EXPLORING SENSE OF BELONGING AMONG FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE, SECOND-GENERATION IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

SAYDE J. BRAIS. Exploring Sense of Belonging Among First-Generation College, Second-Generation Immigrant Students. (Under the direction of RYAN A. MILLER)

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of four-year university and college students identifying as first-generation in college (FGC) and second-generation immigrant (SGI) in the United States., with a focus on a sense of belonging at this identity intersection. These student groups experience multiple cultures simultaneously which may intersect or collide to produce bi/polycultural experiences that are subsequently introduced into their college experiences. Using in-depth interviews, this qualitative phenomenological study sought to highlight the identity narratives of FGC-SGI students in the Southeastern United States and explore how social identities influence their sense of belonging. A total of ten participants were included in this study which used sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Strayhorn, 2012, 2019) and the reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity (RMMDI; Abes et al., 2007) in combination to ground the examination of the phenomenon of *FGC-SGI students experiencing belonging in college*. Sense of belonging is often associated with social support stemming from identification within a group, is not static, and is context dependent. RMMDI allows for an understanding of how a person negotiates complexities associated with salience of identity and context. Thus, applying sense of belonging to the RMMDI allowed for a deeper understanding of how perceptions of multiple identities played a role in the lived experiences of acclimation to a college context. Further, understanding a sense of belonging among FGC-SGI students may assist equity-minded student affairs practitioners with framing and creating settings which purposefully engage with these populations - including but not limited to encouraging identity exploration - to promote a positive college experience, aiding in persistence and success.

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DEDICATION

My decision to pursue a doctoral degree was not an easy one. In fact, it took me nearly seven years post-master's degree to make the decision. I could not have made this life-changing decision without the enduring and unwavering support of my late mentor, who always encouraged me to reach higher and to remember that I am capable of greatness. Thus, my dissertation is dedicated to Dr. Shawn D. Long, who worked tirelessly in areas of diversity and student success throughout his impressive—albeit short—career, and who provided countless colleagues and students with the same unwavering support he always provided me. Shawn, thank you for paving the way for me to find my purpose, and my greatness. I promise to continue to be the "rockstar" you always were. I am privileged to have known you, and to be a product of your mentorship.

This dissertation is also dedicated to all the FGC-SGI students who were the "first" in their families to navigate the U.S. college journey, and who did their best to make their immigrant families proud along the way.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FGCS	first-generation college student
FGC-SGI	first-generation college, second-generation immigrant
SGIS	second-generation immigrant student
RMMDI	reconceptualized model of multiple identities
POC	person of color
PWI	predominately white institution

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Although the need for belongingness is universal and applies to all people, it does not necessarily apply to all people equally. Quite often, social identities converge and intersect in ways that simultaneously influence sense of belonging" (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 159). In order to effectively understand students' belonging experiences, identity and identity salience should be considered (Strayhorn, 2019). Further, belonging is heavily context-dependent (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017; Ribera et al., 2017; Strayhorn, 2012, 2019), and takes increases in importance within "certain contexts, at certain times, and among certain populations," specifically individuals who may be predisposed to feel minoritized within the respective context (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 159). Thus, as student demographics continue to evolve, higher education will need to respond accordingly to the different ways students experience college based on their unique social identities and their intersections (Duran et al., 2020).

While students identifying as White and continuing generation (i.e., one parent obtained a bachelor's degree) often obtain a sense of belonging during their college experience (Duran et al., 2020), this is not often the case for minoritized students. In fact, first-generation college, non-White identifying students report a lower sense of belonging in college on average (Hachey & McCallen, 2018). Further, United States (U.S.) native-born students who are the first in their family to attend college experience college in unique ways typically due to their diverse upbringings (Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; London, 1992; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Mukherji et al., 2017; Yosso, 2005). Additionally, children of immigrant backgrounds experience unique college journeys often due to cultural differences as compared to the dominant

culture (Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Mukherji et al., 2017; Stebleton et al., 2014; Yosso, 2005). More specifically, individuals identifying as second-generation immigrants in the United States have varying college experiences due to tensions between their ethnic and native-born cultures (Mukherji et al., 2017).

Thus, the experience of a sense of belonging, conceptualized as identification within a group or community and associated with social support or feeling "at home" (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 338; Means & Pyne, 2017), can be challenging to obtain for students identifying as both first-generation in college and second-generation immigrant in the United States. Both first-generation college students (FGCS) and second-generation immigrant students (SGIS) can experience tensions throughout their college experience which includes lack of familial college-going knowledge and challenges with the navigation of differing cultures (Baum & Flores, 2011; Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; Hachey & McCallen, 2018; London, 1992; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Mukherji et al., 2017).

Yet, FGCS and SGIS benefit from forms of *community cultural wealth* (e.g., familial and social) which situate these students in advantageous ways throughout the pre-college and college journeys. According to Yosso (2005), community cultural wealth is defined as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77). Thus, using this alternative perspective, both FGCS and SGIS have and can derive and use several forms of capital from their upbringings and family units. These forms of capital can aid in their college experiences and lend to successful outcomes (Yosso, 2005). With that said, sources of support generally include but are not limited to supportive relationships both on and off-campus and targeted

campus resources (Demetriou et al., 2017; Dong, 2019; Evans et al., 2020; Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Havlik et al., 2020; Jehangir, 2009; Jehangir, 2010; Means & Pyne, 2017; Pascarella et al., 2004; Portes et al., 2009; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Stebleton et al., 2012; Stebleton et al., 2014; Stebleton et al., 2017).

Thus, there is an intersection of college-going generation status and U.S. immigrant-generation status that needs to be considered as it pertains to the college experience; particularly, how these bi/polycultural experiences may play a role in experiencing a sense of belonging in college (Mukherji et al., 2017). This is due to the fact that FGC and SGI students are often navigating multiple cultures simultaneously including immigrant culture, dominant U.S. cultures, and U.S. higher education culture. Thus, understanding a sense of belonging among students identifying as FGC-SGI students could be advantageous in framing and creating university and college settings which prominently and purposefully engages with this student population to promote a positive college experience, aiding in the overall persistence and success across the population. The following discussion will highlight higher education literature which has historically analyzed and interpreted FGCS separately from SGIS with some exceptions.

As the first in their family to attend and complete college, FGCS may experience common characteristics (e.g., similar socioeconomic status). Although FGCS are frequently low-income, students of color with less educational training (Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Means & Pyne, 2017; Mukherji et al., 2017), the essence of being a FGCS is fluid and it is challenging to imply that there are generalities (e.g., not all FGCS are low-income or persons of color). Thus, it is important to note that the FGCS possess a multitude of characteristics which results in a more fluid depiction of shared similarities. That said, when FGCS come from non-White, low-income

families, they may experience issues with reconciling differing cultures and identities (Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; London, 1992; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Mukherji et al., 2017).

FGCS may experience trouble with navigating the college-going process due to their family's inexperience with the college application process. Additionally, FGCS may have trouble assimilating to *college culture* (i.e., referring to cultural norms, rules, and rituals common to a four-year, U.S. college or university experience) due to the lack of a family model or subsequent familial support. These challenges may result in unwritten norms, rules, rituals, or the *hidden curriculum*, associated with college culture that is often not easily accessible to groups including FGCS. The hidden curriculum is defined as "what is implicit and embedded in educational experiences in contrast with the formal statements about curricula and the surface features of educational interaction" (Sambell & McDowell, 1998, pp. 391–392; Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018). More specifically, the hidden curriculum can be understood as a contrast between expectations according to the official curriculum and what occurs within the classroom and other campus experiences (Sambell & McDowell, 1998). Additionally, challenges may be exacerbated with social identities common to this student population (e.g., person of color) which indicates an additional cultural tension. When introduced into college culture, these various cultural experiences may intersect or collide to produce bi/polycultural tensions. Specifically, shared demographic characteristics across the FGCS population may contribute to common experiences throughout the college journey.

SGIS must often balance the navigation of both a culture (i.e., dominant U.S. culture) and an experience (i.e., U.S. higher education) that is unfamiliar to their parents (Stebleton et al.,

2014). Due to their U.S. upbringing, SGIS frequently need to reconcile multiple cultural identities when assimilating to predominantly White college culture. This is a complex process as SGIS have a variety of racialized identities (Mukherji et al., 2017), which may influence their feelings of belonging (Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Mukherji et al., 2017; Stebleton et al., 2014). Further, immigrant origin and status play important roles in how SGIS view their belonging in college (Arbeit et al., 2016; Baum & Flores, 2011) and in feeling as if they have something to prove to their family members and peers (Orupabo et al., 2019).

SGIS also often experience a variety of tension and assistance that contributes to their overall college journey. Common tensions include family composition (e.g., non-college educated parents) and subsequent tension (e.g., disagreement regarding importance of a college degree), and intersecting cultural identities (e.g., immigrant origin culture and U.S. culture). According to the literature, SGIS use multiple frames to activate cultural resources (e.g., support from the social environment) and achieve academic success; thus, cultural resources are often constructed through a sense of belonging within their institutions (Orupabo et al., 2019). Specific assistance that SGIS receive throughout the college transition process include family composition (e.g., U.S. born siblings) and subsequent support (e.g., emotional support), and positive campus-related relationships (e.g., peer groups).

Given the understanding of FGCS and SGIS college experiences, particularly the tensions commonly experienced, the need for a sense of belonging throughout the college experience seems vital to these student populations' persistence and experience within college culture. As FGCS and SGIS must navigate their cultural backgrounds within college culture, the existing tensions and supports throughout the college process become more relevant. Therefore, there

appears to be a need for emphasis on the experience of sense of belonging as an aspect of the college experience and its subsequent outcomes among minoritized students experiencing multiple, intersecting social identities.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of university and college students identifying as first-generation in college and second-generation immigrant in the United States, with a particular focus on experiences that are associated with a sense of belonging at this identity intersection. While research exists about these populations examined separately, there is little known on the lived experiences of students identifying as both first-generation in college and second-generation immigrant in the United States. Additionally, while there is research on the overall facilitation of a sense of belonging in college, there is little research regarding how students identifying across both identity groups experience a sense of belonging in college. These student groups are raised within and experience various cultural diversities which may intersect or collide to produce bi/polycultural experiences that are subsequently introduced into their college experiences.

Therefore, better understanding what contributes to the college experience for students at the intersection of FGC and SGI identities is essential, as this understanding could inform personnel who design and facilitate academic interventions and programs at various higher learning institutions. Additionally, this information could be used by higher education personnel to encourage identity exploration among this student population, particularly in cases where members of the population have not previously examined or considered examining these aspects of their identity. Lastly, studying this topic could serve to greater support other student

populations with variations of multiple, intersecting social identities throughout their college experience.

Research Questions

The following are research questions that will be used to focus this research:

RQ_1: How do college students attending a four-year, public, predominantly White institution (PWI) experience first-generation college and second-generation immigrant identities?

RQ_2: In what ways do first-generation college, second-generation immigrant students experience a sense of belonging during college?

Conceptual Frameworks Overview

Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging is often referred to as feeling "at home" in the campus community with a close association to social support stemming from identification within a group or community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 338; Means & Pyne, 2017). Sense of belonging is not static and is context-dependent (e.g., institution type; interaction type) (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017; Ribera et al., 2017; Strayhorn, 2012, 2019). For example, students may feel connected in the classroom or to faculty but feel isolated from peers (Strayhorn, 2012, 2019). Hoffman et al. (2002) found that a sense of belonging derived primarily from "perceptions of 'valued involvement' in the collegiate environment" (p. 249). Valued involvement was based on peer relationships and faculty compassion (Hoffman et al., 2002).

Further, social identity intersections cannot be separated from a sense of belonging (Duran et al., 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017; Strayhorn, 2012). According to literature, intersecting

identities, particularly those highlighting areas of oppression, often specifically shaped FGCS' college experiences particularly within the first year (Means & Pyne, 2017). Further, U.S. born, non-White identifying student groups often report a lower sense of belonging as compared to non-immigrant, White students on average (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Duran et al., 2020; Gopalan & Brady, 2019; Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Means & Pyne, 2017). Thus, when commonly minoritized students do not see themselves and their experiences reflected in dominant college cultures, they may feel like they do not belong on campus or in their classrooms (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Jehangir, 2010). This is often derived from an obligation to assimilate to a PWI campus climate which may lack diverse resources and activities (Duffy et al., 2020; Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Means & Pyne, 2017; Stebleton et al., 2014). It is important to note that tensions between identity and social expectation vary depending on institutional context (Means & Pyne, 2017) and generational status (i.e., generational immigrant status or first-generation college student status) (Duran et al., 2020).

Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Identities

Derived by Abes et al. (2007), the reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity (RMMDI) uses constructivist-developmental theory, tenets of self-authorship, and aspects of intersectionality to determine the necessity of exploring the simultaneous experience of identity and its relationship with other dimensions. The RMMDI determined that adding a *meaning-making filter* to the original model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) more accurately illustrates the link between salience of identity and context, as well as the link between the core identity and social identities (Abes et al., 2007). Further, Abes et al. (2007)

determined that the depth and penetrability of contextual influences (i.e., the filter) depended on the sophistication of a person's capacity to make meaning.

Therefore, RMMDI's concept of a meaning-making capacity may provide a stronger depiction of how students work to understand the relationships among their personal and social identities, as well as understanding relationships between context and identity. Overall, this model may allow for a deeper understanding of how a person negotiates identity complexities (Abes et al., 2007). Further, studying intersecting identities (e.g., college generational status and immigrant generational status) may provide a stronger portrayal of college student lived experiences when ethnic and social identities are at play (Patton et al., 2016). Overall, the RMMDI may help to explain the multiple dimensions of identity and may provide useful methods for interpreting how the various pieces connect to each other and affect one another (Patton et al., 2016). Thus, it is important to better understand how FGC-SGI students experience bi/polycultural contexts which may prompt tension throughout the meaning-making process, and subsequently, how this tension may play a role in the experience of sense of belonging during the college experience. While RMMDI may be useful for understanding how students come to perceive their personal and social identities, applying the concept of sense of belonging to the RMMDI may allow for a deeper understanding of how perceptions of multiple identities play a role in the lived experiences of acclimating, and belonging, within the college context.

Research Methodology Overview

This study used a phenomenological design to study the lived experiences of undergraduate students (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). Ten students who identified as both first-generation in college and second-generation immigrant in the United States. and were attending

the same large, public, four-year, PWI were recruited for this study. Participants of several racial/ethnic backgrounds were sought to derive a broader and more inclusive picture of the experience of sense of belonging across many racial/ethnic cultures. Purposeful sampling included student organizations and programs that strived to include a variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds. Recruiting from a PWI provided a backdrop for bi/polycultural experiences to emerge among the proposed population as they experienced aspects of PWI college culture that differed from their ethnic culture(s). Additionally, a four-year institution allowed for a more established experience of sense of belonging as the amount of time spent (i.e., several semesters) allowed for the experience of isolation and/or belonging to occur, change, and/or shift.

In-depth, semi-structured, qualitative interviews were conducted to gather insight into lived experiences as they pertained to a sense of belonging and experiences of multiple identity dimensions in college (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The interview protocol included primary questions and probing questions to elicit additional detail from participants regarding their college experiences. Interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes on average and took place in-person and via Zoom depending on participant preference and COVID-19 global pandemic protocol. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim using transcription software and verified manually by me. Participants were incentivized to participate in the study with a $15 Amazon gift card at the conclusion of their participation.

Upon completion of data collection, an inductive analysis approach was used to gain a broad perspective of the data with notes made regarding possible patterns and themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Data analysis progressed through phenomenological data reduction identifying the experiential essence of the phenomenon of “belonging”. The first stage of coding involved

immersion in the data through a multiple transcript review. I noted words and narratives that reflected participant experiences in the margins during this stage, which led to potential themes. The second stage of coding consisted of clustering and labeling emerging themes according to phenomenological theming (Vagle, 2018). Throughout data analysis, I continuously reviewed the transcripts to reassess and verify themes.

To ensure the essence of the experience of sense of belonging was adequately described, participants were asked to provide revisions to their interview transcripts shortly after interviews were completed. Member checks with participants also took place at the conclusion of data analysis where participants were provided with an opportunity to provide feedback on whether their experiences had been captured accurately. Additionally, I revealed my positionality by acknowledging past and current experiences with the phenomenon to ensure the participants' experiences were emphasized in alignment with the phenomenological approach. I also maintained a reflective journal throughout the study to assist with "suspicious interpretation" (Willig, 2017). Lastly, I utilized a peer reviewer for debriefing purposes and to provide alternative perspectives on initial coding impressions.

Significance of Study

While there is extensive research on the overall facilitation of belonging among various student groups, including FGCS, there was little known on the lived experiences of students identifying as both FGC and SGI, nor how this unique student group experiences a sense of belonging during college. The literature indicated commonalities among FGCS and SGIS as it pertained to the overall college experience and indicated that these student groups derived from and experienced various cultural diversities which intersected or collided to produce

bi/polycultural experiences that were introduced and intertwined within their overall college experience. Therefore, supplemental understanding of what contributed to the college experience allowed for a view of the experience of belonging for students at the intersection of FGC and SGI identities. This information is important as it could benefit this student group on their path to persistence and attainment. Further, a better understanding of this student population's experiences with sense of belonging could help to inform higher education administrators and practitioners to construct policy and programming that intentionally considers their needs and situates faculty and staff interacting with this student population to strategically support the student population within minor contexts of the college environment, and throughout the overall college journey. Thus, past research and current experiences justify the need for further study of students identifying as FGC-SGI students and outlined specific gaps in the literature that the current study sought to address regarding a sense of belonging and identity experiences.

Delimitations and Assumptions

Delimitations

One criterion for potential participants was for each student to self-identify as both FGC and SGI to speak on the experience of multiple, intersecting identities as a part of the experience of sense of belonging. Additionally, participants who volunteered for this study were assumed to be students that were persisting, thus, in some ways this study emphasizes "success stories" with the experience of a sense of belonging. Additionally, in Fall 2021, operational restrictions due to the COVID-19 global pandemic began to lift in higher education in the United States. Students were given an opportunity to acclimate to a "normal" college experience, some for the first time. Yet many preferred to remain in a mostly remote college environment. Though this study does

not focus on the pandemic, it is important to note that recruitment and data collection occurred with the pandemic in the background, and some participants often discussed the pandemic as it related to their sense of belonging and overall college journey.

Assumptions

This research study was conducted under several assumptions. First, this research was conducted with the assumption that interviewed students self-identified as FGCS and SGIS as well as had a working knowledge of the fluidity and nuances associated with these social identity groups. Second, this research assumed that interviewed students had some experience with belonging and/or isolation throughout their college experience. Third, this research assumed that participants would answer questions openly and honestly during the interview. Last, the research assumed that a PWI would play some role in the development, formation, and/or exploration of students' identity statuses during acclimation and the overall college experience.

Definitions of Terms

Assorted definitions have been used for key terms used frequently throughout this study. Therefore, the following are definitions of key terms as they are understood within this study:

Culture: Taken from Yosso (2005)'s definition, "culture refers to behaviors and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people. Culture is also evidenced in material and nonmaterial productions of a people. Culture as a set of characteristics is neither fixed nor static" (pp. 75-76).

College culture: According Gao (2001), "broadly speaking, college culture is the sum of material wealth and spiritual wealth created by the college with its own characteristic. In a narrow sense, college culture refers to an organization's administrative characteristics, values,

interpersonal relationships, traditions, norms, spirit and corresponding teaching, scientific research, and cultural and sports activities" (p. 96 as cited in Lians-sen, 2016). Thus, it refers to cultural norms, rules, and rituals common to a college or university experience.

Cultural capital: Developed by Bourdieu (1979, 1984) to partially explain inequalities related to class-based skills and norms not easily visible. According to this model, cultural capital can be obtained through family origin and educational attainment.

Community cultural wealth: Developed by Yosso (2005) to challenge the deficit-thinking often derived from the traditional model of cultural capital, "community cultural wealth refers to an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77).

Continuing generation status: A continuing-generation college student, by contrast, has one parent with at least a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

*Ethnic group: "*A group of people who share a similar culture (beliefs, values, and behaviors), language, religion, ancestry, or other characteristics that is often handed down from one generation to the next. They may come from the same country or live together in the same area" (NIH, n.d.). For this study, ethnic group specifically refers to the cultural upbringing of an individual specifically from a culture different from or outside of U.S. culture.

Ethnic identity: Adapted from Patton et al. (2016), *"*a multi-dimensions construct involving feelings, attitudes, knowledge, behaviors, and include self-identification, attitudes relative to the group, attitudes about self as a member, extent of group knowledge and commitment, and behaviors/practices" (p. 2).

First-generation college student: FGCS are defined as students whose parents did not complete a four-year college or university degree in the United States (NASPA, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

Minoritized students: Based on Harper (2012)'s definition, minoritized signifies "the social construction of underrepresentation and subordination in U.S. social institutions, including colleges and universities. Persons are not born into a minority status nor are they minoritized in every social context (e.g., their families, racially homogeneous friendship groups, or places of worship). Instead, they are rendered minorities in particular situations and institutional environments that sustain an overrepresentation of Whiteness" (p. 9).

*Predominantly White Institution (PWI): "*Term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment; however, the majority of these institutions may also be understood as historically White institutions in recognition of the binarism and exclusion supported by the United States prior to 1964" (Lomotey, 2010, p. 524).

Salience of identity: Adapted from Ethier and Deaux (1994), "when identity is made salient, as for example by a change in context, a person will become increasingly identified with his or her group. The concept of salience can be elusive, however, particularly when dealing with long-term changes in context" (p. 244). Also, based on Jones and McEwen (2000), salience of personal and social identities to the core are fluid and dependent on context-based influences.

Second-generation immigrant student: SGIS are defined as students born in the United States to at least one parent born abroad, or the first generation born in the United States (Arbeit et al., 2016).

Sense of belonging: Sense of belonging is referred to as feeling "at home" in the campus community and is associated with maintaining interactions internal and external to campus (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 338). Sense of belonging is conceptualized as fundamental to identification within a group or community and will be closely associated with social support (Means & Pyne, 2017; Strayhorn, 2019).

Social identity: Socially constructed identities are defined and constructed through "interactions with the broader social context in which dominant values dictate norms and expectations" (Torres et al., 2009, p. 577).

U.S. immigrant-generational status: Refers to whether a student or one or more of the student's parents were born outside the United States (Arbeit et al., 2016).

Organization of Study

This chapter started by describing that FGCS and SGIS often have experiences of belonging and isolation throughout their pre-college and college journeys. Specifically, students at the identity intersection of FGCS and SGIS required closer examination as tensions within their cultural experiences may play a role in identity meaning-making, subsequently playing a role in the experience of sense of belonging while in college. Thus, this outlined the need for examining FGC-SGI students at a public PWI through the lens of identity formation, exploration, and experience. This phenomenological, qualitative study explored how FGC-SGI students experienced their multiple, intersecting identities, and how they experienced a sense of belonging at their institution. This chapter also discussed the study purpose, research questions, study significance, delimitations, and definitions of relevant key terms.

The rest of this study is organized into four additional chapters, followed by references and appendices. Chapter Two will provide a review of the literature as it relates to this topic by further exploring FGCS, SGIS, sense of belonging, and the RMMDI. FGCS and SGIS will be examined through research on common tensions and supports experienced throughout the college acclimation process. Existing research on the concept of sense of belonging and common experiences with belonging among minoritized student groups will be examined. Finally, identity research will be discussed as it relates to early models of identity and an in-depth view of the RMMDI as it stands today.

