forms of capital these first-generation college students used throughout their time in post-secondary educational contexts. My attention to the different forms of socialization that they were exposed to during their time in the Pathways program provides insight on the challenges first-generation college students are likely to encounter and what interventions can help them overcome these challenges. The remainder of the chapter includes recommendations for practice and implications for future research.

Aspirational Capital – Education for More than Oneself

Yosso (2005) argues that aspirational capital is the transference of parents' own dreams on to their children. These dreams are represented in the ambition and perseverance that children have despite the real or perceived barriers that they may face trying to achieve these goals. Participants reported having an abundance of aspirational capital. This fueled their ambitions to go to college and graduate school. Many participants understood the sacrifices their parents and families made for their educational opportunities in the U.S. and did not take that lightly. While many of the participants reflected on how being a first-generation college student made applying and

transitioning into college difficult, having a post-secondary education was always a part of their plan—figuring out how to make that happen was the challenge.

Community colleges played a major role for many of the participants to consider going to a 4-year institution and eventually graduate school. Ten of the twenty-seven participants began their post-secondary education at a local community college.

Consistent with Saenz et al. (2018) research on Latinx males in community colleges, many of the participants talked about the flexibility community college gave them in getting an affordable education whilst still being able to help their families. At community colleges, these participants met outstanding faculty who mentored them and encouraged them to finish community college as soon as possible and consider pursuing a graduate degree in the future.

One common theme found with many of the participants is aspiring to become their favorite teachers or professors. While pursuing an education was always the plan for many of these students, being in awe by one of their teachers or professors seemed to be transformative in their professional ambitions. Some participants found learning from specific professors exhilarating and felt compelled to be that professor for someone else, while others realized how inspirational having a professor who looks like them in the classroom can be. This phenomenon was one that would leave a lasting impression to many of the participants and would lead them to commit to becoming a role model for future students.

Linguistic Capital – a Source of Inspiration and a Coping Mechanism

Linguistic capital is the communication skills possessed by minority students cultivated in their experiences navigating multiple languages and code-switching (Yosso,

2005). Embedded in linguistic capital is also the value of storytelling and the oral history traditions of racial and ethnic minority experiences (Yosso, 2005). These stories of migration and struggle in the United States served as motivation to many of the participants to persist despite the barriers they encountered. For one fellow who was raised to deny her Mexican heritage, the oral traditions she shared with her parents surrounding their traditional dishes would be the catalyst to spark her interests in anthropology and food studies. The histories of the participants' families put into perspective what was at stake in order to offer them educational opportunity. For some participants, this inspired them to consider their respective fields of study like immigration, sociology, and history.

One surprising aspect of linguistic capital that emerged from this study is how it is both a source of frustration and a coping mechanism to many of the participants. Perez's (2017) study on how Latinx men use linguistic capital as a motivational factor to persist in college does not account for the challenges that come up when a student does not recognize the linguistic capital they possess. In this study, participants constantly reflected on the frustrations they have because "they don't know what they don't know." Participants reflected on the challenges they encountered in education related to their lack of knowledge and resources to cultivate that understanding. In the classroom, this manifested in feeling underprepared and not up to par with their peers. However, while this placed a sense of doubt to many of the participants, once they were able to name these feelings with the imposter syndrome, they were able to develop coping mechanisms to combat those feelings. For a considerable number of participants, this coping mechanism was "faking it." Participants shared that after observing how much posturing

occurs inside and outside the classroom, they began “seeming confident” in themselves in order to overcome feelings of doubt and participate in the classroom. As they continue to do this, they found themselves more comfortable speaking up.