Next, Chapter Three will provide details regarding constructivism and phenomenology, as well as the research design and data analysis procedures. Additionally, my positionality in this study will also be outlined. Chapter Four will examine the results of the study, with a table overview of the participants, individual participant descriptions, and a presentation of themes developed through inductive analysis. Finally, Chapter Five discusses the results in light of the research questions, the conceptual frameworks, and reviewed literature. Chapter Five also includes research limitations, implications for policy and practice, implications for future research, and my reflection on the research process.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Commonly minoritized students experience unique tensions during the development of a sense of belonging while in college (Hachey & McCallen, 2018). Within this broader student population, there is a specific intersection of college-generation status and U.S. immigrant-generation status that needs to be considered as it pertains to integration into college life, particularly how these intersecting identities may be associated with a sense of belonging in college. This chapter will begin with a review of the conceptual frameworks. First, a review of a sense of belonging will be provided as it relates to commonly minoritized student populations. Then, a review of the reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity (RMMDI) will be provided as it relates to the concept of sense of belonging and this particular student population. Finally, a brief review of research about FGCS and SGIS separately is provided. This chapter discusses the common tensions and supports FGCS and SGIS populations experience during the college acclimation as well as the common barriers and facilitators to a sense of belonging among minoritized student populations within the public, four-year university setting. The following table outlines how this literature will be presented:

Table 1

Recurring Themes

Theme	Sources
	Conceptual Frameworks
	Sense of Belonging
Common Barriers	Intersecting Identities and Status (Duffy et al., 2020; Duran et al., 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018) Campus Climate and Institutional Context (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Duffy et al., 2020; Duran et al., 2020; Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Jehangir, 2010; Means & Pyne, 2017;

	Ribera et al., 2017; Stebleton et al., 2014)
Common Facilitators	Academic and Social Structures (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Duran et al., 2020; Hoffman et al., 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Means & Pyne, 2017; Ribera et al., 2017; Stebleton et al., 2014)
	Peer and Faculty Interactions (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Hoffman et al., 2012; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Jehangir, 2009; Means & Pyne, 2017; Rendon, 1994; Stebleton et al., 2012; Strayhorn, 2019)
	RMMDI
Early Models of Identity	(Deaux, 1993; Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Reynolds & Pope, 1991)
RMMDI	(Abes et al., 2007; Abes & Jones, 2004; Jones & Abes, 2013)
	First-Generation College Students (FGCS)
Common Tensions	Family Model and Tension (Dong, 2019; Duffy et al., 2020; Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; Havlik et al., 2020; Jehangir, 2009; Jehangir, 2010; London, 1989; London, 1992; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Means & Pyne, 2017; Mukherji et al., 2017; Pascarella et al., 2004; Richardson & Skinner, 1992)
	Social and Intersecting Identities (Duffy et al., 2020; Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Havlik et al., 2020; Jehangir, 2009; Jehangir, 2010; London, 1992; Means & Pyne, 2017; Mukherji et al., 2017; Patton et al., 2016; Torres et al., 2009)
	Low-Income, Financial Stress (Duffy et al., 2020; Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; Havlik et al., 2020 London, 1992; Pascarella et al., 2004; Richardson & Skinner, 1992)
Common Supports	Targeted Support Services and HIPs (Demetriou et al., 2017; Dong, 2019; Evans et al., 2020; Havlik et al., 2020; Jehangir, 2009; Jehangir, 2010; Means & Pyne, 2017; Pascarella et al., 2004; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Yosso, 2005)
	Supportive Relationships (Demetriou et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; Havlik et al., 2020; Jehangir, 2009; Means & Pyne, 2017; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Roksa & Kinsley, 2019; Yosso, 2005)

	Second-Generation Immigrant Students (SGIS)
Common Tensions	Family Composition and Tension (Baum & Flores, 2011; Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Hudley, 2016; Mukherji et al., 2017; Orupabo et al., 2019; Portes et al., 2009; Stebleton et al., 2014) Ethnic and Intersecting Identities (Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Mukherji et al., 2017; Patton et al., 2016; Pivovarova & Powers, 2019; Stebleton et al., 2014; Stebleton et al., 2017)
Common Supports	Family Composition and Support (Baum & Flores, 2011; Hagy & Staniec, 2002; Hudley, 2016; Kao, 2004; Kao & Tienda, 1995; Mukherji et al., 2017; Orupabo et al., 2019; Pivovarova & Powers, 2019; Portes et al., 2009; Yosso, 2005) Campus Support Services and Relationships (Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Means & Pyne, 2017; Portes et al., 2009; Stebleton et al., 2012; Stebleton et al., 2014; Stebleton et al., 2017)

Conceptual Frameworks

Sense of belonging will be combined with an identity model and their combination will be understood as conceptual frameworks throughout this study. Thus, identity will be used as a lens by which to view FGC-SGI students and their experiences with a sense of belonging within college culture. This student population frequently experiences multiple, intersecting social identities and culturally specific experiences throughout the pre-college and college processes; thus, combining sense of belonging with an identity model may allow for a more focused understanding as to how this student population attends to these experiences as they attempt to acclimate to college culture. The identity model that will be highlighted is the reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity (RMMDI). To begin, a discussion of the sense of belonging literature as it pertains to common barriers and facilitators will occur followed by a discussion of early models of identity. Lastly, a discussion on the RMMDI will occur with a

specific discussion of how this model has been used in various contexts and among various populations.

Sense of Belonging

Strayhorn (2012) defined sense of belonging as "students' perceived social support on campus, feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g., campus community) or others on campus (e.g., faculty, peers)" (p. 3). Hurtado and Carter (1997) referred to belonging as feeling "at home" in the campus community and the maintenance of internal and external interactions (p. 338). Sense of belonging has also been conceptualized as fundamental to identification within a group or community and is closely associated with social support (Means & Pyne, 2017; Strayhorn, 2012, 2019). Further, sense of belonging is not static and is context-dependent (e.g., institution type; interaction type) (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017; Ribera et al., 2017; Strayhorn, 2012, 2019). For example, students may feel connected in the classroom or to faculty but feel isolated from peers (Strayhorn, 2012, 2019). Hoffman et al. (2002) found that a sense of belonging derived primarily from "perceptions of 'valued involvement' in the collegiate environment" (p. 249). Valued involvement was based on faculty compassion and peer relationships (Hoffman et al., 2002). Sense of belonging was related to understanding various contexts indicative of the college environment that enabled decision-making (Duffy et al., 2020, p. 173). The ability to make decisions was contingent on student composition, institutional culture, and context of space and time (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018).

Minoritized students (e.g., SGIS and FGCS) often reported a lower sense of belonging compared to non-immigrant, White students (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Duran et al., 2020;

Gopalan & Brady, 2019; Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Means & Pyne, 2017). Additionally**,** non-White, FGCS reported lower cultural fit within the college environment and negatively associated campus climate with a sense of belonging (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Strayhorn, 2012). It is important to note that social identity intersections cannot be separated from a sense of belonging (Duran et al., 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017; Strayhorn, 2012). Intersecting identities, particularly those highlighting areas of oppression, often shaped students' first-year experiences (Means & Pyne, 2017).

Common barriers. There are common barriers to the sense of belonging in college among minoritized student groups. These barriers are not exclusive to minoritized students but impact them most often. These barriers include understanding and navigating intersecting identities, identity statuses as well as non-diverse or non-inclusive campus climate and institutional contexts.

***Intersecting identities and status*.** Minoritized identities are not always welcomed or recognized in higher education (Means & Pyne, 2017). Social identities and intersectionality created barriers due to related systemic oppression (Duffy et al., 2020; Duran et al., 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017). Duran et al. (2020) found that "privileged and marginalized identities intersect to produce unique experiences of belonging" (p. 147). Spaces were not always inclusively constructed for students experiencing identities at the intersection of race and generational status. This impacted sense of belonging in college (Duran et al., 2020). For example, FGCS of color often experienced various forms of racism (e.g., microaggressions) and a lack of support for their experiences (Means & Pyne, 2017).

Duran et al. (2020) found that "higher education institutions advance cultures that slight those who have less knowledge about the norms present in postsecondary education" (p. 147). According to Nguyen and Nguyen (2018), this is especially troublesome as minoritized students were often improperly viewed "uni-dimensionally" (p. 160). A uni-dimensional lens does not allow for students to receive necessary support related to their multiple identity groups (e.g., lack of academic preparation). Instead, Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) posited that a multidimensional lens should be used to give proper attention to the multiple statuses that influence minoritized students' unique collegiate experiences. For example, tensions between identity and social expectation may vary depending on institutional context (Means & Pyne, 2017) and generational status (Duran et al., 2020). For example, FGC and SGI students attending a PWI may experience heightened tensions between their multiple identities and institution culture.

Campus climate and institutional context. When there is a little-to-no connection from college culture to lived experiences, minoritized students may not feel like they belong (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Jehangir, 2010). This is often derived from an obligation to assimilate to a PWI campus climate lacking in diverse resources and activities (Duffy et al., 2020; Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Means & Pyne, 2017; Stebleton et al., 2014). Non-diverse campus climates specifically impacted the social integration necessary for minoritized students to feel a connection to their institution (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020). Duffy et al. (2020) found that students who experienced discrimination felt a sense of isolation on campus. Additionally, peer conversations on common sociocultural issues created a sense of isolation among this student population (Duran et al., 2020).

Means and Pyne (2017) posited that institutions should review structures that create areas of exclusion for minoritized students, particularly as it pertains to equity and social justice. Stebleton et al. (2014) suggested that institutions should be more purposeful in creating an inviting climate for minoritized students (e.g., immigrant students). For example, this can include curriculum, initiatives, and events designed around minoritized student experiences to support their unique needs (Stebleton et al., 2014). Additionally, institutions should rethink policies and practices to “focus on encouraging campus climate and sense of belonging factors" (Hachey & McCallen, 2018, p. 227), primarily through creating opportunities for targeted minoritized student engagement (Hachey & McCallen, 2018). Although Ribera et al. (2017) determined that institutional context impacted the sense of belonging among minoritized students, this is an area that requires further study. Specifically, FGCS reported feeling a lower sense of institutional acceptance at public institutions than at private institutions (Ribera et al., 2017). Thus, the differences between private and public institutions, and the resources and practices associated with institutional context, should be further examined.

Common facilitators. There are common facilitators of a sense of belonging in college among minoritized student groups. These facilitators are not exclusive to minoritized students but promote less isolation for this student group most often. These include specific types of academic and social structures and intentional peer and faculty interactions.

Academic and social structures. Institutional support structures positively contributed to a sense of belonging for minoritized students (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017; Ribera et al., 2017; Stebleton et al., 2014). Structures most supportive were those which were social identity based. These included structures like multicultural offices and designated, diverse

spaces (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Means & Pyne, 2017; Ribera et al., 2017; Stebleton et al., 2014). On-campus residence (Duran et al., 2020; Ribera et al., 2017) and participation in student organizations (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Duran et al., 2020; Ribera et al., 2017) produce feelings of belonging for minoritized students. The more involved students were on campus, the more they felt they belonged. The more they felt a sense of belonging, the more engaged with campus life they were (Duran et al., 2020). Means and Pyne (2017) found that specific institutional structures (e.g., identity-based student organizations) provided students with access to a "supportive network of peers and staff, helped students increase awareness about their own identity, challenged students' internalized oppression, and led to students being an advocate on their own campus" (p. 913).

Additionally, high-impact practices (HIPs) fostered a sense of belonging for minoritized student populations (Hoffman et al., 2002; Means & Pyne, 2017; Ribera et al., 2017), particularly when structured to include meaningful interactions with people of diverse backgrounds (e.g., study abroad) (Ribera et al., 2017). Learning communities, specifically, allowed for the facilitation of relationships, both academically and socially (Hoffman et al., 2002; Ribera et al., 2017). Similarly, social-community organizations and culturally related activities were associated with a sense of belonging (Duran et al., 2020; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Further, students who held leadership positions in campus-based organizations had increased positive perceptions of peer belonging and institutional acceptance (Ribera et al., 2017).

Peer and faculty interactions. Peer and faculty interactions positively contributed to feelings of validation, mattering, and belonging (Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Hoffman et al., 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Means & Pyne, 2017; Strayhorn, 2019). According to Hoffman et

al. (2002), a sense of belonging is derived from feelings of "valued involvement" which is partially based on the belief that faculty are compassionate (p. 249). Additionally, mattering was integral to the development of a sense of belonging (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017). Feelings of mattering led to validation, which was crucial for minoritized students to find their place within their institution (Hoffman et al., 2002; Jehangir, 2009; Stebleton et al., 2012). Mattering indicates that there is a shared sense of trust that all members' needs will be met as a result of the respective relationship (Strayhorn, 2019). Dueñas & Gloria's (2020) study on Latinx students confirmed that a sense of belonging predicted mattering among minoritized students.

Overall, when students are validated academically or socially, they are better equipped to find success in college. This is especially true for minoritized students who often do not fit into the traditional continuing generation, White American student profile and who are often forced to adapt to a college culture that has not been designed to support them (Rendon, 1994). Thus, according to Rendon (1994)'s validation theory, validation may occur both within and outside of the classroom, and both contexts hold equal weight on whether a student experiences validation. When students feel validated, they also experience feelings of value and belonging, and the reverse is often true. In-class validation occurs through individuals like faculty or peers while out-of-class validation takes place via interpersonal relationships such as those developed within student organizations as well as via student affairs professionals including resident advisors. Lastly, validation is a process in which the more validated a student feels, the richer their college experience will be (Rendon, 1994).

Additionally, membership to peer groups helped minoritized students acquire college-ready skills and linked them to the larger whole of campus life (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). More

specifically, peer groups in particular play critical roles in the development of a sense of belonging as these groups provide support that is often necessary to achieve both belonging and persistence (Strayhorn, 2019). Hurtado and Carter (1997) posited that specific activities may foster a stronger sense of identification with the institution. Hachey & McCallen's (2018) study confirmed that even on campuses with high diversity, minoritized students needed opportunities to interact with each other (e.g., student-led organizations) to feel like they belonged. Further, social contexts where social identities are not welcomed produce feelings of isolation or loneliness; thus, belonging takes on increased value within social contexts where minoritized students are generally not supported or welcomed (Strayhorn, 2019). Strayhorn (2019) also found that making friends with people of shared backgrounds and identities may serve to meet a "basic human need" (p. 29). This aides in the development of a sense of belonging which produces behaviors that coincide with "true membership" into a community. Consequently, not all forms of student involvement facilitate a sense of belonging; some involvement fosters feelings of isolation (Strayhorn, 2019).

Additionally, the more needs are satisfied, the more positive outcomes occur; thus, the more students feel they belong, the more motivated they are to succeed in college. The opposite can also be true, implying that experiences in college that impact belonging for better or for worse are associated with thoughts about oneself or one's identities (Strayhorn, 2019).

RMMDI

Early models of identity. The original model of identity, the multidimensional identity model, was derived by Reynolds and Pope (1991) to determine four ways individuals belonging to multiple oppressed groups can engage identity resolution: (1) "identify with one aspect of self

in a passive manner" (i.e., society-assigned); (2) "identify with one aspect of self in a conscious manner" (i.e., without including other identities); (3) "identify with multiple aspects of self in a segmented fashion" (i.e., one at a time and determined more by context or setting); or (4) "identify with combined aspects of self" (i.e., multiple identities that intersect) (p. 179).

In 1993, Deaux reconstructed *social identity* by conceptualizing it as both defined by oneself and by context. This provided a foundation for understanding multiple, intersecting identities. Deaux (1993) posited that social and personal identity are interconnected. Personal identity refers to how a person self-describes their characteristics and actions, while social identities refer to membership or roles a person considers representative. Further, Deux's research highlighted the significance of social identities and the context they exist within, which provided the foundation for the original model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI; Jones & McEwen, 2000). Moreover, when determining identity salience, Ethier and Deaux (1994) suggested three bases on which one might predict the influence of salience on social identity: (1) those who highly identify with their identity group, regardless of context; (2) those who experience a conflict between self-perceived identity and context, for example those with minority status in their group; (3) those who experience conflict between past and present context.

The original model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) states that socially constructed identity dimensions must be understood in relationship to each other. Further, changing contexts are a factor in the salience of identity dimensions (e.g., race) overall as well as the salience of each dimension to the core, which fluctuates depending on contextual influences (e.g., family) (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Thus, the MMDI was created to better understand the

influence of contexts during identity development, and the purpose of the model was to demonstrate the prospect of contently living with multiple identities. Jones and McEwen (2000) determined the role *contextual influences,* which included race, culture, gender, family, education, and religion, on identity formation. Further, they noted that identity salience depended on the contexts in which they were experienced (e.g., college), and that difference played an important role in the experience of multiple, intersecting identities.

At the center of the MMDI is the *core identity*, which is highly personal. The model depicts a set of intersecting circles that represent significant identities and contextual influences. The model determined that both core and intersecting identities fluctuate in salience as they interact with various contextual influences (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Further, when identities are externally imposed by others or context, they are not considered integral to the core and their salience produced heightened internal mindfulness. Ultimately, this model suggests how multiple identities develop and change, and laid the foundation for the RMMDI to include a *meaning-making capacity* (Abes et al., 2007).

Reconceptualized model of multiple dimensions of identity. Abes and Jones' (2004) study helped to create the addition of the *meaning-making capacity* which serves as a *filter* to interpret contextual factors (Abes et al., 2007). Further, the way context influences these interpretations depends on the complexity of the meaning-making filter. Thus, it was determined that those with complex meaning-making capacities were able to both filter contextual influences more readily and determine the way context influenced their identity experiences (Abes et al., 2007). In reconceptualizing the original model, Abes et al. (2007) used Kegan's (1994) constructivist-developmental theory and Baxter Magolda's (2001) self-authorship framework

along with Crenshaw's (1994) intersectionality framework. As such, it was determined that the concurrent experience of identities requires individuals to explore differences within each aspect of their identity (Abes et al., 2007).

RMMDI determined that the depth and permeability of contextual influences depended on the complexity of a person's meaning-making capacity. Therefore, contextual influences and perceptions of identity are closely related. For example, as meaning making grows more complex, limitations of stereotypes regarding a race-based identity are realized and identity labels are found to be insufficient (Abes et al., 2007). Thus, the RMMDI allows for a view of identities as intertwined, interactive, and unique per individual and posits that repetition creates a sense of self at the core (Abes et al., 2007). This confirms that identities are variable in meaning across contexts and can only be understood in relation to each other (Jones & Abes, 2013; Patton et al., 2016).

Overall, the RMMDI's meaning-making capacity concept may provide a more specific depiction of how college students understand the relationships among their multiple, intersecting identities. Thus, the meaning-making capacity "provides a richer portrayal of not only *what* relationships are perceived among identities but *how* they come to be perceived" (Abes et al., 2007, p. 13). Further, the RMMDI opens possibilities for understanding how a person negotiates complexities between the context and identity (Abes et al., 2007). For example, Jehangir (2009) found that identity expression is important to FGCS, particularly in their first year, as many students within this population attempt to assimilate by not disclosing parts of their multiple identities. Therefore, FGC-SGI students may experience various cultural contexts which may prompt tension among their identities throughout the meaning-making process and may

subsequently play a role in how this student population experiences a sense of belonging within college culture.

First-Generation College Students

FGCS are defined as individuals whose parents did not complete a four-year college or university degree in the United States (NASPA, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). While the essence of being a FGCS is fluid and it is challenging to imply that there are generalities (e.g., not all FGCS are low-income or persons of color), when FGCS come from non-White families, they may experience issues with reconciling differing cultures and identities (Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; London, 1992; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Mukherji et al., 2017). FGCS may experience trouble with navigating the college-going process (e.g., applying for college, submitting the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), etc.) due to their family's inexperience with that process. Additionally, FGCS may have trouble assimilating to *college culture*, which refers to cultural norms, rules, and rituals common to a four-year, U.S. college or university experience, due to the lack of a family model or subsequent familial support (Lians-sen, 2016). These challenges may be exacerbated by social or ethnic identities common to this student population (e.g., being a person of color) which indicates an additional cultural tension known as *ethnic culture* and refers to the cultural upbringing of an individual, specifically a culture different from, or outside of, dominant U.S. cultures (NIH, n.d.). These various cultural experiences may intersect or collide to produce bi-cultural or poly-cultural tensions which are then introduced into college culture.

Since FGCS often experience a disconnect from the pre-college and college journeys due in part to differences based on their cultural upbringing, this student population may experience a

lack in cultural capital or experience *cultural capital deficit* (Dong, 2019; Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; Jehangir, 2010; Means & Pyne, 2017; Mukherji et al., 2017). Cultural capital is understood as resources deriving from cultural experiences (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). These cultural resources provide advantages and disadvantages regarding things such as knowledge about higher education (Jehangir, 2010; Winkle-Wagner, 2010). Bourdieu (1979, 1984) coined the term *cultural capital* to partially explain inequalities related to class-based skills and norms not easily visible (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). According to Bourdieu (1979, 1984), cultural capital can be obtained through family origin and educational attainment (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). Thus, according to this understanding, due to not having the cultural capital that would typically derive from a family model, FGCS may lack knowledge on how to integrate into college culture and have difficulty doing so (Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; Jehangir, 2009; Mukherji et al., 2017). This means that some FGCS may not be as prepared for college compared to their non-FGCS peers (Jehangir, 2010). As such, FGCS may be at a higher risk for dropping out of college as compared to students of college-educated and some college-educated parents (Ishitani, 2006; 2016).

Further, as many FGCS are often students of color, they may experience racism, classism, and oppression by their peers and faculty as they are attempting to adjust to unfamiliar cultural norms in higher education (Duffy et al., 2020; Havlik et al., 2020; Jehangir, 2010; Means & Pyne, 2017; Richardson & Skinner, 1992). FGCS typically identify with multiple historically marginalized or minoritized identities. Thus, this student population may attempt to hide their identities to better assimilate into the majority culture (Jehangir, 2010), resulting in the

experience of oppression and otherness, and making the college transition process more challenging (Duffy et al., 2020; Havlik et al., 2020; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018).

It is important to note that although FGCS have historically been framed using a deficit cultural capital model, this student population thrives in several ways as it relates to their cultural and identity-related experiences. Yosso (2005) developed an alternative concept named *community cultural wealth* to challenge Bourdieuean cultural capital theory. Yosso (2005) asserts that using a critical race theory lens "means critiquing deficit theorizing and data that may be limited by its omission of the voices of People of Color. Such deficit-informed research often 'sees' deprivation in Communities of Color" (p. 75). Deficit-thinking implies that minoritized students are at fault for their inexperience, pointing at the family for not supporting their children in their educational efforts. This leads to overgeneralizations regarding family and cultural background and implies that families and their students must change in specific ways to conform to a system that is "effective and equitable" to their needs (Yosso, 2005, p. 75). Thus, according to Yosso (2005), it is important to consider that the traditional view of cultural capital "assumes that White, middle-class culture is the standard" by which other groups must meet and all other forms of culture are compared to this standard (p. 76). Community cultural wealth is then defined as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77).

Thus, using this understanding of community wealth capital, FGCS have and can derive several forms of capital (i.e., aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant) from their cultural upbringing and family unit, which can aid in the college-going and college-

attending processes (Yosso, 2005). According to Yosso (2005), *aspirational capital* is the "ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of real or perceived barriers" (p. 77); *navigational capital* is the "skills needed to maneuver through social institutions not created with communities of color in mind" (p. 80; e.g., PWIs); *social capital* involves tapping into "networks of people and community resources" that provide them with "support to navigate society's institutions" (p. 79); *linguistic capital* is the "intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (p. 78); *familial capital* is the "cultural knowledge nurtured among kin which engages a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family through healthy connection to the cultural community" (p. 79); and *resistant capital* which is the "knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80). It is important to note that the forms of capital established by Yosso (2005) are not mutually exclusive or static, rather they build on each other to construct community cultural wealth.

Common Tensions for FGCS

FGCS face unique tensions associated with successfully transitioning and assimilating to college culture. Common tensions experienced across the FGCS population include lacking a family model resulting in subsequent tensions, navigating multiple, intersecting identities, and experiencing financial stress before and while in college.

Lack of family model and subsequent tension. Pascarella et al. (2004) found that parental education level impacted institution selection, academic and non-academic experiences, and cognitive and noncognitive outcomes of the college experience among FGCS. Richardson and Skinner (1992) found that a lack of college preparation was linked to the family model.

Thus, students with well-developed expectations of college life may be those whose family members attended college, and those with little-to-no expectations were students who belonged to families whose members did not attend college. Parents of FGCS may lack the social capital typically obtained during college-going years (Evans et al., 2020; Havlik et al., 2020). Thus, the lack of social capital can impact the choices FGCS make regarding institutional choice, affects the experiences FGCS have once enrolled (Pascarella et al., 2004), and leads to family members experiencing difficulty with supporting FGCS throughout their college experiences (Evans et al., 2020; Havlik et al., 2020). When FGCS do not have parental experiences by which they can model, it can impact confidence and subsequently lead to feelings of not belonging or isolation in college (Jehangir, 2009; Jehangir, 2010; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Mukherji et al., 2017). Further, this may result in difficulty with applying academic experiences to their future career aspirations (Gibbons et al., 2019; Havlik et al., 2020; Jehangir, 2009; Mukherji et al., 2017).

Additionally, the lack of a family model means FGCS are less likely to receive the necessary support from their family while they pursue their college degrees (Evans et al., Gibbons et al., 2019; Havlik et al., 2020). FGCS' parents desire to support their children but are unable to offer the type of advice or support necessary for the transition process due to their low or inexperience with the college-going process (Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019). Consequently, while this student population needs to shift from a dependence on family relationships to develop, they often do not have the support from home to do so (London, 1989; Gibbons et al., 2019; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). London (1989) found that upward educational mobility for FGCS meant both gains and losses. For example, FGCS were subject to losing their place in their family, a role within their family unit, or a loss of self in the process of gaining an

education: “Moving up, in other words, requires a ‘leaving off’ and a ‘taking on,’ the shedding of one social identity and the acquisition of another” (London, 1992, p. 8).

Further, FGCS often face competing pressures between what their family wants for them and what they want for themselves (Evans et al., 2020; Havlik et al., 2020; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Mukherji et al., 2007). For example, parents may not want their children to attend college at all or will try to persuade their child to attend a local college or particular program that is close in proximity (Gibbons et al., 2019; London, 1989). Thus, FGCS face pressure to make their family and community proud (Evans et al., 2020; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). Ultimately, FGCS’ upward mobility results in difficulty for this student population to reconcile the pressures of multiple cultures, which produces and exacerbates a disconnect between the cultures, and subsequently, within their family unit (Jehangir, 2009; London, 1989; London, 1992; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016).

Social and intersecting identities. FGCS often experience intersecting identities that become ever-present throughout their academic pursuits (Duffy et al., 2020; Havlik et al., 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017). Means and Pyne (2017) found that FGCS felt tension between their identity and social expectations, namely due to feeling unwelcome or disconnected within the campus environment. While students do not routinely self-identify as *first-generation* and more commonly do so by race or ethnicity (Mukherji et al., 2017), FGCS experience social identities that are often minoritized (Duffy et al., 2020; Havlik et al., 2020). For example, FGCS may experience minoritized, intersecting identities of being low-income and a person of color (Havlik et al., 2020). Specifically, feelings of isolation are seemingly exacerbated at the intersection of FGCS status and race/ethnicity (Havlik et al., 2020). While identity expression is important in

the first year, it can be challenging for FGCS, who may lack cultural and social capital, to explore, name, and accept their intersecting social identities. This causes “disequilibrium” within their college experience (Jehangir, 2010, p. 543). Disequilibrium can cause conflict internally (e.g., processing understanding of self) and externally (e.g., processing academic materials) (Jehangir, 2010). Additionally, FGCS of color are often grappling with the transition between their cultural upbringing and college culture, which leads to this student group living “on the margin of two cultures” (London, 1992, p. 6), producing bi or polycultural tensions which are then introduced into college culture.

According to the literature, socially constructed identities constructed through “interactions with the broader social context in which dominant values dictate norms and expectations” (Torres et al., 2009, p. 577). Thus, when determining identity salience among social identities, several factors should be considered. Ethier and Deaux (1994) posited that when a change in context (e.g., entering college) makes an identity (e.g., FGCS) salient, it is more likely that the individual will highly identify with the respective group (e.g., other FGCS). However, salience is not constant, especially when considering long-term contextual change (e.g., spending four or more years in college). The last item to consider is that choice is not always an option when it comes to identity salience due to existing privilege and oppression structures (Patton et al., 2016).

Thus, FGCS reported that certain social identities, like being first-generation in college, were related to feelings of otherness (Havlik et al., 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017). Otherness is described as “a sense of possessing an outsider status, feelings of not belonging, being viewed as different or less than, being misunderstood, excluded, or invalidated, or being disadvantaged in

comparison to the majority" (Havlik et al., 2020, p. 124). These experiences are often intensified through a lack of inclusion in student-centered programming (e.g., clubs) at an institution (Havlik et al., 2020; Jehangir, 2010). Racism was also a common issue among FGCS of color, with faculty contributing to feelings of otherness (Havlik et al., 2020). FGCS who faced discrimination were less likely to feel belonging within their college environment (Duffy et al., 2020). Racism and oppression experienced by FGCS of color were especially prevalent if the students attended PWIs (Havlik et al., 2020; Richardson & Skinner, 1992). FGCS of color reported feeling othered by faculty and peers in the classroom due to a lack of inclusion of their lived experiences which are often dissimilar to the majority population (Havlik et al., 2020; Jehangir, 2009). In some cases, these students felt pressured to represent their racial/ethnic group within the classroom, intensifying feelings of otherness and isolation (Havlik et al., 2020). Thus, some FGCS felt that changing who they were or how they behaved was necessary to avoid social isolation (London, 1992).

Low-income, financial stress. Finances are consistently identified as a tension among FGCS and a source of stress throughout the college experience (Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; Havlik et al., 2020). For example, finances can produce tension during the college application process prior to the student being enrolled (Gibbons et al., 2019). As some FGCS come from lower socioeconomic classes and attend lower-resourced high schools, this creates disadvantages during college application and inadequate preparation due to a lack of information (Gibbons et al., 2019; Havlik et al., 2020). Further, financial stress was also linked to feelings of isolation in college (Duffy et al., 2020). For example, some FGCS felt guilty attending college knowing their parents were struggling financially to help pay for their academic pursuits

(Gibbons et al., 2019). Additionally, some FGCS often worked full or part-time to pay for college and to simultaneously support their families (Garcia, 2010; Warburton et al., 2001). Subsequently, greater work responsibilities were linked to lessened involvement on campus and lowered peer interactions (Pascarella et al., 2004), which may negatively impact a sense of belonging.

Further, once in college, finances can be a source of stress as there is often a lack of understanding of the financial aid application process (e.g., when and how often to apply) and regarding financial aid awards (e.g., loans) (Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; Richardson & Skinner, 1992). Finances can also be particularly limiting when, or if, this student group desires to participate in certain academic and social activities such as Greek Life or study abroad (Havlik et al., 2020). Additionally, Havlik et al. (2020) found that faculty may exacerbate financial stress among FGCS through isolating or assumptive statements regarding the majority who do not face similar financial stress or by not providing an opportunity for FGCS to share lower-income experiences.

Common Supports for FGCS

While FGCS experienced tensions during the transition into college culture, common supports were shown to assist with transition and assimilation processes. Common supports included targeted support services and HIPs as well as various supportive relationships. Supportive relationships included family, peers, and faculty.

Targeted support services and HIPs. FGCS need opportunities to gain skills that will assist them with navigating college culture while also exploring their own cultural and social identities (Jehangir, 2010). Campus support services were noted as a supplement for the lack of

social capital this student group may experience (Means & Pyne, 2017). Services most supportive to students included mentoring, tutoring, and writing centers (Means & Pyne, 2017; Richardson & Skinner, 1992). Additionally, HIPs were found to positively support the FGCS experience (Demetriou et al., 2017; Dong, 2019; Havlik et al., 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017). HIPs of particular use to FGCS include service-learning, study abroad, and learning communities (Jehangir, 2009; Means & Pyne, 2017). Dong (2019) found that FGCS who engaged in HIPs were more likely to overcome challenges associated with their intersecting social identities. For example, learning communities, particularly those centered on multiculturalism, served as affirming support systems for FGCS to discuss their cultural experiences (Jehangir, 2009).

Further, Jehangir (2010) emphasized the importance of validation to FGCS' sense of worth and belonging. Particularly, campus involvement allowed for social connections to form and for social and professional networking to take place (Demetriou et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2020). Additionally, Evans et al. (2020) found that specialized programs for FGCS were necessary to fill in gaps where parental experiences were missing. Further, early engagement with multiple identity statuses may help FGCS with self-validation (Jehangir, 2010). Although FGCS were less likely to be engaged in certain campus activities and peer interactions as compared to continuing generation peers, this student group experienced more benefits from involvement than other student groups (Pascarella et al., 2004). Thus, creating space for identity exploration empowered FGCS trying to assimilate to college culture (Jehangir, 2009, 2010), and targeted support practices seemingly fostered validation for this student population (Havlik et al., 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017).

Again, it is important to note that there is an alternative perspective of capital formation as a facilitator of the FGCS college experience. As Yosso (2005) described, students like FGCS, whose characteristics are fluid and diverse, may bring experiences from their upbringing to their college experience. For example, FGCS may be able to rely on *navigational capital* within community cultural wealth to assist with maneuvering through college culture and common, subsequent constraints (Yosso, 2005).

Supportive relationships. Family support enhanced success in college and increased a sense of belonging among some FGCS (Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; Havlik et al., 2020; Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). Although some FGCS may be discouraged from attending college for various familial reasons (Gibbons et al., 2019; London, 1989), in other cases, FGCS reported being continuously encouraged by their parents to attend college and persevered when things were challenging (Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019). Being the first in the family to complete college and becoming a role model for other family members served as a motivator for this student population to achieve their degrees (Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; Havlik et al., 2020); but can also be viewed as pressure to succeed (Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019). FGCS reported feeling motivated to fulfill their parents' dreams and reduce the burdens common to families of FGCS (Havlik et al., 2020), as is evidenced in *aspirational capital* (Yosso, 2005). Even when faced with barriers, students found resiliency in their family's desire to seek better outcomes. Additionally, Yosso (2005) described *familial capital* as an asset for communities of color such as Hispanic/Latinx. Familial capital provides individuals with kinship ties that prove useful when navigating college culture as there is a supportive connection to

community and its resources. Thus, since FGCS are often also people of color, FGCS may be able to rely on kinship ties for support during the college journey (Yosso, 2005).

Further, specific campus relationships support the FGCS college experience. Peer support was positively related to academic integration and fostered social integration (Demetriou et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; Havlik et al., 2020; Jehangir, 2009; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). Specifically, peer mentors provided insight into the college experience and served as motivation for the FGCS to succeed (Demetriou et al., 2017; Richardson & Skinner, 1992). Additionally, validation was derived from peer interactions (Rendon, 1994), especially when those conversations centered around social identities (Jehangir, 2009).

Formal mentors, particularly when seeking help from outside the family unit, aided FGCS with the college transition (Demetriou et al., 2017; Gibbons et al., 2019; Havlik et al., 2020). Means and Pyne (2017) found that faculty contributed to students' sense of belonging, particularly when faculty showed explicit support and consistent outreach. FGCS reported receiving critical insight on the college experience from faculty, which promoted feelings of belonging (Demetriou et al., 2017; Gibbons et al., 2019). Informational support came primarily from mentor-like relationships, while other types of support came from peer relationships or academic services (Gibbons et al., 2019). Additionally, FGCS received support for their racial/ethnic identities from faculty that provided space for identity expression and discussion (Havlik et al., 2020).

Second-Generation Immigrant Students

Generational status refers to whether a student or one or more of the student's parents was born outside the United States (Arbeit et al., 2016). Thus, SGIS are defined as students born in the United States to at least one parent born abroad, or the first generation born in the United States (Arbeit et al., 2016; Baum & Flores, 2011). When compared to non-immigrant peers, on average, immigrant students of all generational statuses register, persist, and complete a degree at similar rates (Hachey & McCallen, 2018). This varies depending on race/ethnicity, generational status, and socioeconomic status as college enrollment and attainment differ partially due to parental educational attainment differences (Arbeit et al., 2016; Hachey & McCallen, 2018). SGIS are more likely to enroll in four-year institutions when compared to other immigrant generational statuses (e.g., first-generation or third-generation immigrants) (Hagy & Staniec, 2002). Additionally, SGIS are more likely to achieve college success when compared to their first-generation immigrant counterparts (Baum & Flores, 2011). In 2016, 27% of SGIS in the United States obtained some college degree (Arbeit et al., 2016). Similar to FGCS, SGIS typically experienced upward mobility compared to their parents (Alba & Nee, 2003 as cited in Orupabo et al., 2019). Some immigrant populations commonly included in higher education studies regarding SGIS attainment and experiences are Hispanic/Latinx, Black/African-American, and Asian/East Asian (Arbeit et al., 2016; Hudley, 2016; Orupabo et al., 2019; Portes, 2009).

There are important differences between non-immigrant and immigrant students regarding salience of cultural background and perception of belonging in college (Hachey & McCallen, 2018). U.S. immigration history plays a role in some of these differences. Differences

can be traced to U.S. immigration policy and trends over centuries and decades and has likely contributed to differences in educational attainment by various immigrant populations (Baum & Flores, 2011; Hachey & McCallen, 2018). For example, children of immigrants under 18 years old who are undocumented or are U.S. citizens born to undocumented parents face legal and financial barriers to completing a post-secondary education. This population is ineligible for federal financial aid and some states prohibit their admission into college (e.g., South Carolina) (Baum & Flores, 2011).

Additionally, immigrant students of all generational statuses often experienced several intersecting identities prompting an experience of multiple minoritized statuses (Mukherji et al., 2017; Stebleton et al., 2017). These minoritized statuses resulted in implicit and explicit biases within campus-related interactions (Stebleton et al., 2017). SGIS specifically may face unique cultural tensions during their upbringing and subsequent experiences during the pre-college and college journeys. These tensions may derive from intersections or collisions regarding their origin culture (i.e., ethnic culture) and the culture of their upbringing and residence (i.e., U.S. culture) (Mukherji et al., 2017). Similar to FGCS, this student population must navigate these bi- or poly-cultural tensions and then introduce them into college culture, potentially creating complications during the college integration process resulting in further complications with the development of belonging.

Further, immigrant origin and generational status play critical roles in how SGIS view their belonging in college (Arbeit et al., 2016; Baum & Flores, 2011). For example, SGIS, in particular, felt the “burden of doubt” or the feeling that they had to prove themselves to their peers and family members as a way of validating their belonging in college and the United States

(Orupabo et al., 2019, p. 13). Orupabo et al. (2019) found that SGIS used multiple frames to activate cultural resources (e.g., support from the social environment) to achieve academic success, constructing resources through a sense of belonging within the academic environment (Orupabo et al., 2019). This was due in part to the burden of doubt which prompted a higher level of commitment to educational attainment to supplement for the lack of familial and cultural support (Orupabo et al., 2019).

The SGIS population is fluid as some SGIS may not identify with their ethnic culture, may identify as biracial or White, or may be identified by others in one or both ways (Mukherji et al., 2017). Although there may be some commonalities across this population, it is difficult to assume generalities regarding reason for immigration, country of origin, etc. Yet, U.S. immigration history and patterns may serve as a backdrop for the immense diversity of this population (Arbeit et al., 2016; Baum & Flores, 2011; Mukherji et al., 2017). Mukherji et al. (2017) found that the negative impact on educational attainment is specific to the country of origin, with immigrants from more politically stable countries generally faring better in college.

SGIS experience several types of tension during the college transition (Baum & Flores, 2011; Stebleton et al., 2012, 2014). On average, they work harder than non-immigrant students to learn about college culture and expectations in order to transition more seamlessly into the college environment (Stebleton et al., 2014). Tensions this student population experiences include family composition and intersecting identities.

Common Tensions for SGIS

While SGIS experience similar transitional tensions as FGCS, there are tensions unique to this student population. Tensions surrounding family composition produce subsequent

conflicts related to who, if any, within the family has higher educational experience. Tensions surrounding ethnic, intersecting identities emphasize the variability with identity experiences and their subsequent role during the college journey.

Family composition and tension. Portes et al. (2009) used the theory of segmented assimilation to analyze and understand SGIS. They posited that three exogenous factors impact SGIS as they navigate college life: "1) human capital that their parents possess; 2) the social context that receives them in America; and 3) the composition of the immigrant family" (p. 1079). Family composition, in particular, impacted SGIS' educational outcomes (Portes et al., 2009). Family composition may include the number of parents, if any, and number of siblings who have attended college. Further, familial attitudes toward education vary by country of origin and may impact educational experience (Baum & Flores, 2011; Mukherji et al., 2017). Additionally, parental education level may determine the level of support provided to SGIS. Orupabo et al. (2019) found that families with parents who have an education tended to create more supportive environments. Mukerji et al. (2017) found that immigrant students from regions like South Asia are more likely to have parents with a college degree compared to immigrant students from other regions (e.g., Central America).

Additionally, SGIS may feel stuck between two cultures, prompting them to figure out how to exist within both (Hachey & McCallen, 2018). Stebleton et al. (2014) found that immigrant students overall often need to learn about the cultural expectations of college as they differ significantly from their cultural upbringing or home life. However, Hudley (2016) found that SGIS, specifically, are equipped to overcome cultural challenges and, thereby, better equipped to matriculate as compared to their first-generation immigrant counterparts. Therefore,

ethnic culture may contribute to SGIS' community cultural wealth prompting this student group to be better equipped (Yosso, 2005). These points further the importance of understanding differences among immigrant generational status groups. This also brings to light the importance of fluidity found among the SGIS population regarding cultural and identity experiences and subsequent tension.

Ethnic and intersecting identities. SGIS possess intersecting identities that can make the college transition process complicated (Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Mukherji et al., 2017; Stebleton et al., 2014). Factors such as parental education and immigrant generational status combined with standard ethnic categories are common to the SGIS college experience (Mukherji et al., 2017). Mukherji et al. (2017) argued that for SGIS to assimilate into college culture, factors associated with their intersecting identities must be understood. For example, the intersection of social identities was associated with perceptions of campus climate among SGIS (Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Stebleton et al., 2014). Hachey and McCallen (2018) found that, compared to White students, students at the intersection of race and immigration status reported feeling as though their immigrant backgrounds were not respected, resulting in perceptions of a negative campus climate. Mukherji et al. (2017) found it was more common for minoritized students to self-identify by race/ethnicity but not by other social identities (e.g., second-generation immigrant), which resulted in this student population seeking necessary support services less often.

Ethnicity and ethnic identity refer to the feelings, attitudes, knowledge, behaviors that center on self-identification with the group and the of commitment to the group commitment (Patton et al., 2016). Many individuals who experience upbringings outside of a dominant culture

have heightened awareness of their ethnicity in positive and negative ways. Thus, individuals with non-dominant ethnic roots are faced with deciding whether to acculturate to dominant culture. Acculturation begins the moment two or more cultural groups interact, and can range from assimilation, marginalization, separation to integration. Integration involves adapting bi/polyculturalism to maintain aspects of the ethnic group and acquire aspects of the dominant group as this is a generally less stressful, more successful form of adaptation (Patton et al., 2016). Further, SGI and other immigrant-status students can experience various forms of isolation as part of the integration process which often requires further negotiation of their bi/polycultural values and beliefs, resulting in implications for their identity (Hachey & McCallen; 2018; Patton et al., 2016; Stebleton et al., 2014).

Therefore, identification with multiple social and/or ethnic identities yielded the likelihood of implicit and explicit forms of discrimination among immigrant students (Stebleton et al., 2017). Consequently, racial discrimination increased the difficulties associated with navigating college culture and impacted a sense of belonging among immigrant students (Pivovarova & Powers, 2019; Stebleton et al., 2014, 2017). For example, Orupabo et al. (2019) found that SGIS identifying as women faced tension as they navigated cultural expectations within the majority society that differed significantly from their native culture. Specific to the college context, bias was also found through faculty and staff's lack of knowledge on properly supporting or integrating SGIS within specific contexts in college (Stebleton et al., 2017). Additionally, socioeconomic class status played a role in how SGIS fared in college and how much they felt like they belonged (Orupabo et al., 2019). Thus, Stebleton et al. (2014) found that

designating spaces for immigrant students of all generational statuses to explore issues related to their cultural experiences allowed them to feel more connected to their institution.

Common Supports for SGIS

SGIS require specific cultural resources unique to their population. These supports are often derived through feelings of belonging within their institutions (Orupabo et al., 2019). Some specific supports shown to assist with the SGIS transition process included family composition, campus support services and relationships, and a diverse campus climate.

Family composition and support. Family composition and involvement enable assimilation and academic attainment among immigrant students (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Mukherji et al., 2017; Orupabo et al., 2019; Pivovarova & Powers, 2019; Portes et al., 2009). Portes et al. (2009) and Orupabo et al. (2019) found that parents and siblings typically supported college plans and provided encouragement throughout the process regardless of their college-going histories. Further, Kao and Tienda (1995) found that parental enthusiasm was predictive of educational attainment among first and second-generation immigrant students. SGIS reported feeling motivated to fulfill their parents' dreams and to reduce the burdens common to immigrant families, such as the inability to obtain high-paying or stable jobs due to language barrier or lack of college degree (Orupabo et al., 2019).

Furthermore, when SGIS identified with their family's migration experiences, they were better able to envision their academic achievement (Orupabo et al., 2019; Portes et al., 2009). Identification with parental migration relates to the *immigrant advantage*. This is the idea that immigrants overall generally have higher levels of capital upon arrival to the United States than is common in their countries of origin (Baum & Flores, 2011; Kao, 2004). Kao and Tienda

(1995) alluded to the idea of the immigrant advantage in their study of educational performance of immigrant youth, positing that SGIS are particularly well-positioned for educational success due to cultural and linguistic fluency. Thus, community cultural wealth can be applied to SGIS as it relates to the advantage this population has with arriving to college with multiple languages (Yosso, 2005) as seen through *linguistic capital* or the "intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). However, Hagy and Staniec (2002) found conflicting results regarding the immigrant advantage, finding that while still present, this effect lessened among SGIS compared to other generations.

In addition to being advantaged due to their immigrant status, SGIS specifically performed better than first and third-plus generations due to *immigrant optimism* (Pivovarova & Powers, 2019). Immigrant optimism is another way to explain the immigrant advantage. Immigrant optimism suggests that the higher the expectations are for immigration into the United States, the higher the likelihood of resources sought and obtained to assist with any obstacles experienced among immigrants (Baum & Flores, 2011; Hudley, 2016; Orupabo et al., 2019). Orupabo et al. (2019) found that immigrant optimism motivated SGIS to validate their parents' sacrifices with academic achievement. Again, community cultural wealth becomes important in its *aspirational capital* form. SGIS are able to pursue higher education because their families have allowed their children to "dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). This creates a resiliency among SGIS that is reflective of immigrant optimism which may motivate success in the collegiate experience (Orupabo et al., 2019; Yosso, 2005).

Campus climate and relationships. Campus climate is a significant predictor of a sense of belonging among SGIS (Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Stebleton et al., 2014). "Campus climate is the current perceptions and attitudes of faculty, staff, and students regarding issues of diversity on campus" (Reason & Rankin, 2006, p. 11). Additionally, the geographical location of a campus impacted immigrant students' pre-college and college experiences. For example, campuses located in areas heavily populated with immigrants often did a better job of recognizing and supporting immigrant students of any generational status (Stebleton et al., 2017). Additionally, faculty and staff were better informed on the challenges this student population faced within more diverse, geographical campus locations (Stebleton et al., 2017). As described previously, designated spaces positively impacted a sense of belonging and promoted diversity on campus (Stebleton et al., 2014). Institutions that offered and routinely advertised these designated spaces to the appropriate populations fostered a higher sense of belonging among immigrant students (Stebleton et al., 2014, 2017).

Further, HIPs and other targeted support services promoted college integration and feelings of belonging among the SGIS population (Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Stebleton et al., 2012, 2014, 2017). Stebleton et al. (2014) posited that HIPs purposefully designed to include faculty and peer interactions highly supported the college transition. Learning communities (LC), when paired with targeted courses for first-year students (e.g., first-year seminar), were particularly successful in promoting integration and belonging (Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Stebleton et al., 2012). LCs allowed immigrant students to better integrate into campus life, learn about support services, build peer relationships, and create faculty connections (Hachey & McCallen, 2018). For example, Jehangir's (2010) study of a multicultural LC consisting

primarily of FGCS of color found that when identity exploration, community-building, and educational agency were encouraged, students cultivated a sense of voice within and connection to their institutions.

Additionally, targeted assistance programs and designated spaces for diverse student interactions were supportive in cultivating a sense of belonging and the overall transition (Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Means & Pyne, 2017; Portes et al., 2009; Stebleton et al., 2014, 2017). Designated spaces may specifically serve as areas where students can safely explore their identities on campus, further cultivating a connection between students and the institution (Stebleton et al., 2014). Additionally, these spaces may allow immigrants and other minoritized students to interact with each other, thereby highlighting similarities in experiences and subsequently fostering a sense of commonplace in college culture (Hachey & McCallen, 2018).