Familial Capital – Outstanding Support Despite Lack of Understanding

Familial capital refers to the support an individual receives from their family. This also includes friends and community members that an individual forms kinship with (Yosso, 2005). All participants in this study emphasized the pivotal role their families and close friends had in their ability to persist in education, however, that support did not come along without any challenges. As first-generation college students, a lot of participants talked about the difficulty they experienced not being able to talk to their families about applying to college and what it was like to be a college student. Parents who do not attend college have less “direct knowledge of the economic and social benefits of a postsecondary education” (Terezini et al., 1996, pp. 2-3) and therefore may challenge why someone would choose education over working and helping provide for the family. While most of the participants had parents who expected them to go to college, many of them shared that their parents were skeptical about graduate school and this skepticism was amplified by their inability to explain their academic interests and why graduate school was needed. Many times, the participants admitted they knew graduate school was the next step but had no idea what that entailed. This may complicate their ability to do well as they are likely to not be as academically prepared as their non-first-generation counterparts and are juggling their familial responsibilities

along with adjusting to the rigor of college coursework and applying to graduate school (Choy, 2011; Roksa et al., 2018).

The kinship formed among the students in the HSI Pathways to the Professoriate program proved to be an added benefit of the program. Given that these students were coming from similar walks of life, being able to bond over the challenges and barriers they were experiencing as first-generation college students provided the participants with encouragement and motivation to persist and support each other. Overall, when the participants were confronted with fears of doubt and failure, accessing and recognizing the familial capital that they have developed through and beyond the program helped them overcome these moments of uncertainty. While previous researchers have listed a lack of familial support as one of the factors affecting first-generation college student success (Terezini et al., 1996), the majority of participants in my study felt the support of their family even when their families did not quite understand what they are going through.

Social Capital – Who You Know Can Make All the Difference

Social capital refers to the information and resources one has access to based on who they are connected to (Yosso, 2005). For first-generation students in particular, these resources can make the difference in educational opportunity. Whether it is information about applying to college or graduate school, or financial resources, the connection that participants had with specific individuals played a significant role to how the participants in this study saw themselves as scholars and aspiring professors. Many of the participants in this study mentioned a specific interaction with a professor or an administrator that

changed the trajectory of their lives in college. It only took one person to believe in them for many of the students to see themselves as future professors.

Once students were accepted into the Pathways to the Professoriate program, many of them began to recognize the importance of social capital and forming genuine, strong relationships with their peers and faculty mentors. As the students described what they were learning about becoming professors, participants shared how important it was for them to put themselves out there and connect with faculty for more opportunities to develop as a stronger scholar and student. The students in the program also grew appreciative of the social bonds they were cultivating among each other. As they applied to graduate programs and were awaiting responses, many of the participants reflected on the camaraderie that was developed among the cohort, and rather than feeling like they were competing with each other, they became champions for each other's success.

Consistent with the literature on the role social capital plays on a student's sense of belonging, academic success, and retention (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Soria & Stebleton, 2013), participants in this study tied their ability to succeed as an undergraduate and their aspiration to enter graduate school to the interactions they had with specific faculty and the camaraderie they experiences with similarly-ambitious students in their cohorts.

Important to note is how social capital helped the participants navigate systemic inequality during the graduate school process. As noted before, some students faced sexism in the classroom and classism during their visits to graduate programs. However, similar to what Espino (2014) study on the role of community cultural wealth in graduate school access and persistence for Mexican-American students, the participants of my

study shared that their social connections help them navigate these experiences as they relied on their cohort, faculty mentors, and institutional coordinator for support. They knew that their support team was only a text or call away, and some of them relied on these systems of support to help them manage their anxieties of the graduate school application process and their performance in the classroom.

Navigational Capital – Self-Advocacy as First-Generation College Students

According to Yosso (2005), navigational capital refers to the skills needed to navigate and persevere through social institutions like higher education institutions. While first-generation college students may lack the resources needed for a smooth transition into post-secondary educational contexts after high school, their life circumstances seem to prepare them to figure things out and become their own biggest advocates.

Bank-Santilli (2014) and Borrero's (2011) research on first-generation students emphasizes the role "giving-back" to one's community has as a motivational factor for first-generation college students to persist in educational environments. Most of the participants in this study described the difficulty of being the first in their family to navigate post-secondary education, but they also took pride in being able to do so and serving as a resource for others in their family or community. Similar to what Byrd and MacDonald (2005) found, despite the participants' experiences being filled with roadblocks, these students emphasized that the challenges they faced taught many of them early on of the importance of seeking help and support from faculty and administrators.

While much of the literature on first-generation college students depict the experiences of first-generation college students as a “struggle” (Lowery-Hart & Pacheco Jr., 2011; Schwartz, et al., 2018), this study provides a much-needed reframing of how we understand the first-generation college experience. Some participants in the study framed the challenges of being a first-generation college student as a privilege rather than a set-back. Considering the life-circumstances of their families (for example: migration into the U.S. and battling homelessness), the difficulty of figuring out how to get into college and learn about graduate school were not as dire as not having a home to sleep in at night or not knowing when your next meal was going to be. Another student, who considered herself a co-parent, talked about how figuring these things out herself was going to help her and her mother prepare for when her younger sibling is applying to college. Rather than focusing on the lack of awareness or resources that these students encounter when thinking about their education, their journeys inspire them to become that resource for others like them. Their navigation of higher education, in general, becomes a responsibility they do not take lightly, and if anything, motivates them more to persevere.

Resistant Capital – Claiming Space

Resistant capital refers to an individual’s ability to succeed and persevere despite challenges that come up due to inequality (Yosso, 2005). This form of capital often overlapped with other forms of capital as participants continually connected their lived experiences in education to issues of racial and social inequality. Consistent with prior research (Espino, 2016; Matos, 2015), many participants found that their encounters with microaggressions or racism in the classroom or on campus, although difficult to deal

with, inspired them to persist through and prove their doubters wrong. Several participants in this study shared that these instances were further proof of why it was important that they persisted and achieved their goals of becoming a professor.

Their aspiration to become a professor was also often tied to their lack of representation in educational spaces and a sense of responsibility they felt as passionate students of the field who sought out mentors who looked like them. The participants in this study were encouraged by their mentors to “claim their space” in the academy and become that professor who encourages other Latinx, first-generation college students to consider graduate school. One student in particular found the responsibility of becoming a professor as an opportunity to “create a better world.” He saw his role as a professor to inspire younger students to commit to lifelong learning, and if he is able to make a difference in one student’s life then he sees himself as being part of a larger cause.

Another interesting aspect of resistance capital that the participants reflected on through their educational journey is how their identities influenced their academic interests and how this has evolved to a greater goal of tackling ahistoricism and underrepresentation in academia. A significant number of participants in this study became enamored with their field of study once they saw themselves within the curriculum. For the students studying sociology, learning about social inequality and schooling answered many questions they had about their experiences in education. For the history and Chicano/a studies students, learning more about their heritage and the struggles these communities faced in the U.S. unveiled a side of their history they were completely unaware of. For the students pursuing English and Latinx literature, seeing themselves reflected in the stories inspired them to see that there is space for them in the

field, and that they can become the future of the field and educate others of the contributions of Latinx writers. It was consistent throughout the interviews with the participants that a large motivational factor of their success was tied to their resistance to failure given the obstacles they had to overcome in order to claim their space in education. As Syed's (2010) study on integrating ethnic and academic identity suggests, participants of my study felt that their commitment to becoming professors was tied to their heightened consciousness of their identities that occurred in the classroom.

Socialization Reconsidered

Socialization is considered to be an ongoing process where individuals observe and learn the norms and expectations of their professional field. In higher education specifically, students are observing and learning the norms of their respective academic disciplines (Winkle-Wagner & McCoy, 2016). The socialization framework used for this study traditionally views graduate school socialization as a process that occurs once a student is admitted to a program. However, as this case study focused on students in a research-intensive graduate school preparation program, I wanted to demonstrate how adopting this model to understand the experiences of first-generation college students applying and transitioning into graduate school can give insight to best practices in setting up Latinx, first-generation college students for success in these types of endeavors.