Moreover, the cultivation of a significant relationship outside of the family unit greatly impacted the college experience for immigrant students (Portes et al., 2009). This relationship may be with a peer, professor, etc. but is generally not with the SGIS' parent or a significant other (Portes et al., 2009). Portes et al. (2009) found that outside support generally centered on providing motivation and advice for the student to persist and graduate. Hachey and McCallen (2017) found that peer mentoring programs provided opportunities for immigrant students to feel belonging. Stebleton et al. (2012, 2014) found that peer interactions and peer-centered networking had the greatest impact on the sense of belonging among immigrant students. Faculty interactions also impacted belonging, particularly when the faculty learned the students' names and established relationships (Stebleton et al., 2012, 2014). Further, immigrant students felt validated and included when faculty made the effort to understand their cultural complexities and

unique experiences (Stebleton et al., 2017). Additionally, the strength of peer and faculty relationships fluctuated based on immigrant generation status (Stebleton et al., 2012, 2014). For example, first-generation immigrant students may face unique issues such as mastering English, which may inadvertently impact their relationships with peers and/or faculty (Stebleton et al., 2014).

Summary

This review of literature has established the importance of a sense of belonging during assimilation into college culture among minoritized students. Sense of belonging illustrates how college students perceive their acceptance within their college communities (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Means & Pyne, 2017). The existing barriers and facilitators of a sense of belonging for minoritized student populations were also examined within this review. Further, this review emphasizes the importance of gathering more insight on sense of belonging among minoritized students experiencing multiple, intersecting identities.

While there is extensive research on the overall facilitation of belonging among various minoritized students, including FGCS, there is little known about the lived experiences of students identifying as both FGC and SGI students; nor how this unique student group experiences a sense of belonging during college as they simultaneously experience their identities during the college journey. The literature shows commonalities among FGCS and SGIS as it pertains to the overall college experience; therefore, better understanding what contributes to the college experience and a sense of belonging for students at the intersection of FGCS and SGIS identities is important. Thus, the research reviewed in this chapter justifies the need for further study of students identifying as FGC-SGI students and outlines specific gaps in

the literature that the current study will address regarding a sense of belonging combined with identity navigation and intersection.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Students belonging to first-generation college and immigrant identity groups report lower cultural fit and lower sense of belonging in college as compared to non-immigrant, continuing generation students (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Duran et al., 2020; Gopalan & Brady, 2019; Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Means & Pyne, 2017). Thus, there is an intersection of college-going generation status and U.S. immigrant-generation status that needs to be considered regarding the college experience; particularly, how these bi/polycultural experiences may play a role in the experience with sense of belonging in college (Mukherji et al., 2017). The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of U.S. university and college students identifying as first-generation in college and second-generation immigrants in the United States, with a particular focus on experiences that are associated with a sense of belonging at this identity intersection. The following were the research questions used to focus this research:

> **RQ_1:** How do college students attending a four-year, public, predominantly White institution (PWI) experience first-generation college and second-generation immigrant identities?
>
> **RQ_2:** In what ways do first-generation college, second-generation immigrant students experience a sense of belonging during college?

Research Design and Rationale

This study followed a qualitative, phenomenological design through the epistemological lens of constructivism. Constructivism honors that multiple realities can exist; thus, this lens allowed for the capturing and understanding of multiple realities. The use of constructivism

implies that meaning-making is a collective effort and acknowledges that there will be differing constructed realities throughout this effort. The guiding assumption of constructivism is that researchers should try to understand the world of lived experience from those who live in it. In addition, constructivist research indicates that contextual factors should be considered in making sense of the world (Mertens, 2020). Qualitative inquiry was an appropriate way to conduct this study because exploring FGC-SGI students' navigation of identity intersections and their experience of sense of belonging was an examination of how participants find meaning in their overall lives as college students (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Thus, using qualitative methods provided opportunity for participants to share rich stories about their lived experiences with sense of belonging as FGC-SGI students (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Therefore, constructivism allowed participants to co-construct the meaning of their college experiences, while qualitative methods were used to infer themes associated with FGC-SGI identities and belonging (Mertens, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Phenomenological research attempts to describe a shared significance among several individuals' lived experiences of a phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2014). As Vagle (2018) explained, a phenomenological design seeks to thoroughly describe complex phenomena to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomena. The research design specifically followed a hermeneutical approach to phenomenology as it is "oriented to the description and interpretation of the fundamental structures of the lived experience, and to the recognition of the meaning of the pedagogical value of this experience" (Guillen, 2019, p. 222). Hermeneutical phenomenology encourages the researcher to exercise openness to everyday experiences and to acknowledge that an interpretative understanding provides access to otherwise "non-observable

realities" (Guillen, 2019, p. 223; Vagle, 2018). Further, eliciting rich, narrative descriptions from participants regarding their lived experiences is a central part of the hermeneutic tradition (Vagle, 2018). Additionally, hermeneutic phenomenology allows for the use of open-ended and semi-structured interview questions which were used in this study (Creswell, 2013). Last, in this approach, theories or conceptual frameworks can help to focus the scope, to make decisions about participants, to determine how research questions should be addressed, and to help interpret the findings (Neubauer et al., 2019).

This design aimed to capture the participants' subjective experience through understanding perceptions and meanings of a phenomenon and sought to describe occurrences from the participants' points of view. Thus, a hermeneutical phenomenological design was used to study the lived experiences of a *sense of belonging* among participants who identify as FGC-SGI. More specifically, phenomenology was used to understand the particular phenomenon of *sense of belonging in college while navigating multiple, intersecting identities*. To emphasize the *universal essence* of the participants' lived experiences with belonging, I have described their subjective experiences with the phenomenon (Vagle, 2018).

Researcher Role and Positionality

I recruited participants, collected, and analyzed data throughout this study. I was working at the research site as a faculty member in Communication Studies and student affairs personnel in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences throughout the duration of the study. Additionally, I have mentored students who identify as FGC-SGI. Thus, these relationships provided access into the FGC-SGI student community. The topic of this research study was selected based on my professional and personal experiences. I identified as a FGCS during my undergraduate studies. I

was the first member of my nuclear family to obtain a college degree, as my parents and older sibling did not receive a post-secondary education. Additionally, I identify as an SGIS in the United States. Both of my parents were born and raised in the Middle East, and my siblings and I were born and raised in California. I have spent the last 10 years teaching and advising undergraduate students in higher education. Additionally, I directed a first-year learning community in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences for four years at the institution of my employment. These experiences have exposed me to the concept of “belonging" related to college success and prompted me to reflect on my own experiences as a FGC-SGI student who participated in a learning community during my first year of college.

Thus, I was most interested in using my professional and academic experiences to assist minoritized student groups with experiencing a sense of belonging throughout their college experience. I firmly believe that a sense of belonging can significantly impact persistence and attainment among student populations experiencing multiple, intersecting identities, such as FGC-SGI student identities. I also believe that students with diverse cultural backgrounds can offer a great deal of cultural wealth to their college experience and campus environment but need the recognition of their cultural wealth and the opportunity to utilize their knowledge and experiences to thrive. Due to my self-identification as a FGC-SGI student, and professional roles as faculty, advisor, and learning community coordinator, my role as a researcher was essential to the recruitment of participants, data analysis process, and discussion of findings. In the hermeneutical phenomenological approach, the researcher is specified as being in constant dialogue with derived meanings rather than simply describing their essence (Vagle, 2018). Additionally, according to hermeneutical phenomenology, human experiences are always “in the

world", meaning we are a part of the world and its activities (Vagle, 2018, p. 8). Thus, rather than bracket or separate myself, I interpreted meaning by looking at my own contextual relationships with the experiences discussed in this study (Vagle, 2018). Additionally, this research was personally significant and a way of conducting "me"-search (Altenmüller et al., 2021); thus, conducting this study uncovered experiences, thoughts, and feelings I had as an undergraduate student that, at times, were shared with the study participants.

Subsequently, my positionality and past experiences with the topic influenced data collection and analysis processes as my preconceived notions filtered the lens I used to obtain and understand data. Specifically, my strong sentiments toward this student population and self-identification to the population produced preconceived understandings and perspectives, at times, regarding the lived experience of sense of belonging among this student's population. According to hermeneutical phenomenology, researchers capture their reflections of their own experiences with the phenomenon in writing to develop a dynamic and meaningful interpretation (Neubauer et al., 2019). In order to adhere to this approach as well as mitigate these potential biases, I engaged in reflective journaling throughout the study to document my feelings before, during, and after each interview. Within journal entries, I described if and how I related to the participant's story, and my general impressions of the participant and their experiences. Further, I requested that each participant perform a transcript review to ensure accuracy and I attempted to utilize member checking with all participants during the drafting of chapters 4 and 5 with. Lastly, I utilized a peer debriefer, a classmate who is also studying minoritized groups, during the early stages of transcript analysis to help me consider alternative perspectives. These

techniques were employed with the understanding that my subjectivity will influence data analysis and discussion.

Protection of Human Subjects

In addition to obtaining institutional review board (IRB) approval prior to recruiting and collecting data, I adhered to several ethical considerations prior to, during, and following data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). First, study objectives were made available during the recruitment process as well as articulated prior to each the interview. Each participant was informed during the recruitment process and reminded before the interviews of their voluntary participation. Additionally, participants were informed that they could decline to answer any questions or withdraw from the study without issue at any time, if they so chose. Each participant submitted an electronically acknowledged consent form, and a copy of that form was automatically emailed to each participant after it was completed. Last, participants were provided with written transcriptions of the data collected and given an overview of themes and key findings.

As the primary investigator, I am aware of the identity of the participants; thus, all participants were asked to select pseudonyms at the conclusion of the interviews. Other identifiable data, like the names of people and places, were removed or replaced with additional pseudonyms within the transcripts, allowing me to comfortably share findings. All informed consent forms and study data, including a master list of participant pseudonyms, were stored in ITS-approved locations (Google Drive). Additionally, my dissertation chair and I are the only persons who have access to study data which are securely stored on password-protected cloud-based networks. To ensure the security of the participants, the master list of participant

pseudonyms was destroyed once the study was completed. Findings of the study are reported using only the pseudonyms assigned to the participants to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. Additionally, I offered transparency to participants regarding my self-identification and experiences as an FGC-SGI student during recruitment and data collection.

Overall, steps taken to ensure confidentiality and safety were clearly explained to each participant. I attempted to minimize potential discomfort by establishing an atmosphere of mutual respect and support, and by sharing my experiences with being an FGC-SGI student. Additionally, I prepared a list of relevant campus resources (e.g., counseling services) in the event participants expressed feelings that may have required their use. A breach of confidentiality did not occur throughout the duration of the study, and participants did not express feeling any discomfort throughout the interview process.

Sampling

Site of Research

Participants were recruited from a large, public, four-year, PWI in a large, metropolitan city in the Southeastern United States. Recruiting from a PWI provided a backdrop for examining cultural experiences to emerge among the population as they noted experiencing aspects of PWI college culture that differed from their own ethnic culture(s). A four-year institution allowed for a more established experience of a sense of belonging as the amount of time spent (i.e., several semesters) allowed for the experience of isolation and/or belonging to occur, change, and/or shift. Using a large, public institution increased the chance of adequately locating and recruiting participants who fit the criteria, as these institutions typically boast a diversity of students across the state, country, and world. The institution that was used for this

study has over 50 student-run organizations and clubs which have ethnic, cultural, and other minoritized themes (e.g., FGCS and LGBTQ+). It is important to note that the recruited participants were considered persisting students at the institution at the time of the study. Additionally, because I work and study at the research site, I had an increased level of access to the population. Interviews were offered in-person, where possible, supporting the use of my place of employment and schooling as the proposed research site.

Population and Sample

Before recruitment started, I identified potential participants with specific qualifiers. Participants who met the following requirements were sought: 1) self-identify as first-generation in college, 2) self-identify as a second-generation immigrant in the United States, 3) enrolled as a full-time undergraduate student at the research site, and 4) classified as a current sophomore, junior, or senior and have continuous enrollment at the institution for at least one year or two consecutive semesters. First-year (freshmen) students at the institution were originally excluded from this study because the sentiment was that new students typically need to spend some time acclimating to the environment, norms and rules, and overall culture of their college or university upon entry into an institution. However, this qualification was loosened due to issues with recruitment, combined with interest and willingness to participate among first-year students. Participants of several racial/ethnic backgrounds were sought to derive a more inclusive picture of the experience of a sense of belonging across many racial/ethnic cultures. Each participant completed a preliminary self-report questionnaire to determine self-identification as FGCS and SGIS, and continuous enrollment at the institution. This information was accepted as truth as no additional verification was sought prior to interviewing.

Qualitative research typically permits the use of a small number of participants to allow for a depth in understanding of the participants and context. For this study, 8-12 participants were sought. The final sample was comprised of 10 participants, including two participants who were interviewed during a pilot study and subsequently gave consent for their data to be used. This is also in line with a hermeneutical phenomenological design as it is generally recommended researchers obtain a small sample of participants, between 5-25, that can be interviewed in-depth (Creswell, 2013; Vagle, 2018). It was determined that data saturation had been met, according to the research questions, at the completion of the tenth interview.

Recruitment focused on outreach to racial/ethnically focused student organizations and programs that strive to include a variety of racial/ethnic student backgrounds (e.g., Latinx Student Organization). First, I contacted members of the executive board of various racial/ethnically affiliated student organizations to share the study and recruit participants during organizational meetings. During recruitment presentations, I shared a brief presentation which included a QR Code to the informed consent form and eligibility questionnaire. Next, I contacted interested students via collected email addresses who qualified for the next phase of the study. Participants who qualified and agreed to participate were directed to an online calendar to select the date, time, and format (e.g., in-person or virtual) of their preference for the interview. After each interview concluded, I engaged in snowball sampling by sharing a flier with information about my research study and requesting the participant pass information along to others who fit the selection criteria and may be interested in participating in my study. This approach yielded two participants. In addition to these forms of recruitment, I posted fliers around campus in permitted spaces with high student traffic to encourage visibility and knowledge of the study.

Data Collection Techniques and Sources

Individuals who showed interested in participating in the study were provided with a QR code link to a brief online form which served as both informed consent and an eligibility and background survey. This pre-interview form allowed me to acknowledge interest as well as identify potential participants for the study who fit the criteria. The responses in the form were self-reported and served as an initial instrument for data collection. Information gathered in the form included close-ended questions regarding undergraduate and full-time status at the institution, college generational status, and immigrant generational status in the United States, and open-ended questions to describe major, race/ethnic identity, gender identity, and preferred gender pronouns. It is important to emphasize that participants were prompted to fill-in their gender/gender identity, and seven out of eight opted to use sex-related terminologies to describe their gender identity. Two participants did not complete the online form as they were a part of a pilot study in which the form was not utilized. Their background information was obtained during the interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect meaningful data about the participants lived experiences. This type of interview provides participants with the opportunity to openly reflect on their lived experiences without filter (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Participants were encouraged to freely share about their lives, focusing on identity and belonging experiences, in order for me to understand their college experiences more effectively. Interviews consisted of me and the participant, lasted for approximately 45 minutes on average, and primarily took place via Zoom with only one interview taking place in-person or face-to-face. Interviews were recorded and transcribed using a real-time transcription program (Otter) paid for by me, with additional

manual transcript verification occurring to ensure verbatim accuracy. Participants were incentivized to participate in the study with a $15 Amazon gift card and were provided with the gift card upon conclusion of the interview.

Instrumentation

Interviews are frequently used in phenomenological design, as this research design calls for an in-depth, first-person interpretation of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Vagle, 2018). According to hermeneutical phenomenology, the in-depth interview seeks to obtain an interpretation the participant has of their lived experience. A conversational interview, however, "seeks to obtain the lived meaning of a specific experience, relegating the subjective interpretations about it" (Guillen, 2019, p. 225). Thus, this research study closely followed a conversational interview style, using semi-structured interviews which left the researcher space to let the conversation naturally take shape with each participant. Each participant was interviewed once with an option for a follow-up interview which no participant requested.

An IRB-approved interview protocol using open-ended questions was used to focus the discussion. This instrument was appropriate for a qualitative study. The protocol included primary interview questions and probing questions to elicit additional detail from participants regarding their experiences. The protocol included approximately 20 study-related questions and 3 warm-up/wrap-up questions. The protocol covered the following major topics: *first-generation college experience, second-generation immigrant student experience,* and *experiences with sense of belonging* (see Appendix). The interview began by building rapport, establishing trust, and then moved into a reflection on participants' understanding of identities. The interview also engaged participants in a discussion of the intersections of their cultural identities, descriptions

of how those intersections play out on campus, and a discussion on how they experienced a sense of belonging on campus, if at all.

Data Analysis Procedures

Interpretive understanding is crucial to exploring and understanding the essence of lived experience; therefore, a researcher must have a plan for a systematic and detailed description which highlights the biases, preconceived notions, and perspectives of both the researcher and participant (Guillen, 2019; Vagle, 2018). Data analysis involved highlighting significant statements that shed light on participants' experiences, clustering these statements into themes which allowed me to write a "textual description" (i.e., participant experience) and "structural description" (i.e., context/setting influence on the experience) (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). Further, it is suggested that researchers also describe their own experiences with "situations that have influenced their experiences" (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). Thus, I utilized journal reflection entries as a means of analyzing my own experiences. Ultimately, I took all these descriptions and created a "composite description" to capture the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 82).

Data analysis began during data collection. I lightly took notes during the interviews but largely worked to stay focused and present for each conversation. Immediately following each interview, I completed analytic memos to take note of how participants responded to questions, highlight from their respective responses, and my impressions of the participant and interview overall (Creswell, 2013). These memos aided in the initial interpretations of the data and assisted me in forming connections between the participant and their own experience, as well as across the interviews as a means of understanding the shared experience (Vagle, 2018). Next, within 24-48 hours, I wrote a participant summary for each participant which provided a fuller picture

of the first-person lived experience the respective participant shared, while also beginning to make connections to the conceptual frameworks (RMMDI and sense of belonging). Participant summaries ranged from 1-2 pages, single-spaced, and were referred to during the writing of the results section.

Thus, the first phase of the analysis process involved validating all transcripts by listening to each recording and simultaneously reviewing the transcript and making any changes to the text necessary. After I validated each transcript, I sent it to the participant for validation. Two participants requested updates to their transcripts which included writing edits or further explanation of their statements. Once all transcripts were validated by both the participants and me, I began a multiple transcript review process using a "bottom-up" or inductive analysis approach to gain a broad perspective of the data with notes on possible patterns and themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Throughout data analysis, I kept in mind the following important tenets of phenomenological research, according to Vagle (2018):

1. "Whole-parts-whole process" (p. 110): I began by reading the whole transcript and getting acquainted with the event while taking small notes; then, engaged in a series of line-by-line readings, taking in specific aspects of each part that were most meaningful; then, re-read the parts identified as being most important to look for themes/patterns of meaning.
2. "A focus on intentionality and non-subjective experience" (p. 110): I worked to understand that as a person, I am part of the world, and I am connected to others

in the world in a meaningful way; I did so by "studying a phenomenon and the intentional relations that manifest and appear" (p. 28).

3. I worked to ensure "a balance among verbatim excerpts, paraphrasing, and [my] descriptions/interpretations" and
4. "an understanding that [I am] crafting a text—not merely coding, categorizing, making assertions, and reporting" (p. 110).

The first stage of this process involved initial coding or precoding which was an unstructured reading of the data corpus with little to no notetaking to get a "lay of the land" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Saldaña, 2021, p. 30). I read transcript by transcript — whole parts — for overall insights and patterns (Vagle, 2018). Upon completing precoding, I wrote an analytical memo to digest and make sense of my thoughts and reactions. During this stage, I enlisted the help of a peer within my cohort to review a transcript and provide their thoughts and reactions to the data. This provided me with an extended perspective of the data set and allowed for alternative interpretations of the data.

The next stage involved second and third readings of the data and the use of open coding where I highlighted and labeled sections of text using the software program, Nvivo (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Open coding took place in two rounds. Within the first round, I focused on determining what stood out and wrote memos summarizing highlights from each participant transcript. The second round consisted of cleaning up the initial code list and was used to focus specifically on study research questions. In this stage, I used a combination of emotion coding and values coding (Saldaña, 2021) to organize the codes and begin revealing patterns within each research question. Emotion coding includes labeling the emotions the participant recalls or

evokes, or the researcher infers. Emotion coding is suitable for studies that explore matters of identity and social relationships as it allows for a deep view into participant perspectives (Saldaña, 2021). It is recommended to apply emotional coding with a culturally contextual lens (e.g., ethnic culture vs. dominant culture) in order to analyze participant experiences within specific contexts. This is especially important when studying highly contextual phenomena that take place over a long period of time (e.g., attending college). Within these circumstances, it is recommended that emotion codes be categorized according to emotion experienced and the situation within the context (Saldaña, 2021).

Examples of key emotion codes derived from the data regarding the FGCS identity can be categorized as negative and positive. Negative emotion codes included *embarrassment* of FGCS identity and subsequent experiences and circumstances; *guilt or sadness* that family members or peers were unable to attend college; *fear of failure* and *pressure to succeed* due to being the first; *resentment* due to being the first or model for others. Positive emotion codes included *excitement or happiness* to have the opportunity to attend college; *pride or honor* to be the first; *grateful* for the opportunity and internal or external support. Examples of key emotion codes derived from the data regarding the SGIS identity can also be categorized as negative and positive. Negative emotion codes included *disconnection* from curriculum, classroom, faculty; *disconnection or not fitting in* with peers external and internal to same-ethnicity community; *frustration or anger* due to lack of acceptance or representation; *loss or suppressing of identity* and *internalization of otherness* due to stereotyping and discrimination. Positive emotion codes included *pride* related with ethnic heritage; *gratefulness* for immigration struggle and sacrifice; *uniqueness* associated with bi/polyculturalism. Emotion codes were also categorized as general

to the college experience and were related to multiple, intersecting identities, and can be viewed as negative and positive. Positive emotion codes included *excitement* about diversity within the college environment; *feeling seen or accepted* due to diversity and inclusivity; *feeling supported* internally and externally. Negative emotion codes included *feelings of conflict, complication, or overcompensation* due to not fitting in within certain contexts; *loss of or questioning of identities*; *pressure* to prove oneself in all identity groups.

Values coding "reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing their perspectives or worldview" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 167). Values coding is appropriate for research that explores cultural values and beliefs, and identities. Values, attitudes, and beliefs can be interpreted as major or minor depending on the context and may be viewed at a specific moment in time. All of these are created, intensified, or altered via social and cultural interactions and through cultural membership to groups within specific generational cohorts (e.g., FGC-SGI statues) where shared systems exist. A value can be thought of as what a person thinks or feels is important; an attitude is how a person thinks or feels about something or someone; and a belief is what a person explicitly thinks or feels to be true (Saldaña, 2021).

Examples of key values codes derived from the data centered primarily on motivation. Motivation regarding the general college experience occurred due the prospect of an *exciting career outlook and opportunities*; *making a larger impact and name for oneself*; *receiving financial aid*. Examples of key values codes regarding motivation associated with FGCS identity experiences centered on the desire to have a *different outcome than parents*, and *influence of parents* to do more than they could. Examples of key values codes regarding motivation associated with SGIS identity experiences centered on *making the family proud* by pursuing the

American dream and *succeeding to honor ancestors* and ethnic heritage. A key values code associated with multiple, intersecting identities centered on motivation associated with *helping and supporting others* with shared identities.

A key attitude code regarding the general college experience centered on feeling that college was *something one has to do* if the opportunity exists. Additionally, feeling *supported internally or externally* to the family unit was a key attitude code and factor of persistence. Key attitude codes regarding the FGCS identity centered on *questioning* if college was worth it or necessary to finish and *frustration* due to having to figure things out by oneself. A key attitude code regarding the SGIS identity centered on working to *exist with two or more cultural identities* within the college context. Key belief codes regarding the general college experience included believing that *diversity and inclusivity within the college environment allowed for exploration and acceptance of self/identities*, and *support is crucial to success* regardless of where it is coming from. A key belief code regarding the FGCS identity included believing that the *perception of how others viewed* one impacted their view of self within the college environment (e.g., classroom vs. student organization). A key belief code regarding the SGIS identity included believing that bi/polyculturalism allowed for *increased sympathy/empathy* and *awareness of othering* among those with shared identities.