The anticipatory stage considers the time where students begin to learn the general norms and expectations of graduate school and the academy (Weidman et al., 2001). While this tends to be the focus of graduate school orientation sessions, in this study, this took place from the moment students in this study were accepted into the HSI

Pathways to the Professoriate Program throughout their summer research-intensive seminar experience. The impetus of this program was to tackle the distinct underrepresentation of Latinx faculty in the humanities professoriate, thus these students learned early on how they would be one of few Latinx graduate students in doctoral programs. Their summer seminar was filled with opportunities for them to learn more about navigating graduate school, connecting with graduate students, and building relationships with faculty in order to develop research projects and prepare to apply to graduate programs. Many participants claimed that although they were inspired to become professors before applying to this program, they had no idea what they were getting themselves into until they learned more about graduate school and life as a professor through the program. The participants also believed that even though this program was incredibly helpful to their success in applying and transitioning into graduate school, they still felt behind throughout the application process. Many of them wished that the program started sooner so that could have developed the necessary materials for graduate school as juniors instead of seniors.

The formal and informal stage refer to the knowledge acquired through formal instruction and interactions with faculty and colleagues, as well as the informal mentorship received among a graduate student's peer networks and connections with faculty. For first-generation college students, waiting until they are already in graduate school to learn about these things can be too late. Prior research suggests (Espino, 2014) that underrepresented and first-generation college students often struggle to make these connections, and this can cause feelings of isolation and otherness, which can lead to attrition. By exposing the participants to the important aspects of networking and forming

relationships with faculty and peers, the Pathways program set these students up with opportunities to develop their own support network prior to applying to graduate school. When feelings of under-preparedness or the imposter syndrome peaked, these students already had a support structure set up to rely on and help them pass through these normal feelings of doubt. This can make a difference in one's ability to believe in themselves in a hyper competitive environment like graduate school.

The last stage of socialization in graduate school, referred to as the personal stage, occurs when an individual embodies their identity as one that is merged to their academic discipline. While this occurs in the later stages of graduate school, exposing the participants in the Pathways program to the different aspects of graduate school and the life of a professor prepares them to imagine what their future holds. This helps first-generation college students in particular make intentional decisions of their academic trajectory. They are not going into graduate school blindly, but rather, with a purpose to connect with faculty, develop a scholarly agenda, and prepare for a life as a professor.

Another aspect to note is how the participants in this study encounter notions of prestige throughout their time in the Pathways program. Consistent with Cuellar's (2014) study on the impact attending an HSI has on a Latinx student's academic self-concept, participants in this study acknowledge the support and opportunity from attending an HSI but also felt that they were seen as less than because they were not at more prestigious and selective institutions. Given the partnerships fostered with this program, these students were exposed to faculty at research-intensive institutions throughout the nation, as well as had the opportunity to visit highly-selective and very competitive graduate programs. As they prepared to visit these programs, many of the participants pointed out

how they were told not to get their hopes up because of the institutions they were coming from. These feelings were amplified when they would visit graduate programs and see that most of the students interviewing were coming from other highly-selective, elite schools. However, as these students experienced this, they were also observing how much posturing is involved throughout the process. Once the students noticed that everyone was nervous, and that their perspective was just as important as everyone else, they began to feel more confident about themselves in graduate school.

Recommendations for Practice

This case study intended to inform our understanding of the experiences of first-generation, Latinx undergraduates in the HSI Pathways to the Professoriate Program. The resources of this research-intensive graduate school preparation program were informed on what research suggests helps underrepresented students successfully apply to graduate programs. Beyond the financial support that the participants received that helped combat the financial obstacles applying to graduate school presents to any applicant, the research mentorship and academic support provided by their peers and faculty mentors were instrumental to their success. An importance aspect of this research study is to point out the investment institutions can put towards their first-generation, Latinx students who want to go to graduate school. While I recognize that the program is supported by a large grant, many of the interventions in the program that proved to be helpful are not as expensive. Cultivating an environment of similarly-ambitious scholars can provide students with a community of peers that can help them persist in achieving their goals. Access to faculty and opportunities to conduct independent research was one of the more

useful experiences that the participants talked about in what prepared them for the rigor of graduate school. Prioritizing educational opportunity for first-generation, Latinx students at HSIs and other institutions can help these students seek out these types of opportunities.