The next stage involved pattern coding, a second-round method, to condense and categorize summaries into smaller numbers of categories, themes, or concepts (Saldaña, 2021). Pattern codes are "explanatory or inferential codes to identify a theme, configuration, or explanation. They pull together material from first cycle coding into meaningful units of analysis such as a meta code" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 322). In order to interpret the data, I revisited the

research questions often. I found multiple overarching themes per study research question that reflected and synthesized the phenomenon to portray the *essence* of the participants' lived experience of sense of belonging in college which seemed to center around the experience of "seeing" oneself within contexts and among specific groups within the college environment. In summary, emotion and value codes, and codes based on the research questions (i.e., pattern coding) were used to identify themes within the data set (Mertens, 2020). Phenomenological analysis involves organizing participant narratives into units of meaning to signify the layers of identity (Vagle, 2018). I utilized phenomenological theming, a method which involves symbolizing data through two specific prompts: "what something is (the manifest) and what something means (the latent)," to develop overarching themes within each research question and to ensure proper examination of the phenomenon under study (Saldaña, 2021, p. 268). Using phenomenological theming, I identified and organized significant statements into clusters of meaning to illustrate the *latent* and *manifest* (Vagle, 2018). These categories relate specifically to the research questions with a focus on first-person perspective of a sense of belonging while navigating multiple, intersecting identities.

Finally, I extracted verbatim statements from the data to formulate meaning about them through interpretation, clustered those meanings within the identified themes, and elaborated on them through rich description (Saldaña, 2021). I highlighted and included verbatim interview excerpts to describe the participants' first-person perspective of a sense of belonging while navigating multiple, intersecting identities. Throughout this process, I utilized code weaving (Saldaña, 2021) to make connections across and among codes within themes. Narratives of each participant were written to provide a snapshot of the participants, their FGC-SGI student

experiences, their salient identities, and how, in general terms, they see themselves experiencing college. A synthesis of the phenomenon was included to detail descriptions which portrayed the essence of the participants' experience with a sense of belonging in college. Each theme was discussed in detail according to my insight and interpretation as well as excerpts from interview transcripts for support and richness. Additionally, I created data displays that included a summary of participant characteristics and identities table and a summary of themes and sub-themes model to assist with my meta-synthesis of the data.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the essence of sense of belonging was adequately described, participants were asked to validate their interview transcripts shortly after interviews concluded. Two participants provided me with minor edits to improve clarity within their transcript. Member checks with participants also took place after data analysis, where participants were provided with an overview of the themes and key findings with corresponding participant quotes to support the findings. Participants were asked to provide feedback and to clarify if their experiences had been described inaccurately (Mertens, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Three participants responded to the request with feedback which indicated the findings resonated with their FGC-SGI student identities and belonging experiences. Additionally, in accordance with hermeneutical phenomenology, I described my personal experiences with the phenomenon to help readers understand my subjectivity. I engaged in a study-long reflective journaling process which ensured that I could direct the focus to the participants and their experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019; Vagle, 2018). Lastly, I elicited the assistance of a peer debriefer to externally check the

data analysis process and to provide alternative perspectives on the data collection and discussion processes (Mertens, 2020; Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Limitations

Although this qualitative study did not seek to generalize findings to a larger population, I aimed for transferability where possible. Each participant was intentionally chosen through purposive sampling; therefore, the sample is not representative of FGC-SGI students at large. An additional limitation connected to purposive recruitment is that a large portion of recruitment involved ethnic/racial-based organizations at the research site. Although other recruitment methods outside of student organizations occurred, this implies that most of the participants were involved in at least one student organization, which seemingly aided in their sense of belonging. Further, students who volunteered to participate may be considered the most involved of the students in the organization which meant those not as involved in the organizations or not involved in student organizations at all may have been overlooked. The study sought participants who affiliated, not exclusively, with a non-White racial/ethnic identity. This meant that SGIS who self-identified as White were largely overlooked, although recruitment yielded two biracial (e.g., Latinx and White; Asian and White) participants.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research design, describing the phenomenological, constructivist, and qualitative nature of the study while simultaneously addressing the researcher's positionality. The chapter followed with a description of the research site and how the sample was selected. Instruments for data collection were also described followed by a discussion of the inductive data analysis procedures. Lastly, trustworthiness and

limitations of the study were detailed. The following chapter will discuss the findings of the study as they relate with and reflect the primary research questions and overall objective of the research project.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this research study was to explore a sense of belonging among college students who identify as the first-generation in college and second-generation immigrant in the United States. Data was collected using in-depth interviews and analyzed using a multiple transcript review process which included extensive memo writing and coding to establish several overarching themes used to answer the study's research questions. This chapter will provide an overview of the data analysis process, participant summaries, and research findings organized by three themes as they relate to research question 1 and three themes as they relate to research question 2. Themes were organized according to phenomenological theming as the "latent" and the "manifest" to express the essence of the experience of being a FGC-SGI student at a PWI, and experiencing a sense of belonging as a FGC-SGI student. Based on the derived themes, four key findings emerged from the collected data: 1) Being the "first" both in the United States and to attend college produced an implicit pressure to succeed; 2) FGC-SGI students engage in identity disclosure more readily with people who share one or more of their identities; 3) FGC-SGI students seek out people who have similar identity characteristics in order to feel belonging; 4) Belonging plays a critical role in how FGC-SGI view their identities, and subsequently their abilities and chances to succeed.

Procedure Summary

Interpretive understanding is crucial to exploring and understanding the essence of lived experience; therefore, data analysis involved highlighting significant statements that shed light on participants' experiences and clustering these statements into themes which allowed me to

write a “textual description” (i.e., participant experience) and “structural description” (i.e., context/setting influence on the experience) (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). Using these descriptions along with my journal reflection entries as a means of analyzing my own experiences, I created a “composite description to capture the essence of the phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 82).

Data analysis began during data collection as I lightly took notes during the interviews but largely worked to stay focused and present for each conversation. The first phase of the analysis process involved validating all transcripts. Then, I used a multiple transcript review process using an inductive analysis approach to gain a broad perspective of the data with notes on possible patterns and themes (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Throughout data analysis, I kept in mind the important tenets of phenomenological research (Vagle, 2018). The first stage involved reading transcript by transcript — whole parts — for overall insights and patterns (Vagle, 2018). The next stage involved second and third readings of the data and the use of open coding where I highlighted and labeled sections of text using the software program, Nvivo (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Open coding took place in two rounds followed by pattern coding which allowed me to hone in on themes and categories.

Lastly, I re-read the parts I identified as being most important to look for themes/patterns of meaning by reviewing all transcripts to cluster and label emerging themes. I utilized phenomenological theming, a method which involves symbolizing data through two specific prompts: “what something is (the manifest) and what something means (the latent)” to develop overarching themes within each research question and to ensure proper examination of the phenomenon under study (Saldaña, 2021, p. 268). To interpret the data, I revisited the research

questions often and continuously reviewed the transcripts throughout data analysis to reassess and verify themes.

Participant Summaries

Participants included nine people identifying as female, one identifying as non-binary, six identifying with Latinx/Hispanic ethnic identity, two identifying as biracial, one identifying as Black, and one identifying as East Asian. Participants were pursuing a variety of majors across four different colleges at the institution (College of Arts & Architecture, College of Engineering, College of Health & Human Services, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences) with three in their freshman year, three in their sophomore year, one in their junior year, two in their senior year, and one as a recent graduate at the time of the study. Of the participants, three were only children and thereby the first in their family to attend college; three were the eldest and thereby both the first to attend and would serve as subsequent models for siblings; and four were the youngest in their family and subsequently had some form of support or model by way of older siblings who attended college. Two participants noted being transfer students at the institution. It is important to note that participants were asked to fill-in their ethnic identity and gender or gender identity in the preliminary self-report questionnaire and the majority used sex-related terminologies to describe their gender/gender identity. Other salient identities were discussed during the interviews and are detailed in the table below.

Table 2

Summary of Participant Characteristics and Identities (as described by participants)

Participant pseudonym	Year in school	Major(s)	Gender/ gender identity	Ethnic identity	Other salient identities in addition to FGCS and SGIS*
Ashley	Sophomore	Pre-public health	Female	Black/Ethiopian	Ethnic name and pronunciation; being an only child
Cici	Sophomore	Social work	Female	White/Hispanic (Venezuelan)	Humanitarian; being a woman; being half White
Danielle	Freshman	Pre-kinesiology	Female	Latinx (Mexican)	*Data could not be obtained; this participant was a part of a pilot study, and this question was not asked.
Erica	Senior	Communication studies	Female	Latinx (Mexican/Honduran)	*Data could not be obtained; this participant was a part of a pilot study, and this question was not asked.
Laura	Junior	Sociology & Communication Studies	Cisgender female	Mexican	Being a Latina/woman; Being LGBTQ+
Melissa	Senior	Architecture	Female	Hispanic (Guatemalan)	Being an architecture student; being a diverse student
Roxy	Freshman	Biology	Nonbinary	Pakistani-American	Being non-binary/LGBTQ+; being non-religious
Samantha	Senior	Economics & Spanish	Female	Mexican/Latinx	Being the eldest sibling; being low-income; being a transfer student
Sharon	Sophomore	International studies	Female	Costa Rican	Being low income
Stephanie	Freshman	Civil engineering	Female	White/Asian (Laotian)	Being bi-racial; being a woman

Ashley

Ashley was a full-time undergraduate student in her sophomore year majoring in pre-public health. She identified as Black/Ethiopian and a second-generation immigrant in the United States. Ashley indicated that her Ethiopian birth name and its correct pronunciation is a salient feature of her identity. Ashley was an only child and was the first in her nuclear family to attend college, as her parents did not previously attend. She expressed desiring to make her family

proud but also feeling fearful she may not succeed. She described, “I feel a lot of pressure. Because, like, all eyes are on me. And it is difficult because I don't want to disappoint my parents.” She indicated living on campus which made it difficult for her to have the support of her friends and family when college became challenging at times.

Cici

Cici was a full-time undergraduate student in her sophomore year studying social work at the research site. Cici was of White and Hispanic descent noting her Venezuelan background. While Cici was a U.S. citizen, she spent her formative years in Venezuela and identified more closely with her Venezuela heritage as compared to her White/American heritage. Cici grew up with her Venezuelan mother primarily and although she did not attend college, Cici’s extended family members did and this is a primary motivation for her college degree pursuit. She said, “I also see [attending college] as an obligation. So, it makes me feel like it’s part of my identity to get [a degree] here [in the United States] to show them that I can do it like them.” Cici indicated that her gender identification as a “woman” was a salient identity in most contexts and she viewed herself as being a “humanitarian” which she also indicated as being an important identity that she holds. Being “half-white” has also played a role in her identity as a Latinx, namely in contexts with other Latinx individuals. Cici feels that faculty and administration should be more aware of what diversity and multiple identities means, and why people label themselves the way they do. Rather than creating a “one size fits all” approach, Cici feels that considering everyone has differing backgrounds and experiences can help develop the right salutation for the person with the issue or need.

Danielle

Danielle was a full-time undergraduate student in her first year in pre-kinesiology. She identified as a Latina, noting her Mexican background. Danielle was a U.S. citizen and identified as a second-generation immigrant in the United States. She was born and raised in a small town in North Carolina. Danielle had two younger siblings who were not yet college age. She identified as the first in her family to attend college, as her parents did not previously attend or complete college. Danielle lived on-campus, noting having moved away from her family for the first time. She noted finding peers who shared similar experiences as being pivotal in her sense of belonging and identity exploration. She described joining a student organization where other members were also FGCS and of Hispanic descent. "I met the leaders there and they're all first gen, and the students who are also part of the club. Just hearing their stories and their struggles and we were in the same boat—it really made me feel even more comfortable than I was. Like, 'wow, I'm not the only one here whose first gen' and I had friends and a whole community of people who are struggling like me and who are in the same process of life."

Erica

Erica was a full-time undergraduate student in the first semester of her final year at the research site and majored in communication studies. Erica lived at home during her first year of college and lived in apartment housing off-campus the remaining years of college. She identified as a Latina, noting her Honduran and Mexican backgrounds. Erica identified as a second-generation immigrant in the United States. She was born and raised in a small town in North Carolina. Erica has two older siblings who previously attended college and identified herself and her siblings as first-generation in college. Her parents did not previously attend or complete

college. For Erica, despite her parents' immigration-related struggles and the lack of opportunity to further their education, they have succeeded in the United States, and this motivated her to attend and complete college. She said, "Seeing how they came literally from nothing to having their own business, their own house and now investing in houses … I just want to do you know right by them and that's really what influenced my choice."

Laura

Laura was a full-time undergraduate student in her junior year double majoring in sociology and communication studies. Laura identified as Latinx, noting her Mexican background. Laura did not previously have a term to name her second-generation immigrant experiences but upon hearing this term, she noted feeling "seen" and her experiences being validated as an immigrant by way of her parents. She described, "It kind of makes me feel like, seen or understood, because I'm not necessarily an immigrant like the way my parents are. But I still like struggled with them. And so it's kind of like, because I didn't know that term. It just kind of felt like I wasn't really allowed to call myself that. Even though I would say that some of my experiences are similar to my parents." She held her Latina identity close, noting that it is ever-present in all contexts. She also noted her identity as LGBTQ+ as being salient within the college context as an identity she has more recently become more comfortable disclosing. Laura was the first in her nuclear family to attend college, with siblings likely to follow. Laura strongly believes that there is power in numbers and in shared experiences and hopes that other FGC-SGI students seek out support from peers within the same population to help make the transition into college easier and help with the navigation during the college process. She also believes that faculty can do a better job of making sure all students of all backgrounds are included in the

classroom. She specifically notes that faculty should “talk more about issues or like maybe conversations that don't center around the white American experience because it excludes a lot of other groups of people or a lot of other experiences and it's kind of like, ‘oh, well, does my experience really matter if that's not what's being talked about?’” Lastly, she feels that administrators should hire more people of color who identify as FGC-SGI or at the least, speak with individuals who belong to this population to be educated on their experiences and include their needs as a part of the “whole vision” for the institution.

Melissa

Melissa was a full-time undergraduate student in her senior year majoring in architecture. Melissa identified as Hispanic, noting her Guatemalan descent. Melissa was not the first in her nuclear family to attend college, as she had older siblings who attended and completed college (at the same institution), but she was the only woman in her family to attend college which she noted as being important to her. Her first-generation college status was salient within the college context, as was being a student of diverse backgrounds. In fact, in spaces where she did not see representation, she felt like she was lacking in some way. She said, “They’ve [White American peers] probably have had opportunities that maybe I haven't been able to get just because their parents grew up here [or] maybe their parents went into the same degree, so maybe they know a program or something that they were able to learn more [about]. And so, I felt lacking because I didn't have that background.” Melissa also noted that her second-generation immigrant identity became more salient to her upon becoming an architecture major but that in her previous major (engineering), she suppressed this identity due to a lack of representation. Melissa hopes that other FGC-SGI students remember that getting into college means they belong there. She also

hopes faculty remember that, too, when working with students of different backgrounds. Lastly, she would like administrators to listen more—listen to what this student population needs and try to understand who they are as a group.

Roxy

Roxy was a full-time undergraduate student in their freshman year majoring in pre-biology at the research site. Roxy identified as Pakistani-American and indicated their non-binary identity as being salient, particularly within the college context, as it has been more widely acknowledged and accepted. Although Roxy's biological father attended college, Roxy did not have a close relationship to their nuclear family, specifically their parents, and as such did not have a model or support to rely on when preparing for college. They indicated their non-religious background as being salient and having derived from their second-generation immigrant identity as Pakistani-American. Roxy viewed themself as holding several minority identities. They shared, "...sometimes when I think about like, the aspects of my identity, which are considered minorities or whatever, I think I had this thought more when I was younger, but maybe it still lingers, but it was, it was kind of like, I especially want to succeed because like, I don't see myself or like people like me, succeeding in mainstream culture." As an individual who has always felt they had to hide some or all aspects of their identities, Roxy feels validated and free to fully be themselves, particularly within their SGI and LGBTQ+ identities. That, they say, is the most important thing any student in this population can do to feel belonging in college. They advise faculty and administration to educate themselves on various diversities in order to be inclusive in the classroom and in policy, so that all students can see themselves in the institution they choose to attend.

Samantha

Samantha was a recent graduate from the research site, having graduated in the previous semester with degrees in economics and Spanish. She identified as Latinx, noting her Mexican background. She transferred into the institution and noted this being a salient feature of her initial experiences of disconnection and isolation at the institution. She was the first in her family to attend college with siblings likely to follow in the future. She indicated being the eldest sibling as a salient identity that she took seriously and was proud to have—as this meant she would be the model for her siblings that she did not have when preparing for college. Samantha largely viewed her FGC identity in a positive light noting that it pushes her to become a better version of herself. Yet, she indicated that her SGI identity often produced feelings of inadequacy. She said, "I think something I kind of wrestle with is being enough; really being enough. If that's me being too Mexican or that's me being too American." Samantha encourages other FGC-SGI students to get involved as quickly as possible and hopes that administrators can go beyond touting a high enrollment and graduation rate for Latinx but provide this student population with specific opportunities for scholarships and academic support that are unique to their needs and will assist with belonging.

Sharon

Sharon was a full-time undergraduate student in her sophomore year majoring in international studies. She identified as Costa Rican and indicated this identity as being salient to her college experience. She was the first in her nuclear family to attend college which she was both frustrated by and proud to do. She noted that being the first was both a privilege and a source of anger because it came with many challenges, namely tied to being low-income and the

stress of finances that going to college often produces. In fact, not having to pay for college was a primary motivation for attending college. When it came to disclosing her identities with others, Sharon was hesitant to do so with people who are not of color because she felt their attitude may change toward her if they became aware of who she was. She said, “I feel like they might think maybe I'm not as smart or awesome. They might think that I have it easy financially or something like that. Like, ‘oh, because she's a minority and first generation, she has everything paid for.’” Sharon’s hope for incoming FGC-SGI students is to be reminded that they are “100% supposed to be here.” She recommends students try to participate in student organizations, specifically Latinx-based ones, because it’s highly likely that there will be others who feel and experience similar things. As for faculty, Sharon would like for this group to try to understand where their FGC-SGI students are coming from, to include them, and not to overlook them in the classroom. She would like administrators to consider this population when making policies to provide opportunities and advantages they may not have “naturally” due to being a “minority” group. Ultimately, she hopes that this population and their needs will be taken seriously.

Stephanie

Stephanie was a full-time undergraduate student in her freshman year majoring in civil engineering. She identified as White and Asian, noting her Laotian heritage. Stephanie noted her second-generation immigrant identity as being highly important to her perspective of college; something her mother could not do due to her immigrant background. Although her father did complete college, he passed away while Stephanie was young and was unable to be a model for her as she prepared to attend college. She also indicated being first-generation college as salient to her identity. Stephanie found great pride in being able to make her family proud by attending

college as a way to honor their sacrifices and struggles. She noted that her identity as "bi-racial" has traditionally been an ever-present, negative identity in most contexts, such as pre-college. Yet, while in college, she has found this identity to be even more salient but for positive reasons. She expressed feeling elation not having to explain her racial or ethnic identity to others who shared similar experiences while in college. She said, "That was a really awesome feeling that I don't have to explain myself. I don't have to justify like, this is where I'm from. This is why I'm here. They were just like, you're here and we accept you. Yeah, it was really awesome." Stephanie hopes students like her will take a chance and "branch out" when in college, that they will find their "niche group" that will understand them and their experiences. She hopes faculty will work harder to listen to student concerns or pay closer attention to situations where students are being isolated or are feeling isolation and provide them with the support they need. She would like to see administrators create a space where students can vocalize their experiences with racism, stereotyping, and isolation.

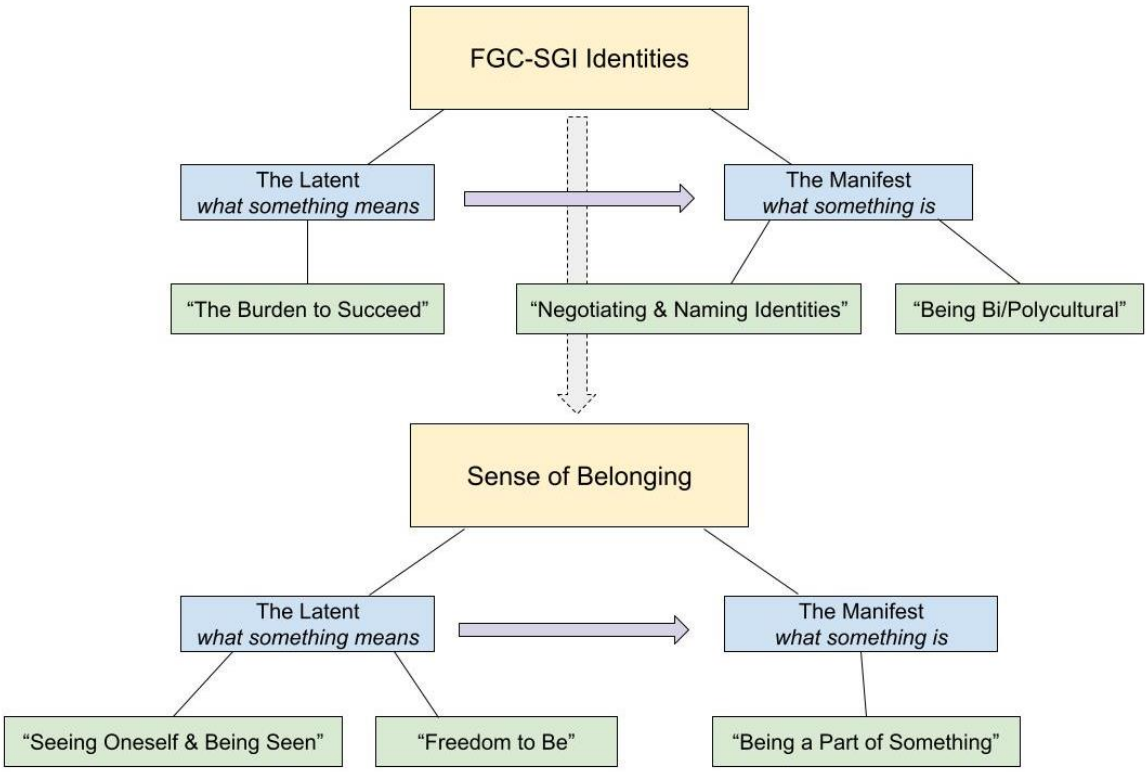
Findings & Themes

Through data analysis and data reduction, I determined three themes that related to and reflected on research question 1 (RQ1): How do college students attending a four-year, public, predominantly White institution (PWI) experience first-generation college and second-generation immigrant identities? Using phenomenological theming, themes associated with RQ1 are organized as "experiencing FGC-SGI identities means" (*the burden to succeed*) and "experiencing FGC-SGI identities is" (*negotiating and naming identities* and *being bi/polycultural*). I determined three themes related to and reflected on research question 2 (RQ2): In what ways do first-generation college, second-generation immigrant students experience a

sense of belonging during college? Using phenomenological theming, themes associated with RQ2 are organized as "a sense of belonging means" (*"seeing" oneself and being "seen"* and *the freedom to be*) and "a sense of belonging is" (*being a part of something*). The image below serves to summarize the themes according to research question categories and to show the use of phenomenological theming to illustrate the shift from the latent to the manifest of the experience of FGC-SGI identities and its relationship to the phenomenon of belonging.

Figure 3

Summary of Themes and Subthemes



Experiencing FGC-SGI Identities Means: The Burden to Succeed

A dichotomy was produced for FGC-SGI students of both feeling the burden or pressure to succeed and feeling pride with having the opportunity to be the first both in college and in the

United States. This dichotomy seemed to largely emerge internally, or via familial relationships, where parents or extended family members expressed their desire for the student to be successful, and to do what they could not or did not have the opportunity to do. This experience fostered feelings of excitement, yet simultaneous feelings of dread to be the "first." The burden to succeed interprets how participants approach the college journey, with notable attributes such as pressure to succeed which elicited feelings of fear and self-doubt, and pride to be the first which elicited both feelings of excitement and guilt.

Pressure to succeed. All the participants shared similar sentiments of "pressure." This idea of being the "first" or not having a model to follow seemingly impacted participants' perspective of the college process and expected outcome. Sharon described her mixed feelings toward being the first in her family to attend college:

> I feel like it's exciting because I get to do everything for the first time but it's also like I have to do everything for the first time. So, I feel like I'm proud of it. But it's like also sometimes I do wish I didn't have to be the first one to do everything.

Sharon's quote depicts the pressure FGCS feel to be the model of a successful college student and outcome. For some, like Sharon, being the first and dealing with the pressure produced feelings of resentment with having no choice but to forge the path for themselves and others. These feelings were exacerbated for participants who did not have older siblings to provide them with a blueprint and left them feeling lost.