Upon reflecting on their overall experience in the program and at their undergraduate institution, many students had suggestions on additional ways help other first-generation, Latinx college students succeed in applying to graduate school. Based on the findings of this study, here are recommendations on how to best support first-generation, Latinx college students in their endeavors to apply to graduate school and become professors.

Early Exposure to Graduate School

As fellows of the Pathways program, many of the participants of this study shared that they felt overwhelmed once they had learned what they would need to accomplish during their senior year in order to apply to graduate school. Though they had access to many resources to support their endeavors to get into doctoral programs, many of them felt that they began this process too late. While they were still able to apply and get into doctoral programs, many students felt that they experienced stress that could have been avoided had they become aware of the demands of graduate school early on in their academic career. As first-generation college students, many of them did not know applying to graduate school was any different than college. Once they became aware of this, they felt that they had wasted a lot of time figuring out how to navigate their undergraduate career instead of developing strong relationships with faculty and a robust research agenda for their graduate school applications. When asked to reflect on what

would have been most hopeful to him to help ease the stress of applying to graduate school, Octavío shared:

What was surprising were all the things that I had to kind of—there was this process I had to undertake of like reaching out to faculty, reaching out to graduate students, and figuring out things that a university or program were not going to communicate on the website and figure out things that they were looking for beyond that. Like if I hadn't been told 'you need to do this and reach out to these people' then I would not have had a clear idea of how I should shape my application for that school, whether they were going to be taking students, whether my research was what they were looking for. I think that the people in the program really did as much as they could in the time allotted that... I mean my answer is like it would be great if I could have started this a year earlier.

Acknowledging that not every student has the opportunity to be part of a program like the HSI Pathways to the Professoriate Program, institutions committed to supporting their first-generation, Latinx students ambitions to pursue graduate school should consider different ways of introducing graduate school to their undergraduate student body early on during their academic careers. Early exposure to the process of applying to graduate school may make the process seem less daunting and give students enough time to both figure out how to navigate college as a first-generation student while developing strong relationships with faculty to help them apply to graduate school. This may help students seek out resources to help support their graduate school ambitions earlier in their college career so that by their junior or senior year, they are completing the requirements necessary to apply to graduate school rather than just learning about them.

Educational Programming for Families

Every participant in this study spoke about the difficulty of explaining to their family what they were studying, why they wanted to go to graduate school, and how graduate school is different than what they were doing as undergraduates. While

everyone felt supported by their families, many participants talked about the frustration they experienced when their parent's "didn't get it." The participants shared that their families always emphasized the importance of education, however, the expectation was to work immediately after receiving a 4-year degree. Iris shared,

I think that here in El Paso, our family ties are super-strong, and also we're getting really guilty from our families, and I think what was lacking, the presentation from Dr. Garcia, she said that we need to educate our parents in order for us to grow, and I think that that is what was missing, because they didn't invite our parents to tell them what this program is, what we're doing and what we're trying to do, and I think that would have been a really good place to start, because even though we can tell our parents this is what we're doing, they're not going to want to believe or understand what we're trying to tell them, but if they hear it from somebody at the university at that level, then they're like okay, my child is a big deal, then they can go out there, and so I think education of the parents.

According to Iris, engaging the families of the students in the program to help answer questions about the program and graduate school would have been incredibly helpful to her. Few fellows, like Iris, talk about a sense of guilt they have deciding to continue their education beyond a 4-year degree. To help alleviate that guilt, institutions should consider opportunities to engage their students' families about graduate school so that the burden is not solely on the student. Educating families on graduate school and the career possibilities after earning a doctorate to the families of first-generation, Latinx students will alleviate the stress of having to justify their decision to pursue graduate school.

Creating Opportunity to Build Community Among Peers

One of the most beneficial aspects of the program that the participants in this study highlighted was being part of a cohort at their institution. Given that many of the students often did not have someone in their family or friendship group to talk about their research interests and their concern about applying to doctoral program, having a group

of students on their campus that were in a similar situation created an environment where the students felt inspired to be in a community with each other. The participants shared that they did not feel alone because they knew they were part of a group, and rather than feeling competitive towards one another, they felt supported and encouraged.

Institutions should make a concerted effort to connect first-generation, Latinx students who have interests in pursuing graduate school. Whether they hold informational sessions about graduate school or create a program or student group specifically for undergraduates seeking mentorship for graduate school, having an intentional space for students who are all going through a stressful and unknown process like applying to graduate school can provide these students with the peer-network needed so that students don't feel alone.

Beyond combating feelings of being alone and unsupported, creating a community of peers allows for students to practice networking and talking about their research in succinct, effective ways. Another aspect of the cohort that the students deeply appreciated was having a "community of intellectuals" where they can practice talking about their research. Rather than feeling nervous while practicing in the classroom, the participants shared that they were comfortable talking about their academic interests casually during the breaks they had in the summer seminar, and when they were with each other traveling to graduate programs or conferences.

Implications for Research

This study revealed the experiences of first-generation, Latinx college students in a program aimed to help them become professors in the humanities. However, not all

institutions are capable of providing the extent of resources that the participants in this study had access to. More research is needed on the experiences of first-generation, Latinx students who have successfully matriculated into doctoral program and have become faculty. While there is a growing cannon of literature on first-generation or underrepresented students of color in doctoral programs (Matos & Holley, 2011; Gardner, 2013; Espino, 2014; Felder et al., 2014; Blockette et al., 2016), this study analyzes the experiences of students at both their undergraduate and during their transition into graduate programs. Furthermore, this Pathways program is specifically geared towards having students matriculate into a doctoral program right after completing a bachelor's degree. While this is possible, many students in doctoral program first earn a master's degree. More insight on these experiences can help inform our understanding of first-generation, Latinx students who are interested in pursuing graduate school after graduating a 4-year institution.

The participants' specific ethnic-identity played a major role in their identity development as it relates to their academic interests, however, that was beyond the scope of this study. Future research should consider disaggregating the experiences of first-generation, Latinx students by ethnicity to tease out the nuances between the different groups within the Latinx identity. Exploring the differences among different ethnicities within the Latinx umbrella can provide more insight on how to support these individuals in college and graduate school.

Lastly, the literature on first-generation college students continues to use different operational definitions of the term (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018; Toutkoushian et al., 2018, Toukoushian et al., 2019), which complicates our understanding of this group as a whole.

Given how complex the first-generation college student identity is, it is important to acknowledge how other intersecting identities play a role in the experiences of this population in higher education. If we ignore the nuances of gender identity, sexuality, income-status, and racial/ethnic identity, then we risk forming conclusions that ignore important aspects of one's identity and how it plays a role in their experiences in education.

I defined first-generation college students in this study as individuals who did not have parents who completed a 4-year degree in the U.S. I operationalized the term in this way given the extent of literature that uses this definition and to honor the ways the participants in this study understood the term. However, as I discussed earlier, it is important for us to think about the ways these experiences differ for students who have parents with a 2-year degree from the U.S., parents who have a 4-year degree from another country, or even students who have older siblings that have received a 4-year degree. If we are to argue that first-generation college students lack resources of capital from their parents, then how do we mitigate these resources or capital that they get from older siblings or other members of their family that they may have strong ties to? These questions are pertinent to understanding the overall first-generation college student experiences, and we lose out on an opportunity to understand the nuances of these experiences when we ignore how unique each individual students circumstance are.

Furthermore, as Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) suggests, considering how intersectionality plays a role in the experiences of first-generation college students is essential to developing equity-oriented research and practices to serving this population. The circumstances of first-generation college students cut across different identities.