The burden to succeed and subsequent pressure largely stemmed from the fear of disappointing their parents and family members. For others, the burden felt more like an obligation that shaped parts of their identity and, therefore, who they were or how they viewed

themselves hinged on persistence and success. Samantha, a Hispanic American, FGCS opted to use the pressure to grow as a person describing how this identity "overpowers" her personality because it is a constant reminder of where she came from and the lack of opportunities. Samantha's perspective illustrates that although "burden" generally carries a negative connotation, it is evident that for most of the FGC-SGI student experiences, this burden was an honor to carry and one that encouraged both persistence and success in college.

Thus, although this pressure exists and can be difficult to manage, all but one participant noted that the pride they felt from their family served as encouragement and motivation to persist. With this support, participants like Stephanie, a biracial Asian and White student, were also reminded that ultimately pursuing college was not just about their families. She described, "It is a lot of pressure. It definitely is. But I guess it's just having to push through and remember this is for myself as well. Like this is not just for my family." Stephanie's experience illustrates the desire that FGC-SGI students must make a name for themselves, and to make a greater impact in their ethnic communities as a means of honoring their parents' immigration and subsequent sacrifices—a point of pride for all of the participants.

Making a greater impact through breaking stereotypes was a sentiment shared by the majority of participants when considering their motivation to pursue and complete college. Stephanie went on to share about her mother's, a Laotian woman, experiences as a source of motivation, describing her mother's struggles with stereotyping and other forms of racism working in a large city in North Carolina. She shared that her mother's challenges motivated her to attend college. Stephanie's experience illustrates that while SGI students may not face the exact challenges of their immigrant parents, hearing about or witnessing discrimination and other

forms of oppression laid a foundation for their desire to make a change within their families and communities.

Furthermore, the burden to succeed also included the burden to honor all those who identify with minoritized identities. As a Pakistani-American who identifies as non-binary, Roxy shared, "...when I think about the aspects of my identity which are considered minorities or whatever, I especially want to succeed because I don't see myself or like people like me succeeding in mainstream culture." Roxy's quote sheds light on the bigger picture of a lack of representation within U.S. society of minority groups or minoritized identities, and its impact on the college experience and subsequent outcomes. FGC-SGI students carry their experiences within society from their upbringing into their college endeavors. These experiences shape and influence their attitudes. For many, fear and self-doubt are resulting attitudes of racialized or minoritized experiences pre-college.

Fear and self-doubt. Feelings of stress were often produced knowing "all eyes" were on the participants which often led to fear of failure and self-doubt for most. While in college, Roxy tried their best not to focus on the fear of failure, stating, "If I think about it for too long, [I feel] kind of like fear because what if there's stuff I don't know, which there is. I don't like thinking about stuff I don't know." Roxy's quote illustrates a common fear among FGCS of not finishing college, or "doing it incorrectly," due to not having information, or a model to follow. It is important to note that even in cases like Roxy's where sibling support is present, or in other cases where parental support is strong, the fear of failure was ever-present. In cases like Ashley's, even with parental support, being an only child increased the desire to have guidance, and the result of not having a model was an added burden to overcome the unknown. Overall,

not knowing what one did not know produced a sense of fear which increased the pressure to succeed.

Self-doubt was described often throughout the data set, most often in relation to the FGCS identity and within the context of pre-college processes. Several participants made reference to the complexity of applying to college, picking the right college, and figuring out financial aid as being areas which exacerbated their self-doubt that college was the right fit overall. Though Erica indicated her FGC and SGI identities as being significant overall, she remarked that she felt her identities made the college process more complicated and even frustrating. These feelings were particularly in relation to selecting which colleges to apply to and the overall application process. Erica noted:

> I feel like, especially as an immigrant student and first-gen, we tend to doubt our abilities a lot of times, especially when it comes to applying to these big schools or even just going to college. Like, "'Oh, that's not for us.'" I really did doubt myself a lot with the schools I applied to, and I feel like that hurt me in the end because it's like I doubted my identity.

Erica's quote illustrates that FGC-SGI students often feel unworthy of attending college due to their parents not having done so. Further, they may feel like their identities will not offer or afford them the knowledge they need to persist and succeed, which results in frustration associated with one or more identities, and can prompt students to conceal or suppress their identities. Additionally, the participants noted that in addition to the fear of failure which prompted moments of self-doubt, they experienced a wave of emotional reactions to their multiple, intersecting identities pre-college and during college.

Mixed emotions. Being a FGC-SGI student fostered feelings of excitement and happiness which largely stemmed from feeling pride to be the first and to have the opportunity to do what their parents and/or family members could not or did not do. On the other hand, feelings of sadness and guilt were also common among the participants, namely regarding the lack of opportunities their parents had but also regarding the lack of opportunities within their ethnic communities overall.

For many immigrants, moving to the United States means hope and opportunity. Yet, the way to achieving these dreams is rough and filled with many challenges. Children of immigrants born in the United States are afforded more opportunities than their parents were, and thereby, keep hope alive for their parents' American dreams. For many immigrants and their children, a college education is a dream that living in the United States makes possible. Yet, this dream is generally only a reality for second-generation immigrants. Thus, all of the participants noted the importance of attending college as a means of honoring their immigration history.

For Stephanie, her college journey is meaningful for not only her, but for her mom and her extended family, too. She described,

> More than anything I feel pride about it [being in college]. I can feel the pride from my grandparents, from my mom, from my uncles and aunts and my cousins who never got to share this experience. I feel so proud that I am here—the sacrifices that my family had to make, leaving behind everything that they knew; just kind of packing up and leaving so that I could have this life is just so incredible, and I'm so beyond grateful for it.

Stephanie’s quote illustrates a common theme among immigrants and their families. Since often immigrants do not fulfill their personal dreams of education and careers, they instead put their

hopes and dreams into their children. Thus, as Stephanie described, fulfilling their family's dreams becomes a source of pride for FGC-SGI students, overpowering feelings of pressure. When Melissa, an architecture major, reflected on the feelings that are evoked to be a FGCS, she stated, "I'm very proud. My parents didn't get the opportunity to go to college. So, it's something that I'm very proud of, [to get] this opportunity." Although some of Melissa's siblings attended college and provided her with guidance at the beginning of her journey, she often felt the pressure to do even more than they did. Yet, this did not seem to lessen her sense of pride and excitement. In fact, it motivated her to push harder to obtain a degree for her mom, who never had the chance to further her education, and for her dad, who started college (in architecture) but did not finish.

Other emotions often associated with being the first to attend college centered on a mixture of sadness and guilt. Cici recalled her mother's inability to obtain a career due to her lack of education in the United States. She described her mom's feelings of defeat each time she would apply for a job that required a college degree, and her mother's experiences making her feel sad yet excited that she could pursue a degree for her and her mom. Cici's feelings illustrate the rollercoaster of emotions FGC-SGI students experience throughout the college journeys—high moments of pride and happiness, and low moments of guilt and sadness. Guilt could also be seen in the college experience itself. For some participants, like Sharon, getting the chance to have the "college experience" produced feelings of guilt knowing that their parents did not get to have that experience. She said, "I'll send her [mom] pictures of all the stuff I'm doing [on campus], and she'll be like, "'Oh, like I'm so glad you're getting to do this stuff that I didn't get to do.'" So, a part of me feels slightly guilty that I get to do that stuff." Sharon's quote depicts the

internal pressure to both succeed for the family but also to just be a college student and enjoy the journey as much as possible.

While making a greater impact in the community was discussed often across the participants, only one participant explicitly described feeling guilty to have the opportunity to further their education as compared to their peers. Laura, who attended an early college program during high school, recalled the moment she was told about the opportunity to participate in the program. For her, it was a "no-brainer" yet for many of her classmates this was not the case. As she matriculated, and eventually began her college journey, she felt guilt. She described,

> It's exciting, but at the same time, I feel sort of guilty. Because I know a lot of people I grew up with—my middle school was in a poor area, or we didn't get a lot of funding. And so sometimes I'll look back and I'll think, because a lot of those people didn't attend college, "Why me? What made me go to college, why didn't they have the same opportunities?" And it makes me feel sort of guilty because I wish that it was easier for people in those areas to get here.

Laura's experience furthers the dichotomy of happiness-sadness and pride-guilt that FGC-SGI students experience as they move along the college path. Thus, the burden to succeed is one that seems to be inherent to being a FGC-SGI student. It is a burden that is both an honor to carry but that also comes with mixed emotions and a considerable amount of fear and self-doubt. It is important to note that the participants in this study largely used these emotions and experiences as fuel to persist, primarily due to unwavering support from their family units and/or the desire to break stereotypes often associated with their minoritized identities. This may not be the experience for every FGC-SGI student who attempts college. Overall, the burden to succeed

develops into the manifestation of the phenomenon of experiencing FGC-SGI identities in two ways: negotiating and naming identities as well as being bi/polycultural.

Experiencing FGC-SGI Identities Is: Negotiating and Naming Identities

As a part of the manifestation of the FGC-SGI identity experience, participants revealed that this phenomenon entailed constantly negotiating and naming (and renaming) their identities throughout specific contexts within the college environment. For the purposes of this data set, the overall context can be understood as the overall college environment or experience, while specific contexts include spaces within the environment that most FGC-SGI students frequent such as classrooms, dorms, student club meetings, etc. Both the overall college environment and specific contexts prompted both negative and positive experiences of the identity negotiation process. Ultimately, these contexts and their subsequent experiences played a role of identity disclosure, or lack thereof, prompting additional renegotiation and renaming of identities.

Identity disclosure. Identity disclosure played a critical role in the process of identity negotiation, and ultimately, identity naming. Generally, participants felt negative feelings internally when they engaged in identity disclosure. The emotions typically associated with identity disclosure included conflict, awkwardness, frustration, or complication. This was often due to the mixing of cultures which resulted in suppressing one or more ethnic identities in order to "fit in" or working harder to prove belonging to one or both groups. Most of the participants shared similar sentiments regarding the desire to be accepted and changing various aspects of their behavior in order to feel acceptance, particularly within specific contexts within the college context where they were interacting with White American faculty/staff and/or peers. Cici, a biracial Venezuelan and White student, described her feelings regarding being Latinx and

American in college, “Stereotypes play a big part of it. So, it's like me thinking, ‘Oh, if I do this, I'll be more accepted’ but it's not who I am. So, then that's why it's conflicting.” Cici’s quote illustrates the conflict associated with navigating multiple identities and multiple cultures; namely, knowing how to balance sharing too little or too much information about oneself in order to relate or connect with others.

The struggle to balance identity disclosure was also evident within same-ethnicity peer groups where a few participants struggled to fit in due to their phenotype. Cici particularly struggled with fitting in with same-ethnicity peer groups in college at times. She shared, “Well, I'm not a person that gets angry very much but it bothers me sometimes. Especially when comments are made or something, it bothers me and makes me feel a little bit sad that my identity is taken away because of my phenotype.” For Cici, not “looking” like she belongs to the Hispanic/Latinx ethnicity due to her phenotype, despite being raised in Venezuela for most of her adolescent life, resulted in her being treated differently by her same-ethnicity peers. Essentially, at first glance, she did not appear to “belong” to Hispanic ethnicity, yet in terms of her Venezuelan upbringing and subsequent general worldview, she was “more Hispanic” than her same-ethnicity peers in many regards. She shared an example of a Latinx student organization that she participated in using terms like “raza" or race in their social media posts, which prompted her to question if that applied to her given her biracial background. Situations like this prompted her to feel excluded and less inclined to vocalize her identity.

Further, balancing identity disclosure was also evident within same-ethnicity peer groups due to participants’ American-born nationality. The outcomes typically associated with these situations included being viewed or treated differently by same-ethnicity peers, leading to

disconnection from this peer group. For example, Samantha, a Mexican-American student, described the challenge of knowing where she stood with her SGI identity, namely whether she was being "too Mexican or too American" in certain situations. Although she was the self-proclaimed "more White Mexican" among her peers, as a child she struggled with the English language as it was not the primary language spoken in her home or among her parents, leading her to feel inclined to prove herself to be just as good as her White American peers. This dichotomy of being "too White" for her Mexican peers and "too Mexican" for her White peers illustrates the stress that generally comes with negotiating and naming one's SGI identity.

Despite the challenges associated with identity disclosure, several participants opted to engage freely in FGC and SGI identity disclosure in order to support family members and peers with shared backgrounds and experiences. Stephanie, a biracial Laotian and White student, described,

> So, for me, bringing my cultures together was utilizing it in a way that I could help other students like myself. And I kind of do the same thing now with my younger cousins. They're going through middle school and high school and using what I've learned from blending my identities together to kind of help them grow and realize there is worth to both sides of your culture. You don't have to fit in with every other American, you can be yourself.

Stephanie's quote illustrates the necessity of being comfortable with the discomfort of navigating multiple identities in order to evolve as a person. Essentially, sharing about one's identities was a way to pay forward to others what they have learned through their own challenging navigations of identity, and the college process. Samantha supported this notion: "I think something that I

realized is it's important to talk about your identity. Being like I was, Mexican-American, I come from an immigrant family, and I'm second gen. And the importance of sharing is because you don't realize there's so many people [who] connect with you." Additionally, Samantha discussed the importance of sharing her FGC identity with others, particularly those who also identify as Hispanic/Latinx. While in college, she participated in a Hispanic-based student organization whose purpose is to provide academic and financial support to first-generation Hispanic students. She noted frequently encouraging her peers to talk about their FGC identity and experiences because they were not alone in the process, and they belonged in college. Ultimately, finding connections to others with shared experiences through disclosure allowed for a greater understanding of self, and in turn, provided support to those who were also on the journey to explore, understand, and accept one's multiple identities.

College context. Participants largely discussed their FGC and SGI identity disclosure in singular ways (i.e., typically discussed one at a time rather than in combination or as intersecting) and highly dependent on context. Contexts within the larger college environment where there was a lack of ethnic representation (e.g., in the classroom or within a major) produced conflicts with identity salience/perception and created dissonance with dominant cultural standards.

Within specific contexts such as the classroom, fear of discrimination or judgment of bi/polycultural experiences occurred, often leading to identity concealment unless it was deemed safe to share, or someone specifically asked about one or more identities. Sharon, a Costa Rican-American student, described her hesitancy to disclose her FGCS status to White American classmates or faculty within the classroom due to fear of their reactions. Sharon's feelings

illustrate the commonality of hiding parts of oneself, typically for fear of not fitting in or being judged. Thus, in Sharon's case, the disclosure of her FGC identity was reserved for people of color (POC) or for those who expressed shared or positive perspectives of FGC students or experiences. Sharon also found herself suppressing her SGI identity during her first semester in college. She stated, "I would say definitely my first semester. I questioned a little bit just because I was new on campus. My roommates were all White and I hadn't met any of my current friends and I hadn't gone to the Latin origins and stuff like that. So, I feel like I definitely suppressed my cultural side." Sharon's quote illustrates the segmenting of identities and the concealment that occurs contextually. Sharon segmented and concealed parts of herself due to a lack of representation which produced feelings of unsafety or discomfort within specific contexts, for instance the classroom and dormitories, though she largely felt safe to be a POC within the overall college context.

Negative perceptions of FGC-SGI identities generally derived from a lack of representation, or the norming of the White American experience, within specific majors. Melissa, a Guatemalan-American student, experienced conflicts with her FGC and SGI identities in her previous major, engineering. She often felt like she was comparing herself to her White American male peers which made her feel isolated and like she did not belong in the major. She said, "Overall, it was just harsh to see I'm the only person in my classes that is like me." She posited that perhaps this was why she both did not enjoy being in this major and, ultimately, chose a different major which better suited her needs. Melissa's experience also illustrates a point which will be elaborated later regarding the importance of representation for FGC-SGI students. Similarly, Samantha shared her experience within her major in business, stating:

> I think sometimes when I was in [business], I kind of wanted not to be very seen because I was a POC. Sometimes I felt like because I didn't see representation, I just felt like a lack of connection with them. And so, I never felt comfortable really being like "I'm struggling with this" or really disclosing my background like "Hey, I'm a first gen."

Samantha's experience depicts the hurdles FGC-SGI students face due to the fear of stereotyping or profiling, and the assumption that faculty will not understand or connect with their experiences.

Yet, for some, a lack of representation within specific contexts, like major-specific classes, encouraged identity disclosure. Stephanie's major in civil engineering proved challenging primarily as it also exposed a lack of representation among her peers where the majority were White American males. She found in these spaces it was crucial to disclose her identities, albeit uncomfortable at times, in order to combat profiling and subsequent assumptions. She described, "It's very hard, obviously, to explain it to them [White American peers], but it's just, it's the only way to kind of start that spark of change." Thus, Stephanie's quote illustrates the desire FGC-SGI students may have to eliminate or reduce negative perceptions through disclosure of identities and related experiences due to the norming of the White American experience. The desire to be seen and understood by their White counterparts also relates to the negotiation of identities as the more a FGC-SGI student discusses their identities, the more common they become and, therefore, the higher the likelihood of acceptance of respective identities by oneself and others.

While identity negotiation can be complicated, the data showed that college can make this process easier due to events and activities that foster identity exploration (e.g., student

organizations), thereby fostering belonging. Specifically, being a part of peer groups of inclusive and diverse backgrounds (e.g., small groups within majors) prompted most participants to accept and even celebrate their ethnic heritage. In these spaces, participants described freely naming and disclosing their identities which equated to "being seen," thus prompting feelings of inclusivity. Melissa described the shift from the engineering to architecture major as a pivotal point in her identity acceptance and celebration journey due to the diversity of students in her classes overall. She described feeling more secure in sharing her FGC identity among her architecture classmates because many of them were foreign-born or identities as SGIS, and could relate to being FGCS, too. Thus, knowing there were others who shared similar challenges produced feelings of comfort and provided a space to share even more about oneself and one's experiences.

Same-ethnicity peer context. Same-ethnicity peer groups largely provided opportunities for self-expression and identity acceptance related to FGC and SGI identities. However, biracial students and students with other salient identities faced unique challenges. These included not being accepted within their ethnic groups or feeling the need to suppress their ethnic identity.

Issues with same-ethnicity peers. The data showed that same-ethnicity groups may not readily recognize or accept other salient identities related to LGBTQ+ subgroups. For two participants, the lack of acceptance of their sexual orientation or gender identity prompted feelings of disconnection within same-ethnicity contexts pre-college and during college. Laura, a Mexican-American student, shared her experience with participating in Latinx-based student organizations and not feeling comfortable with presenting her LGBTQ+ identity,

> In general, I think also being Latinx affects the way that I present myself because in my culture, it's kind of not really accepted or it's frowned upon. So, I try not to be so open

> about it. It's rooted in the culture that you can be gay but don't say it. Or other times it's, "No, you can't be gay at all." And so, you kind of have to hide part of yourself to appeal to the culture to feel like you're a part of it.

Laura's experience illustrates the necessity of concealing or choosing not to present a part of one's identity even in spaces where one sees one or more of their identities represented. This supports the RMMDI model (Abes et al., 2013) which suggests that what a person deems to be a part of their core identity may be filtered depending on contextual influences—namely, identities are variable in meaning across contexts and can be performative given the audience.

Similarly, Roxy, a Pakistani-American student, echoed the necessity of concealing parts of one's identity even when other parts of one's identity are visible and/or celebrated. As a non-binary individual, they have readily chosen not to highlight this identity around other Pakistani or Muslim individuals due to the fear of not being supported. This was especially the case pre-college which created a hesitancy to disclose their non-binary identity in college; at least within certain contexts (e.g., classrooms with non-inclusive faculty).

Biracial disconnection. Feelings of disconnection were seemingly exacerbated for the two participants who identified as biracial. These feelings derived pre-college, usually throughout upbringing, and were often points of contention which prompted hesitancy to reveal some or all parts of oneself. Stephanie described the experience of growing up biracial in the United States sharing, "For me, I was trying to ride the line between being White and being Asian and it was so hard to be able to identify with both sides, especially when I'm growing up around White people. I feel like I'm not connected to my Asian side, but at the same time, they're always going to see me as being different from them." Stephanie's quote illustrates that the

manifestation of negotiating and naming identities as a part of the FGC-SGI experience was evident, even in cases where students identified partially as White. Whereas this could be seen as an advantage in some contexts (i.e., being afforded opportunities due to being White-passing), being biracial became even more problematic within the college setting for some. As Cici attempted to name her identities in a manner that satisfied her and the context, she also experienced dissonance:

> When it comes to the identity of heritage, that's where it's iffy because on the outside, I look like I technically I'm White. So, then they're like, "Oh, you have this opportunity because you're White." But then I have all this history that is Hispanic. So, the belonging is, I belong because I'm both.

Cici's experience illustrates added layers of identity negotiation for FGC-SGI students who also identify as biracial. As discussed, identity negotiation, and thereby naming, is seemingly contextual and, therefore, inconstant. Subsequently, specific contexts can present different responses to biracial identities, and, thereby, produce feelings of belonging or isolation even when other salient identities are recognized and accepted.

Additionally, at least one of the biracial participants experienced code switching, with the experience most often linked to spaces with primarily White American peers or faculty (e.g., classrooms). Cici described:

> In some classrooms with more Americans, I feel like I have to not show my Hispanic accent as much but then I get nervous and then it comes out. So, I feel like I have to overcompensate with that. And then I have to add a little bit more Hispanic with more

> Hispanic groups. So, it's conflicting with staying true to who I am and then trying to navigate both of those groups.

Cici's quote further highlights the complication of identity salience and context. While Cici felt her Venezuelan/Hispanic identity was more personally salient, certain contexts within college prompted her to alter how she presented her identity in order not to stand out unnecessarily. Further, Cici's biracial identity amplified the necessity of code switching in classrooms where she was not perceived as White and within SGI sub-groups, like same-ethnicity student organizations, where she was not perceived as Hispanic.

Benefits of same-ethnicity peers. Although there were some exceptions, all participants disclosed, negotiated, named, and accepted their multiple identities due to diversity across the larger campus context, even when their identities were not readily accepted within other specific contexts (e.g., certain majors). Melissa emphasized the importance of diversity throughout a college campus sharing her excitement with seeing people of different backgrounds and cultures as she walked throughout the campus. She also expressed excitement to see others of Hispanic descent that were not members of her family due to her upbringing in a predominantly White town. The phenomenon of moving from predominantly White areas to a city with diversity was a shared sentiment for other participants, including Danielle who felt right at home at the institution upon entering as a freshman, describing the diversity and feeling of acceptance of being a FGCS; and Samantha, who felt like her "identity shifted when there was more diversity and I felt more accepted" upon moving to the city the institution was located in, and upon seeing the diversity that the PWI had to offer. These experiences illustrate a shift in the identity

negotiation and naming processes toward deeper exploration and acceptance of identities which were previously suppressed and concealed.

Further, participants were encouraged to share stories about cultural traditions and experiences via interactions with same-ethnicity and diverse peers. Stephanie described feeling elated with being able to talk about her Asian heritage despite not being able to do so pre-college. She shared,

> Being here [in college] I've been able to talk about my culture a lot more than I ever did. When I was growing up, I never really shared those kinds of experiences except for with people I was very close with, but here it's like everybody kind of has similar experiences and they can vouch for it.

Stephanie's quote illustrates the importance of storytelling and story sharing as a means of negotiating and naming one's identities, particularly, in contexts where stories are believed to be true due to shared experiences (e.g., same-ethnicity student organizations). The validation of her experiences seemingly fostered an acceptance of her SGIS and biracial identities, allowing her the space to potentially explore her FGCS and other salient identities. Thus, identity negotiating and naming are critical components of the manifestation of the FGC-SGI experience in college which led to the experience of being bi/polycultural.

Experiencing FGC-SGI Identities Is: Being Bi/Polycultural

As a part of the manifestation of the FGC-SGI identity experience, participants revealed that this phenomenon entailed knowing how to be bi/polycultural within all contexts. For the participants, being bi/polycultural began well before college during their upbringing and required

them to learn how to hone-in on and critically apply their identity experiences throughout the college journey.

The upbringing. The discussion of the upbringing was critical to participants' college experiences. For all, the upbringing fostered mostly negative perspectives of their FGC-SGI identities, typically seen as intersecting when discussing applying for college and seen as independent when describing other contexts (e.g., others' perception of their intelligence). The negative aspects of the upbringing included a clash of cultures resulting in not feeling like "enough" for one or more cultural groups. Some positive aspects of the upbringing noted within the data included bi/polyculturalism producing pride in heritage and subsequent emotional reactions, and the role of parental and immigration influence.