While it may seem like the term renders these identities invisible, we must continue to ask what role does race, class, gender, and sexuality play in the experiences of first-generation college students applying to graduate school and enrolling into doctoral programs. While the term first-generation allows us to consider how to best support students who are the first in their families to achieve a certain threshold in education (depending on the definition you subscribe too), we must not forget how other identity markers play a role in these experiences.

Conclusion

This study sought to combat deficit-oriented depictions of first-generation, Latinx students at Hispanic Serving Institutions. As first-generation college students, the participants in this study did indeed have limited knowledge of applying and navigating college and even less knowledge about graduate school and becoming a professor. Bourdieu's theory of practice (1986), which is often used to understand the experiences of minoritized groups in education, suggests that these students lack the cultural capital necessary to succeed in educational spaces, therefore they are more likely to fail. However, the participants demonstrated that their lack of cultural capital did not deter them of achieving their goals. Instead, they relied on different forms of capital that Yosso (2005) conceptualized in her community cultural wealth model. Although the participants in this study did encounter many financial, academic, and social barriers during their educational journey, they exhibited the aspirational, resistant, navigational, familial, social, and linguistic capital to not only overcome these challenges, but to use these moments of challenge as inspiration to succeed and inspire others. When they

experienced uncertainty and self-doubt, the community they built among their cohort and the resources provided through the program gave these students the tools necessary to persist through their senior year of college and apply to doctoral programs. Their ambition to become professors were linked to individual interactions with professors and teachers who believed in them and they became inspired to be that professor for others.

Important to note, however, is that taking an anti-deficit approach does not ignore the educational realities of underrepresented groups in education. This type of work adds a useful framing on how we can think about exceptional students succeed despite the challenges they encounter. Moving forward, we must continue to highlight the persistent gaps of educational opportunity among first-generation, Latinx students. However, this study provides a counter-story to the narrative that first-generation students lack skillsets to thrive in collegiate settings. Instead, this work suggests that we need to redefine “what capital matters” and how can we help students use their experiences in ways that help them persist in environments that were not created for them. This line of work is not about ignoring what other researchers are pointing out—pervasive and consistent educational inequality towards minoritized and low-income populations. This line of work is about highlighting the ways students have been able to succeed undeterred by their circumstances.

For the participants in this study particularly, socializing these students to the norms of graduate school upon their acceptance into the Pathways program allowed them to experience “the unknown” in community with supportive peers and a dedicated team of faculty and administrators who were invested in their success. The most challenging aspect of their endeavors was navigating the conversations with their families who were

supportive but did not understand graduate school and why it was necessary. However, given the support these participants were receiving as students of the Pathways program, many of them shared that it helped their families realize how important graduate school and becoming a professor was to them. These findings suggest that finding ways to engage families about graduate school and career opportunities after earning a doctorate would help first-generation, Latinx students avoid the sense of guilt and uncertainty they feel when pursuing graduate school.

Given the rapid growth of the Latinx population in the U.S., supporting programs that aim to increase Latinx representation in the professoriate is essential to helping to create a representative professoriate that reflect the racial and ethnic makeup of the nation. Colleges and universities play an enormous role in this endeavor. My findings suggest what programmatic interventions other HSIs, and all institutions, can replicate at their institutions to cultivate an environment where first-generation, Latinx students see graduate study and a career in academia as a possibility rather than an unachievable goal.

APPENDIX

Wave A Interview Protocol

Opportunities & challenges during third year of undergraduate education; interest in chosen field

1. We would like to learn more about your background. Tell us about how you ended up enrolling at [name of institution]?
 - a. Probe for: (a) family background; (b) high school experiences
2. Tell me about your interest in pursuing a graduate degree in [enter field]?
 - a. Probe for: (a) interest development in field; (b) family response to academic interest
3. What made you apply to the HSI-PATHWAYS program?
 - a. Probe for: (a) departmental environment; (b) mentors
4. What are you looking forward to this summer?
 - a. Probe for: (a) extracurriculars/employment
5. What are some of the anticipated challenges about this upcoming semester?
 - a. Probe for: (a) challenges in courses; extracurriculars; etc.

Wave B Interview Protocol

Opportunities and challenges during fourth year of undergraduate education; impression on application process to graduate school; expectation of graduate school

Reflections on Summer Seminar

1. We last saw each other during the summer seminar. I'm wondering if you could tell me more about your experience throughout the seminar. What stands out as you think back to those weeks?
 - a. Probe: What are strategies/elements that you've picked up from the summer seminar and incorporated into your fall term?
2. Are there things you wish would have gone differently?
 - a. Probe: either about the structure of the program or their own engagement with it.
 - b. Probe: So if you had to share something about the summer seminar with the new cohort of Fellows, what would you tell them?

Reflection on Application Process

1. Could you tell me more about the graduate school application process?
 - a. Probe – how many schools/which schools/what type of programs

- b. Probe - How would you describe your decision-making process for selecting schools?
- 2. What was the most helpful advice you received throughout the process? Who shared that advice with you?
- 3. [If decisions have been made by their programs] How are you feeling about the decision process?
 - a. Regardless of acceptance/rejection, probes can focus on the experience/feelings that students are having during this time.
- 4. I'm wondering if you could tell me more about the sources of support, both logistical and emotional during the application. Where did you find support?
 - a. Probe about specific in case they have not discussed them:
 - i. Other Fellows (in their institution or elsewhere),
 - ii. coordinator,
 - iii. mentor,
 - iv. other faculty affiliated with the program,
 - v. faculty at MRIs,
 - vi. family members.
 - b. Probe for specific anecdotes or examples that capture what the support felt like/looked like

Wave C Interview Protocol

Opportunities and challenges during transition to and first semester of graduate school, or gap year.

Reflections on summer prior to Graduate School.

1. We last spoke to each other during the Spring semester after you had applied to graduate school. I'm wondering if you could reflect on the graduate school application process. Were there any surprises or challenges you encountered that you did not expect? Did you feel supported throughout this process?
 - a. Probe: What are strategies/elements that you've picked up from the summer seminar and participation in the program that you incorporated when applying to graduate school?
 - b. Who were the people that offered support?
2. Are there things you wish would have gone differently?
 - a. Probe: What are strategies/elements that you've picked up from the summer seminar and participation in the program that you incorporated when applying to graduate school?
3. Can you speak about how you came to your decision to attend [**Graduate Institution**]?
 - a. Probe: What did you consider when making this decision?
 - b. Probe: Were you able to visit the campus? What was that experience like?
4. If you had one piece of advice to tell future cohorts about applying to graduate school, what would it be?

Reflection of Graduate School.

1. How would you describe your transition to **[Graduate Institution]**?
 - a. Probe: Were there any unanticipated challenges that you encountered during the move?
 - b. Probe: Were there any unanticipated joys that you encountered during the move?
2. How does your family feel about you being at **[Graduate Institution]**?
3. **[If at a MRI Partner School]** What is your relationship with your Coordinator like? What about your Faculty Mentor?
 - a. Probe: also ask about their relationship with another Fellow if they attend the same graduate institution (if applicable)
4. How is graduate school different from your time at **[HSI institution]**?
5. How would you describe being a first year student at **[Graduate Institution]**?
6. What has been the biggest challenge during your time at **[Graduate Institution]**? How have you been able to deal with or overcome this challenge?
7. I'm wondering if you could tell me more about the sources of support, both logistical and emotional during your transition to graduate school. Where did you find support? [Clarify that logistical - issues with stipend, classes, housing, etc.; emotional - all affect-based issues]
 - a. Probe about specific in case they have not discussed them:
 - i. Other fellows
 - ii. Coordinator
 - iii. Mentor
 - iv. Other faculty affiliated with the program
 - v. Family members
 - b. Probe for specific anecdotes or examples that capture what the support felt like/looked like
8. Now that you're in graduate school, tell me about your thoughts on pursuing this pathway to become a faculty member. What have been things you have learned that have surprised you about this pathway as a career?

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