Clash of cultures. Some participants chose to integrate or become bicultural as a means of reducing the stress associated with being members of both their ethnic and dominant groups. It was evident within the data that all the participants participated in some form of integration before their college journeys. For FGC-SGI students, navigating multiple cultural identities is a life-long experience of living two or more lives or a clash of cultures centering primarily on their American and ethnic identities. It is important to note that all participants frequently used the term "Americans" to refer to "White American" peers implying some form of distancing from the American culture despite being born into and raised within the American culture.

All the participants noted the experience of living two lives and the differences between one's identity being based on DNA or genetics versus where one is born as an important dichotomy. Sharon, a Costa Rican-American, described her general perspective of being bi/polycultural:

> It's like you have one foot in the Hispanic world but you have one in the American world, and you have to balance both of them. It's really confusing, identity wise. And then really, I'm only American because I was born here. But, if we talk about DNA, genetics, suddenly I'm technically Latina, you know?

Sharon's quote illustrates that, in terms of the SGI identity, being American is something someone does as a result of where they were born, yet being Latinx, for example, is something that someone is as a result of their heritage and familial influence.

Thus, for most participants, during pre-college, the "battle of identities" often triggered feelings of not fitting in, and often occurred within one or multiple cultural groups due to being both Hispanic and American, for example. Melissa shared, "I don't know why, growing up, you have that mentality that 'Oh you're not necessarily from this culture so you don't fit in.'" Melissa also described living in fear of rejection pre-college, due to a lack of confidence stemming from feelings of not belonging to one or both cultural groups. Other participants echoed the sentiment of being "enough" noting that they often felt like they had to choose one culture over the other. Roxy described feeling like they were often expected to only be American or Pakistani but could not be both because they would not be accepted if so. They said, "I think it was that that train of thought came from wanting to belong in a community, one way or another." Roxy's experience depicts the pre-college battle students identifying as SGI face to decide who to be or how to present oneself within society. These feelings were often brought into the college journey and subsequently shaped attitudes and beliefs about being a SGIS, at least until or if the college experience allowed for identity negotiation and acceptance to occur, as previously discussed.

Pride in heritage. Ultimately, participants seemed to find some value and pride in their heritage, and in the uniqueness of possessing multiple identities. As Ashley, an Ethiopian-American, noted, “For me being a second-generation immigrant symbolizes having two identities because I feel like I'm Ethiopian, but Ethiopian and American culture—they're very different and I like that I'm able to enjoy different things from the different cultures.” The ability to find pleasure in both cultures was important, as it indicated an acceptance of the SGIS identity and implied a sense of uniqueness about oneself that not everyone can possess. Although she previously described being both American and Hispanic as confusing, Sharon echoed this sentiment, saying, “I think I'm proud because I get an insight to both sides, and I can sympathize with two different groups.” Sharon’s perspective illustrates that the SGI identity specifically provided insight into multiple cultures, allowing for a wider worldview and richer understanding which would prove useful upon entering college. Additionally, this uniqueness produced feelings of pride due to having experiences that those who do not identify as SGIs will likely not have.

Parents seemingly play a critical role in how much or how little their children leaned into or out of their ethnic heritage and how much or how little they assimilated to American culture. For most participants, pride was instilled via parental influence. Samantha shared, “We're very happy that we come from two countries and especially my mom has always reminded me that your identity is that you're Mexican-American. Don't forget where you come from, and it's okay that you look different.” Samantha’s quote illustrates that the connection a person has to their ethnic heritage relies heavily on how much of a priority the parents or family have made throughout their upbringing and into their journey into adulthood.

For several participants, their parents' instilling of their culture is synonymous with the immigration sacrifices their parents or grandparents made to be in the United States and recognition of the privilege of growing up in the United States. Ashley found her cultural pride increased in college, and she leaned into her bi/polyculturalism through requiring people to correctly pronounce her Ethiopian name after years of it being pronounced in an "Americanized" way. Ashley's decision depicts an important shift from the experiences of the upbringing to the anticipations of the college journey, where FGC-SGI students can make choices about their identities and how they are presented.

For others, the trauma and struggles of immigration are ever present in their view of their heritage, and even at times similar to their parents or extended family members. Stephanie shared,

> Being a second-generation immigrant is just being the product of a lot of trauma and a lot of struggle and fight. But it is so worth it to see this pride from my family, the fact that they are so happy to be Americans, even though they've been mistreated here too. It does come with a lot of hardships, a lot of adjusting, and searching constantly to find where I stand in the U.S. as a biracial person and as a second-generation immigrant but it's really worth it to see this mixture of cultures and how it can bring people together.

Stephanie's quote illustrates that FGC-SGI students often use their parents' immigration-related struggles and sacrifices as motivation to persist despite the baggage associated with it and despite the challenges they have also faced. Thus, the desire to find success hinged specifically on honoring their parents or grandparents' immigration journey and the lack of opportunities their

family faced upon their immigration. For Laura, a Mexican-American, having a term to use for her cultural identity provided validation of her immigrant-related experiences. She described,

> [The SGIS term] makes me feel seen or understood, because I'm not necessarily an immigrant like the way my parents are. But I still struggled with them. And so, because I didn't know that term, it just kind of felt like I wasn't really allowed to call myself that even though I would say that some of my experiences are similar to my parents.

Laura's quote supports the idea that identity naming is critical to identity acceptance, as discussed previously. Further, although not direct immigrants into the U.S, SGIS' immigration experience and subsequent struggles impacts their development and perspective of their identities, for better or worse. Overall, the discussion of immigration sacrifice as the source of motivation generally became emotional for participants. It was evident that participants felt a great source of pride to be the first in their family to obtain a college degree albeit the confusing navigation process and "battle of identity" that inevitably occurs.

The college journey. The discussion of the college journey provided an opportunity to see how experiences within the upbringing played a role in identity and sense of belonging experiences. Notably, the college journey produced negative and positive emotional reactions as they related to bi/polyculturalism. Participants experience negative emotional reactions due to not having a familial model they could use during the college journey. These experiences derived primarily from the FGCS identity. Participants experienced positive emotional reactions more often as a result of seeking diversity within the college context, which was closely tied to the SGIS identity.

Lack of model. For FGC-SGI students, specifically those who are the eldest or only children, having support from family members who attended college in the pre-college journey was not possible. Yet, even when participants had parental or family support, or older siblings who could provide some guidance, there was an overwhelming sentiment of the "unknown." This fear of the "unknown" concerned participants as they worried it may negatively impact their college process which would subsequently put them at a disadvantage, set them up for failure, and cause embarrassment or shame on their family due to their high expectations. Although she had several siblings who attended college and provided her with support and guidance, Melissa still found herself feeling uncertain about her choices throughout her college journey, namely regarding major and course decisions. She shared, "For me it was like I just didn't know what I was doing. Sometimes. I didn't know if I was making the right decisions or talking to the right people, or even in the right major. Sometimes I had that struggle." Melissa's quote depicts the notion that even FGC-SGI students with some familial model still struggle along the college journey, namely due to not having a more consistent "know-how" that would stem from a parental model to navigate necessary processes.

For several participants, being the eldest added a layer of pressure with having to eventually be a model for younger siblings preparing to attend college. Samantha described the salience of the "eldest" identity:

> I was the oldest, so I had to figure out FAFSA. I had to figure out their scholarships. You just have to figure out things kind of on your own. And I think also because I've wanted to help her [sister] through the process of not going through what I have to go through. I feel like that's a really big identity.

Samantha's experience illustrates that FGC-SGI students frequently had to learn how to cope with uncertainty, doubt, and the "unknown" in order to persist. This played a role in the development and application of being bi/polycultural within the college context. Further, Samantha alluded to fulfilling the "American dream" often referenced by immigrants and their families as their motivating factor for immigration. Since FGC-SGI students feel added pressure to find success as the "first in their family" both in the United States and in college, this presents a challenge to fulfill said dreams while also navigating fluctuating identity representations within various contexts, like college.

Within the college context, the bi/polycultural journey begins pre-college within social and cultural experiences that produce mixed feelings. Those emotions most closely associated with the pre-college process include frustration, resentment, fear, confusion, and doubt. They refer primarily to the college application and financial aid (i.e., FAFSA) processes, and are most closely associated with FGCS status specifically. Danielle, a Mexican-American FGCS, described the self-learning process as related to the college admissions and financial aid processes. She stated, "So, I'm going to be honest, it was really hard. I was very unknown to everything, so it was a lot of self-teaching, self-guiding through things, and you just learn a lot about yourself." These processes, largely navigated alone, caused Danielle and most participants immense feelings of stress. Samantha echoed these feelings sharing the difficulty in being a FGCS is not having the security of having guidance throughout the college process. Samantha's feelings allude back to the general fear of the "unknown" and the insecurity that is derived from having to figure out the college process without a model.

In fact, participants experienced mostly feelings of negativity, and, sometimes, negative outcomes as a result of not having a model to follow during the pre-college journey. Erica described feeling frustration with having to navigate the financial aid process alone as compared to her White American counterparts. She stated, “My boyfriend—his dad [files FAFSA] for him. That must be nice. And I was like ‘I don't have that luxury.’ So, I did it myself and then I didn't end up getting aid and I had to pay all out of pocket.” Erica’s experience depicts the frustration associated with having to navigate the pre-college journey alone. Particularly, when hearing about White American peers’ experiences which included having parents who went to college and were walking them through the application process, or in some cases completing applications on their behalf. Experiences like these added to FGC-SGI students’ necessity to be chameleons, or to adapt to the circumstances within contexts, regardless of how challenging it may be. This adaptability furthers the manifestation of being bi/polycultural within the college environment.

Seeking diversity. Participants frequently sought diverse, specific contexts (e.g., inclusive campus resources) in order to feel seen, validated, and accepted; feelings that they had not always felt much or at all pre-college. As previously discussed, these experiences subsequently aided in the disclosure, negotiation, and naming of identities. Roxy, a nonbinary Pakistani-America student, described their experience attending a pride parade while in college. They described that the parade itself was not the most validating part of the experience but rather who they commuted to the parade with. They said, “I went to a pride parade for the first time, but it wasn't just about going to a pride parade. It was going with folks who were willing to listen to you talk about your experiences. That was just really validating.” They went on to describe

having a conversation with someone on the commute to the parade who was from their home state. During this conversation, they shared stories about having to hide their gender identity throughout their upbringings. The experience of storytelling, again, illustrates that seeking out inclusive peers fosters a stronger connection to salient identities. Thus, developing this connection encouraged Roxy to share about their experiences with those who could relate and understand; something that they could not or did not do regularly pre-college.

Although participants experienced some stereotyping and discrimination within and external to college peer groups, the feeling of being accepted due to the diverse, inclusive environment within the institution outweighed the negative emotional reactions for all the participants. Thus, the emotional journey largely turned to excitement and aspiration. For Stephanie, meeting people who were biracial and not as connected to one or both of their ethnicities was refreshing. She described, “It's really, really cool to know that I'm not the only person who isn't super in touch with my Asian culture. It's really, really awesome that there's so many support systems for people like me that I never really saw growing up.” Stephanie’s quote illustrates that seeking out diverse peers provides FGC-SGI students with a level of understanding and support that cannot necessarily be achieved outside of experiencing both identities, and an experience that is not readily afforded pre-college or within college contexts that lack diversity and inclusivity. In fact, Roxy specifically sought out connecting with people who shared one or more of their identities like other FGCS. They stated, “I've never been to an institution where there was a Pakistani Student Association. So that's been new, because I think otherwise, I might not have super strong connections to the Pakistani community here.” Roxy’s

quote depicts the role of strengthening their relationship with their respective identities to the manifestation of being bi/polycultural within the college context.

It is important to note that, although located in the Southeast U.S, the institution is positioned in a large, diverse city. This was an appealing factor for each participant when deciding where to attend college, primarily due to a lack of diversity during their upbringings. For some, the diversity allowed for the experience of an exciting social life—an experience that also was not readily afforded pre-college. For Ashley, being exposed to different people was unexpected but welcomed. She found that she has become friends with people who she would have not otherwise met. Thus, exposure to this type of diversity prompted a celebration of Ashley's own identity-related differences. Similarly, Sharon described desiring to meet more Hispanic people upon entering college and her elation in being able to do so successfully. In fact, this was her favorite part about the institution thus far. She said, "I've made a lot more Hispanic friends because my high school was all White. I was the only Latina in my grade … and now all my roommates are Hispanic. So, I think that's really cool." Sharon's quote illustrates that there is comfort in developing friendships with people of same-ethnicity who shared similar salient identities as this allowed for a deeper understanding of oneself.

Overall, the data showed the manifestation of experiencing FGC-SGI identities hinged on acknowledging the burden to succeed, and its subsequent reactions and outcomes, coupled with leaning into the identity negotiation and naming process, and its subsequent reactions and outcomes. Essentially, when FGC-SGI college students acknowledge the pressure and pride to be the first in the United States and first to attend college, they are better equipped to be bi/polycultural within the college contexts, and beyond. Simply put, being the first generation

born in the United States and the first generation to obtain a college degree are sources of pain and pride for the participants. Although common for FGC-SGI students to adequately exist in the United States, when participants could "see" themselves and their experiences within the college environment, this produced heightened feelings of self-acceptance, and belonging. Thus, as Figure 1 shows, the shift from the latent to manifest of the experience of FGC-SGI identities directly relates with and influences the phenomenon of *a sense of belonging in college*. Namely, experiencing FGC-SGI identities means acknowledging and leaning into *the burden to succeed* and experiencing FGC-SGI identities are a constant process of negotiating and naming identities within the overall college context and specific contexts which leads to an understanding of how to *be bi/polycultural*. Keeping this in mind, the following section will describe the phenomenon of a sense of belonging in college as it means to *"see" oneself and be "seen"* and as *the freedom to be*. Thus, using Figure 1, this would imply that experiencing a sense of belonging ultimately is to *be a part of something*.

A Sense of Belonging Means: "Seeing" Oneself and Being "Seen"

A focal point of deriving a sense of belonging among participations related to or was a direct outcome of representation. For participants, representation meant "seeing" oneself in various contexts within the college environment and among the college community as well as being "seen" by various people and within various structures. Thus, when representation could be found or experienced, positive outcomes and emotional reactions ensued. On the other hand, when a lack of representation occurred, negative outcomes and emotional reactions were produced.

Representation. Representation was frequently noted among all participants, particularly its impact on belonging. Representation primarily focused on observed or acknowledged diversity and inclusivity of ethnicities and regarded FGCS status, too. Observed representation was noted as being important within majors, in the classroom among peers and/or faculty, throughout campus grounds, among housing staff and roommate assignments, and among and within student organizations. All the participants described the belief that diversity and inclusivity within the college environment and among their peers allowed for acceptance and exploration of self/identity. In fact, in contexts where participants saw one or more of their identities represented or included, identity salience and acceptance increased, supporting RMMDI tenets. Feeling welcomed among faculty and within the classroom was echoed by more than half of the participants as being a direct result of "seeing" oneself and being "seen." As a transfer student, Cici had seen a lack of diversity at her previous institution, and often felt isolated due to her Venezuelan and American heritage. For Cici, representation among faculty aided in feeling like she belonged. Thus, upon transferring into this institution, Cici was struck by the promotion of diversity in and outside of the classroom.

In cases where faculty members may not have been POC or revealed their own FGCS identities but welcomed and encouraged diversity and inclusion, belonging was also fostered. For Roxy, even if they chose not to share about themself in the classroom, knowing they were welcome to was motivating. They discussed,

> I know some teachers, in their syllabi, they'll have little notes about things, sometimes specifically, racial inclusivity. And so when that's heartfelt that can be, at least for me, it was motivating. Even if I end up not sharing information, I at least have the emotions of

> safety when I'm near or in that class. And then I can function well and just focus on my academics.

Thus, representation for Roxy and others did not explicitly mean or equate to same-ethnicity faculty and peers within every specific context. Rather, feeling welcomed equated to knowing that they were safe as a POC within the respective context.

Other participants discussed the importance of seeing representation among housing staff and/or roommate assignment, particularly when conflict arose. As previously discussed, Sharon, who had all White roommates during her first semester at the institution, frequently suppressed parts of her identity around her roommates. She described an incident where the roommates made comments that caused her unease and dissolved into a conflict when Sharon confronted them about their comments. This resulted in a roommate mediation led by a resident advisor (RA). She described feeling relieved that the RA was of Hispanic descent, stating, “Luckily at the time, my RA, she was Hispanic. So, we had to have the roommate mediation and obviously she can't be biased but it was nice knowing that there was [an]other person similar to me there.” Sharon went on to describe that she felt she had to take more accountability and apologize extensively to her roommates, whereas she did not feel they reciprocated in their efforts. Thus, although this moment was one that made her feel like she least belonged at the institution, she was grateful for the RA who ensured she was able to voice her side of the story without interruption. Sharon’s experience supports the notion that representation plays a critical role in feelings of safety and in adequately being supported in difficult situations or contexts. These feelings subsequently aid in the fostering of belonging overall.

It is important to note, time spent and overall involvement at the institution may have impacted perspectives on diversity and cultural representation: the more immersed a student becomes in the environment, the more aware they are of the cultural representation present or lack thereof. For participants who were in the first semester or first year of college, immersion was not as significant as those who were sophomores or greater; thus, perspective of and exposure to diversity may be limited. Yet, overwhelmingly, experiencing both diversity and representation among peer groups played an important role in the development of belonging for all participants. Since the navigation of identities is complex for FGC-SGI students, and because they often lack a model to follow, representation of one or more of their identities within college contexts promoted a sense of confidence, encouraging them to seek assistance, ask questions, and share about their challenges more readily among their peers. Thus, in doing so, a sense of belonging in college could develop.

Representation within and among various peer groups was frequently discussed as being critical to belonging. Overwhelmingly, same-ethnicity peer groups and student organizations specifically promoted identity salience of FGC-SGI identities, and acceptance of bi/polycultural experiences. For example, in these spaces, participants noted being encouraged to use cultural traditions/norms (e.g., speaking native language), to explore oneself, and the opportunity to fully be oneself. Laura, a Mexican-American student, shared, “So last semester, I went to [Latinx Organization] and I had friends with me, and they were playing like Latinx music and I could hear people talking Spanish. And to me, that was the moment where I was like, ‘Hey, it's a group of other people who are like me’, and it made me feel seen, and that's when I felt like I belonged.” Laura’s quote illustrates the importance of using or discussing cultural rituals, norms,

and traditions in spaces where they would not ordinarily occur (i.e., outside of the home). This was an unusual experience for all the participants, yet one that was welcomed and appreciated. Further, the use of cultural traditions was, in some ways, an expression of one's identities and thereby led to an acceptance of self within specific college contexts (e.g., student organization events).

Lack of representation. On the other hand, in spaces where FGC-SGI students did not feel welcomed or were discriminated against based on their bi/polyculturalism isolation was fostered. This was seen in the norming of experiences or identities, or not accounting for diversity, via stereotyping, and through disrespect or lack of acknowledgment of identities particularly within classrooms, curriculum, or entire majors. Samantha described experiencing a lack of understanding of her SGI identity among her peers throughout her courses in her major in business stating that she rarely saw representation within her college, and when the subject of belonging was brought up in class, at least one of her White American peers did not understand why representation mattered. Samantha's experience illustrates the concept of the norming of the White experience despite the rich history of immigration present in the United States. The lack of understanding of the experiences of POC among White American peers fosters feelings of isolation or unwelcomeness.

Further, curriculum that centered on the White American experience fostered feelings of isolation for some participants, in addition to a lack of representation. Laura described,

> I guess in my majors, I'm mostly the only person of color or the only Latinx student and so a lot of times I feel like my thoughts aren't really valid 'cuz the way that the professors

> teach is centered on American experiences. So, I'm American but I kind of grew up with the Latinx experience because that's how my parents raised me.

Laura's experience depicts the dichotomy between being American by nationality and Latinx, for example, by ethnicity. Again, this clash of cultures is presented and exacerbated by the norming of the White American experience—fostering isolation. Further, Cici described the difference between the experience of belonging within peer contexts and institutional contexts, like curriculum. Whereas she largely felt belonging among her peers, namely same-ethnicity peers, she did not necessarily feel the same way with regard to curriculum that highlighted Latinx people and history in particular. Cici described the misrepresentation of Hispanic people, advancement, and overall history in an anthropology course which furthered the idea that the White American experience is the primary or dominant experience despite the presence of minoritized groups currently and throughout history. The context, again, plays an important role as she noted that within her major in social work, she did not have these types of experiences and posited that had she been pursuing a STEM major, for example, she may have felt even more isolated. It should be noted that, historically, POC do not highly populate STEM or business majors. Thus, Cici's quote regarding the difference between majors and feelings of comfort depicts the assumption that POC are not suited for certain majors/fields, and thereby do not belong in these spaces, supports this idea. Cici's major-related experience rang true for other participants who noted significant changes in feelings of belonging upon switching from engineering to architecture, like in Melissa's case, or in Stephanie's case, currently an engineering major and deciding whether to switch majors.

Outcomes of a lack of representation. Overall, not seeing oneself within various contexts within the college setting, or simply just being a POC, led all participants to feel alone at times, particularly within a large PWI. Erica, among a few other participants, noted the lack of diversity at the institution overall, frequently referencing the institution as being a PWI, and indicated there was an overall lack of representation of LatinX students, faculty, and staff at the institution. This included having dissimilar experiences to White American peers, which resulted in not fitting in among these peer groups. More than half of participants noted lacking privileges their peers were afforded surrounding areas like advising or networking, particularly participants identifying as Latinx/Hispanic. Samantha described that as a FGCS, one is not aware of simple advising protocols, for example, how many credits to sign up for or the difference in credit hours for full-time vs. part-time students. Additionally, being a business student produced issues with privilege; another major where non-white representation lacked. As she approached her junior and senior years, she recalled, "I went into business and no one tells you need to have your resumes, you need to start applying for interviews a whole year in advance to get into really good companies." Samantha's quote illustrates concepts like cultural and social capital as they pertain to the White American experience. The traditional understanding of cultural/social capital privileges the White American experience and views it as dominant. Thus, the experience of being unaware of college processes that White American or continuing generation peers are familiar with creates a void of the capital that is seemingly necessary to persist and succeed in college. Furthermore, it disregards the rich capital minoritized groups possess.

Similarly, Laura described how her FGC-SGI identities fostered feelings of isolation in college as she compared herself to her White American counterparts:

> I think the driving factor for me is the fact that I'm like a person of color. Maybe it would have been different if I had chosen a different school that had a lot more than people of color. But for me, I think the fact that I see so many other people who aren't like me who seem to know what to do, and I never I don't know what to do because nobody else in my family ever went through this. It's kind of like I feel kind of like a guinea pig because it's like, after me, my siblings are going to be able to come here if they want to, and then I'll be able to help them. And because I know but I don't have anybody to help me.

Laura's experience illustrates the notion that possessing multiple, intersecting identities can create a deep-rooted sense of isolation in contexts where one or more identities are not acknowledged, or represented. Thus, possessing identities that are not the "norm" or standard produces opportunities for isolation to foster, thus, perpetuating fears, and impacting persistence.

Emotions related to lacking privileges were often longstanding, beginning during upbringing and pre-college and, at times, were emphasized during the college journey. Melissa, a Guatemalan-American student, described feelings associated with her FGCS status:

> I grew up being mostly ashamed that my parents didn't go to college. I was always a little bit more shy about telling people that for whatever reason, and I felt like I had to work really hard to prove that I was supposed to be wherever I was, because I didn't have that guidance or that model from them to help me through.

Melissa's feelings were shared across the participants. These feelings illustrate that lacking a model for navigating the college journey creates disadvantage and fosters isolation. Thus, finding others with shared experience encourages belonging and leads to feeling like one is being "seen."

Once one felt “seen”, they also felt they were not the only one experiencing a lack of privilege or disadvantage, allowing them to feel less alone in their feelings and experiences.

In addition to addressing a lack of representation, participants noted that administration could be doing more to support FGC-SGI students financially, academically, and mentally, which would subsequently enable belonging among the student group. Most of the participants noted a lack of advocacy of their identities and a lack of targeted resources or support as fostering feelings of isolation. For example, Sharon, a Costa-Rican-American student, suggested that administrators consider aiding FGC-SGI students with financial processes, an area of the college journey that affected most of participants. She suggested, “One thing I would really like to see is specifically helping us [with] financial stuff, like maybe on how to fill it [FAFSA] out if you don't know what you're doing.” Sharon specifically suggested that administration should consider providing resources in multiple languages, citing her surprise that the institution had only recently started offering campus tours in Spanish provided the large Hispanic population at the institution. Additionally, Laura suggested administration consider hiring faculty and staff who identify with one or both identities, while half of the participants suggested faculty and administration do more to educate themselves on FGCS and SGIS identities, and the subsequent experiences students belonging to these populations have throughout the college journey. Sharon highlighted the necessity of considering multiple, intersecting identities when policies and processes are created that adequately reflect and support all students, and not just the majority. Therefore, the importance of seeing oneself and being seen coupled with the freedom to fully be oneself among peers aided in the latent development of belonging in college for FGC-SGI students.

A Sense of Belonging Means: The Freedom to Be

Belonging means the freedom to be oneself with little to no parameters of what that entails. The freedom to be oneself is an experience that none of the participants had previous to their college journey. The "freedom to be" included not having to fit in or prove oneself, finding and creating safe spaces to explore and disclose multiple identities, and being true to oneself fully and completely without concealment.

"Not having to fit in." For all of the participants, being a POC who has grown up without the same privileges as their White American counterparts meant sticking out or being isolated, having to overcompensate for their upbringing or background, and feeling embarrassed or shameful for having to explain who they are or how they were raised. Thus, upon finding a sense of belonging in college, the participants all noted how important this was to their sense of identity and overall acceptance and celebration of who they are. Laura shared a sentiment that others also shared, the feeling of being valued without judgment or questioning of one's intelligence or capability. She stated,

> Belonging here at [the institution] is just being able to feel like I can exist without that being a problem for other people. I'd like to be able to just be here, do my work, exist, and then feel smart. It's really weird how, like I mentioned in my classes, there's a lot of people who aren't people of color. So, sometimes I'll feel like stupid for saying certain things. And I want to be able to feel like we belong or to be able to feel like I'm not stupid, like I can share my thoughts, even though they're different from everybody else's.

Laura's quote illustrates that FGC-SGI students often feel as though they have to work harder than their counterparts to feel intelligent, and to feel as though their voice is valued and it

belongs in the classroom. Danielle, a Mexican-American student, echoed this sentiment by stating that belonging means "to be treated fairly and to know that you have a voice and you can use it." Her perspective of belonging produces feelings of comfort. Thus, when a FGC-SGI student is treated well and feels that their opinions matter, they feel comfortable being within a space. To reiterate, being a FGC-SGI student did not solely mean having the freedom to exhibit one's personality freely but more importantly, to do so without fearing being un-welcomed or devalued for doing so.

Other salient identities that intersect with FGCS and/or SGIS identities produced similar feelings. Roxy, a Pakistani-American, nonbinary student, shared that in spaces like classrooms where their gender identity was welcomed as part of the norm rather than being highlighted as unusual, they felt included. They described, "So, if you have that welcoming environment, like you ask for pronouns, that might allow more folks to be like, 'Oh, okay, this is an inclusive environment. I can be myself.' So, small things like that can make a difference." Roxy's quote illustrates that even the smallest acts of inclusivity can make all the difference in a student's sense of belonging. In fact, in welcoming, safe spaces, participants described feeling motivated to speak up and share about their identities and experiences more readily.

Finding or creating a safe and unifying space within a large campus environment meant one did not feel alone, felt motivated to use their voice, and existed without fear or issue. Laura shared, "It's definitely just feeling like I'm a part of something. Without that something being like, my race, or my ethnicity is just being able to say, 'Hey, I exist, and you exist, and we exist together.' So, it made me really feel like having a safe place on campus." In this quote, Laura was referring to her participation in a Latinx student organization where she was surrounded by

other same-ethnicity peers who also shared her FGCS identity. In addition to being able to freely share her FGC-SGI student identities, Laura was also largely comfortable with sharing other salient identities (e.g., LGBTQ+) in these spaces. Laura's experience illustrates that the mere possibility of existing with multiple identities was appealing as participants had not felt able to do so in other contexts outside of the college environment; including, at times, within their own family homes where they were constantly negotiating the salience of certain identities and suppressing some of those identities. Ashley, an Ethiopian-American student, echoed this sentiment, describing her experience in safe spaces, like same-ethnicity organizations, where she felt respected and did not feel concerned about being judged. Ashley's experience illustrates FGC-SGI students' need to feel heard and regarded often due to not having experienced these feelings throughout their lives, pre-college. Thus, the experience of having a space to be oneself, without having to try hard to fit in proved appealing and motivating. Overall, the data showed that even within a large PWI, all participants were able to experience inclusivity and diversity in safe spaces prompting them to freely use their voices without fear in these spaces.

Being true to oneself. The freedom to be oneself without having to explain or prove anything opened possibilities for participants to further explore their multiple identities within spaces where they felt safe. Thus, experiencing inclusivity plays a role in allowing one to be true to oneself without fearing comparisons, and thereby, fostering a sense of pride. Roxy described being in Pakistani-based and LGBTQ+ focused clubs when they shared, "It's nice to be in clubs where we can talk about multiple aspects of your identity instead of just one; just your opportunity to be yourself fully." Roxy's quote illustrates the freedom to express multiple

identities within one space; an experience most of the participants had not shared before the college journey.

Yet again, the significance of peer support and student involvement, particularly in spaces with people of shared backgrounds, was evident in the development of a sense of belonging, and subsequently, allowed for participants to express all identities rather than segmenting parts of oneself per context. Sharon described her experience at the university overall saying, “Just knowing that I have a space here and I'm just as welcome as any other person. I feel like that's what I think of belonging here. Feeling like I can fully express myself and it being taken seriously or not overlooked, and it being valued just as much as other people.” As discussed previously, Sharon began to feel belonging when she began making Latinx friends, started attending Latinx organization meetings, and when her housing assignment was adjusted to include more Hispanic individuals. Thus, Sharon’s experience illustrates that having reliable peer groups where one feels safe fosters feelings of belonging.

Similarly, Melissa, a Guatemalan-American student, found a diverse peer group within her architecture major, which allowed her to be true to herself, and to gain more confidence in who she is—experiences she did not have pre-college. Melissa’s experience illustrates that when FGC-SGI students can exist without having to explain anything, they feel more like themselves. For all the participants, pre-college experiences centered on trying to fit in with social norms and constant comparison to others, mostly White American peers. So, when they can find the space and time to just be who they are within college contexts, they can see changes in their personalities, behaviors, and relationships. Ultimately, the experience of being “seen” coupled with the freedom to be oneself seemingly aided in the manifestation of the essence of *belonging*

in college which was deemed among FGC-SGI students to mean *being a part of something* within the larger college community.

A Sense of Belonging Is: Being a Part of Something

The experience of belonging centered around the theme of finding “niche groups" or groups of people with shared experiences in order to feel at home or find community within the large campus. These niche groups included FGCS-related student organizations, same-ethnicity student organizations, LGBTQ+ student organizations, small, diverse groups within majors, and same-ethnicity peers within housing assignments. Thus, getting involved proved critical to the participants' sense of belonging as it subsequently fostered support systems which encouraged perseverance and persistence.

Getting involved. The importance of getting involved was a belief every participant held in order to foster belonging and combat isolation. Getting involved meant something similar for each participant, namely finding peers with diverse backgrounds and interests where one can freely and openly share about oneself. As it has been discussed, participants often leaned on same-ethnicity or inclusive peer groups to feel like they were a part of something. Samantha, who participated in one Latinx student organization, one Latinx and FGCS-focused organization, and a culturally diverse co-ed fraternity, credited being involved as the reason she felt belonging. This was primarily due to the realization that she was not the only one going through the challenges she faced. She described, “It helped me a lot being super, super involved. It felt really nice to have that community around you. It felt really refreshing to hear other people's perspectives and that they're going through the same things.” Samantha’s quote illustrates the importance of the representation of identities within specific college contexts like

student-centered clubs and organizations. In spaces where identities were represented, participants, like Laura, felt a sense of community and were encouraged to share about their experiences. Similarly, Laura, who participated in at least one Latinx student organization described, “I think it's because I surround myself with people who have similar experiences. It's so much easier to feel like I'm actually a part of something or like I'm actually not, you know, I'm not really alone, even though sometimes it feels that way.” Laura’s quote illustrates that being around people who share similar experiences promotes feeling like one is a part of something bigger within the college community.

Other participants, like Erica, who lived off-campus described that getting involved meant feeling at home even when their physical homes were not on-campus. She described that participating in Latinx student organizations allowed her to “find her people” who made her feel “at home” on campus. This then allowed her to feel like, “... you’re not an outsider, that you have someone to go to and reach out to.” Erica’s student organization involvement experience was shared across all but one participant (who was not involved in a student organization at the time of the study). The overall sentiment was that being involved in organizations and clubs, specifically same-ethnicity groups, meant feeling connected to oneself and one’s culture—which encouraged salience of identities and fostered belonging within the college environment. Further, for some participants, like Danielle, getting involved gave them a purpose. She stated, “I’m helping out in the community with the first-generation college students and the Latinx community here [at the institution]. I feel proud that I’m able to make a difference.” In her quote, Danielle is recalling her participation in a Latinx and FGCS-focused club at the institution. Danielle’s quote illustrates that getting involved was not necessarily always about or for oneself,

but that doing so helped others which simultaneously helped them to establish community and strengthened their identity salience. Thus, although getting involved was important to establishing belonging, it was evident in the data that getting involved with those with shared identities and experiences allowed for deeper relationships to form and for the salience of identity to permeate throughout the overall college experience.

Support systems. While most of the participants noted that family members supported their college endeavors to the best of their abilities, none of the participants noted receiving FGC or SGI identity-related support in a way that was meaningful or honored their multiple identity experiences—until college. A few participants were able to do this within student organizations, specifically with the support of faculty/staff. Erica described her participation in a club that showcased faculty and staff of Latinx backgrounds which was motivating. She stated, “It was just really nice to see a Zoom filled with Latin professors and staff. And that was just super cool knowing that we weren't alone and they're there to support us as well.” Erica’s quote reiterates the importance of representation among higher education professionals and its role in fostering support, and thereby, belonging among FGC-SGI students.

All the participants were able to do this upon finding peer groups where they could be themselves fully and where shared identity experiences were evident. This often led to a support system being created which served as motivation to persist during moments of hardship or doubt. Stephanie, a biracial Laotian-American student, described what belonging meant to her:

> I think it means finding those niche groups where you really feel like you're accepted no matter what. They relate to you, they respect you, and you don't have to kind of prove your worth to them. You don't have to prove I belong here like you—you already belong

> there. And they're just there for support. Support has been a huge thing for me because like I said, I had no support really applying to college or getting into college or knowing what to do after that. So having all these people that are already here that are willing to support me so adamantly, even though they don't even know me yet, that's been a huge, huge change in how I feel about my belonging.

Stephanie's experience in an Asian student organization illustrates that feeling a sense of belonging resulted in a dual benefit; it benefitted the participant, and simultaneously benefitted those within the niche group.

With a community of support and a sense of belonging, participants felt more equipped to succeed and more connected to the campus community overall. Thus, being a part of something meant having people to push and support them in times of need, a place to share their stories, and to recognize they are not alone in the college experience. Samantha described her experiences in clubs and organizations:

> More than anything, it makes you feel that you belong there. Most of us are really helping each other out. [It's] realizing that you're not alone, and that there's so many opportunities to have friends, to have a sense of family on campus. And realizing, too, it's having those connections [that] can help you feel better, can make you feel safe being at college, and even want to push you harder.

Samantha illustrates that for FGC-SGI students, perseverance and persistence meant not giving into fear or doubt that they belonged and that they could succeed. While doubt and fear did not completely diminish for all participants, as described earlier, it was seemingly significantly reduced as a result of participation in niche groups. Thus, while FGC-SGI generally do not have

familial models to utilize to navigate their college journeys, the communities that are created during college provide relatively the same, or even better, support fostering a sense of belonging at the institution.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the data analysis process, participant summaries, and research findings organized by theme. Three themes were determined as they related to research question 1 and three themes were determined as they related to research question 2. Themes were organized according to phenomenological theming as the "latent" and the "manifest" to express the essence of the experience of being a FGC-SGI student at a PWI, and experiencing a sense of belonging as a FGC-SGI student. Based on the derived themes, four key findings emerged from the collected data: 1) Being the "first" both in the United States and to attend college produces an implicit pressure to succeed, 2) FGC-SGI students engage in identity disclosure more readily with people who share one or more of their identities, 3) FGC-SGI students seek out people who have similar identity characteristics in order to feel belonging, and 4) Belonging plays a critical role in how FGC-SGI students view their identities, and subsequently their abilities and chances to succeed. Chapter 5 will focus on connections between the findings and conceptual frameworks (i.e., RMMDI; sense of belonging).

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Summary of Study

This chapter will provide discussion of the findings of the study as they confirm or negate literature surrounding the FGC-SGI student identities and the study's conceptual frameworks as they relate to the four key findings: 1) Being the "first" both in the United States and to attend college produces an implicit pressure to succeed; 2) FGC-SGI students engage in identity disclosure more readily with people who share one or more of their identities; 3) FGC-SGI students seek out people who have similar identity characteristics in order to feel belonging; 4) Belonging plays a critical role in how FGC-SGI students view their identities, and subsequently their abilities and chances to succeed. This chapter will also highlight the limitations of the study, implications for practice and policy, and discuss opportunities for future research. Lastly, this chapter will include a researcher reflection of the overall study process and findings.

Research Questions, Purpose, Overview of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of college students identifying as FGCS and SGIS in the United States, with a particular focus on the experience of a sense of belonging at this identity intersection. The data analyzed for this study were from in-depth interviews of ten participants. All participants were enrolled as undergraduate students at the institution. The participants were interviewed to gain a further understanding of their overall experiences with their multiple identities and their experiences with belonging in college. This study utilized a constructivism lens because it honors that multiple realities can exist allowing for the gathering and understanding of multiple participant realities. The guiding assumption of

constructivism is that researchers should try to understand the world of lived experience from those who live in it through a collective meaning-making process which acknowledges that there will be differing constructed realities throughout this effort. Additionally, constructivist research indicates that contextual factors should be considered in making sense of the world (Mertens, 2020). Thus, two research questions were used to frame the study:

RQ1: How do college students attending a four-year, public, predominantly White institution experience first-generation college and second-generation immigrant identities?

RQ2: In what ways do first-generation college, second-generation immigrant students experience a sense of belonging during college?

Using journal reflection entries as a means of analyzing my own experiences, a "composite description" was created to capture the essence of the phenomenon of *sense of belonging* as a shared experience (Creswell, 2013, p. 82). Additionally, using Willig's (2017) "suspicious interpretation," I focused my perspective with an emphatic yet suspicious eye since I had shared experiences with the participants**.** This process was particularly important as I was close to the research topic and experienced many of the same things as the participants during my undergraduate experience. It was determined that the composite description (Creswell, 2013) of the essence of *sense of belonging in college* was wholly dependent on the individual's involvement with peer groups, particularly same-ethnicity peer groups. My suspicion was that the participants sought external support, particularly through peer groups who shared one or more of their identities, because of the pressure to succeed and the fear of failure/fear of not honoring their parents' sacrifices. They found comfort in peers who could understand their

background and experiences, and simultaneously found motivation that they were not alone in the college process. My sense was that the ensuing pressure to be the "first" drove their decisions to find peer support via "niche groups"—providing a safe place within the institution where belonging was experience, and subsequently, the motivation to persist.

In addition to the determined composite description of the phenomenon, this study determined unique contributions to the body of literature and highlighted a unique student population which has not been studied in higher education literature before. This study has provided an understanding of the intersection of college-going generation status and U.S. immigrant-generation status as it pertains to the college experience; particularly, how these bi/polycultural experiences play a role in experiencing a sense of belonging in college. The findings determined that these experiences are because, separately, FGCS and SGIS are often navigating multiple cultures simultaneously including immigrant culture, dominant U.S. cultures, and U.S. higher education culture. Thus, providing an understanding of the experience of belonging among students identifying as both FGC and SGI students is advantageous in framing and creating university and college settings which prominently and purposefully engages with this student population to promote a positive college experience, aiding in the overall persistence and success across the population.

More specifically, the intersection of FGC and SGI student identities affords students unique opportunities to empathize with others with similar identities (e.g., other FGCS), and the ability to understand and subsequently simultaneously navigate two cultures—allowing students access to both their community cultural wealth and to dominant cultural norms. This access proved useful in navigating contexts where White American peers, staff, and faculty primarily

existed (e.g., code switching to blend in). Yet, at the same time, possessing both identities proved limiting at times, primarily during the pre-college journey (e.g., lack of college model to follow). Despite what past literature suggests about FGCS and SGIS' family support during the college journey, the findings of this study indicate that for almost all the participants, parental and family support was an integral component of their journey and a key source of motivation for persistence and success.

Therefore, four key findings emerged from the collected data: 1) Being the "first" both in the United States and to attend college produces an implicit pressure to succeed, 2) FGC-SGI students engage in identity disclosure more readily with people who share one or more of their identities, 3) FGC-SGI students seek out people who have similar identity characteristics in order to feel belonging, and 4) Belonging plays a critical role in how FGC-SGI students view their identities and, subsequently, their abilities and overall chances to succeed. The following discussion will serve to address these findings as they align with the applicable body of literature and as they consider the conceptual frameworks: RMMDI and sense of belonging.

Discussion

The following sections will address the findings as they relate to the study's research questions and conceptual frameworks as well as applicable literature.

Findings Aligned with Research Questions

Research question 1 focused on understanding the experiences participants had specifically regarding their FGC-SGI student identities. The findings indicated that these experiences both predated and included the college journey up to the point of the study. The first key finding: *Being the "first" both in the United States and to attend college produces an*

implicit pressure to succeed stemmed primarily from a combination of pride and fear deriving from familial immigration-related sacrifices and struggles. FGCS literature indicates that this student population faces pressure to make their family and community proud (Evans et al., 2020; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016), and their upward mobility results in difficulty with reconciling the pressures of multiple cultures, which produces and exacerbates a disconnect between the cultures, and subsequently, within their family unit (Jehangir, 2009; London, 1989; London, 1992; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016). Similarly, SGIS literature reveals that immigrant origin and generational status play critical roles in how SGIS view their belonging in college (Arbeit et al., 2016; Baum & Flores, 2011). According to past research, SGIS feel like they must prove themselves to their peers and family members as a way of validating their belonging in college and the United States (Orupabo et al., 2019). Thus, SGIS often use multiple frames to activate cultural resources (e.g., same-ethnicity peer groups) to achieve academic success, constructing resources through a sense of belonging within the academic environment (Orupabo et al., 2019). The findings confirm that those identifying as FGC-SGI students often felt pressure to succeed resulting in a higher level of commitment to educational attainment to supplement the missing familial model of being in college and being an American (Orupabo et al., 2019). Additionally, the data shows that FGC-SGI students utilized peer relationships as a means of guidance through the college process.

Also related to the first key finding, the data shows FGC-SGI students frequently felt as though they were living two or more lives in which the norming of the White American experience did not readily align with one or more of their identities. According to the literature, second-generation immigrants specifically are often faced with assimilating into the dominant

culture in ways that are either required of them or are forced upon them (Patton et al., 2016). Thus, in order for SGIS to assimilate into college culture, factors associated with their intersecting identities must be understood (Mukherji et al., 2017). The literature also states that many students raised outside of dominant culture are highly accustomed to their ethnic culture both positively and negatively, impacting their desire to adapt to the dominant culture, and subsequently their belonging in specific settings like a PWI (Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Pivovarova & Powers, 2019; Stebleton et al., 2014, 2017). In fact, students with strong ethnic ties may outwardly behave as a part of dominant culture but inwardly retain ethnic beliefs/views. Additionally, students at PWIs generally adopt norms and behaviors of dominant groups while maintaining rich cultural affiliations/expressions in same-ethnicity peer communities (e.g., same-ethnicity student organizations) (Patton et al., 2016). The findings corroborate these ideas in several ways. Within the same-ethnicity peer communities, the participants were encouraged to use cultural traditions, norms, and behaviors (e.g., speaking native language), explore oneself in a “safe space”, and could generally fully express all identities, with some exceptions. Thus, the participants chose to integrate by embracing their bi/polyculturalism which allowed them to maintain aspects of their ethnic group and selectively acquire some aspects of the dominant group. In accordance with the literature, this was a less stressful option that yielded greater adaptation (Patton et al., 2016). It is important to note that this can make the process of accepting and presenting identities more complicated outside of same-ethnicity peer communities which correlates with RMMDI tenets that state identity salience is highly contextual, and identity is not easily navigated in all contexts (Abes et al., 2007). Thus, while some participants chose to integrate, or embrace bi/polyculturalism, as a means of reducing the stress associated with being

members of ethnic and American groups, it was also evident within the data that all the participants participated in some form of integration both before and during their college journeys.

The second key finding: *FGC-SGI students engage in identity disclosure more readily with people who share one or more of their identities* reflects the RMMDI in that identity salience is not always clear or constant (Abes et al., 2007). Although some identities remained constant regardless of context (e.g., gender or gender identity) for participants, identity disclosure of other identities was heavily contextual. For example, participants regularly described feeling uncomfortable in contexts with White American peers to share about their FGCS identity as it brought on feelings of embarrassment or shame to not possess the same experiences or family model their peers had. Further, identity disclosure was connected to identity salience. Thus, the idea of "constant" versus "context" is presented. Whether students chose to disclose or conceal their identities depended heavily on the context. In contexts where participants saw one or more of their identities represented or included, identity salience and acceptance increased. Subsequently, this played a role in whether students accepted or suppressed one or more of their identities. It seemed that since the navigation of identities was complex for FGC-SGI students, and because they often lacked an internal or familial college model to follow, the representation of one or more of their identities within college contexts promoted a sense of confidence, encouraging them to seek assistance, ask questions, and share about their challenges more readily in and out of the classroom.

Thus, specific contexts within the college context that included or showcased diverse peers (e.g., certain majors) or inclusive faculty/classrooms promoted identity salience of FGC

and SGI student identities, and thereby acceptance of subsequent and related bi/polycultural experiences. It is important to note that, overwhelmingly, the participants noted the overall diversity of the institution as being a positive and pleasant surprise as compared to their pre-college schooling with only two out of 10 participants noting feeling the institutions lacked diversity overall. Thus, the overall context seen as diverse was in stark contrast to most of the specific contexts within the institution being described by participants as lacking in diversity and representation (e.g., classrooms).

Research question 2 focused on exploring how FGC-SGI students experience a sense of belonging at large, public, PWIs. The third key finding illustrates that *FGC-SGI students seek out people who have similar identity characteristics in order to feel belonging.* Thus, the experience of belonging was rooted in niche groups based primarily on ethnic identity or some other core identity (e.g., LGBTQ+) where the intersection of FGCS identity was also prominent. The data showed that the mere possibility of "existing" without incident appealed to most participants, as they had not felt able to do so in other contexts outside of the college environment; including, at times, within their own family homes where they were constantly negotiating the salience of and/or suppressing certain identities. Yet again, the significance of peer support and student involvement, particularly in spaces with people of shared backgrounds, was evident in the development of a sense of belonging, and subsequently, allowed for participants to express many or all their identities rather than segmenting parts of oneself per context.

According to the literature, belonging is not about fitting in; rather true belonging is about being authentically oneself (Strayhorn, 2012, 2019). The participants frequently described

how they tried fitting in their whole pre-college lives by suppressing parts of their identity but that being exposed to diversity and inclusivity in college as well as finding their niche groups allowed them to truly be themselves. Further, the literature notes that sense of belonging does not equate to community but rather contributes to it. True membership in a community is derived from feelings, perceptions, and mindsets shared among individuals and a fundamental identification within a group or community (Means & Pyne, 2017; Strayhorn, 2019). Thus, when participants found similarity and shared experience within a peer group, they experienced feelings of acceptance and validation, and perceptions of being welcomed and included which both increased belonging and created true membership within the college community.

Upon experiencing a sense of belonging in college, all the participants noted how important this was to their sense of identity and overall acceptance, and celebration of who they were. Further, the freedom to be without having to explain or prove oneself seemingly opened possibilities for participants to further explore their multiple identities within spaces where they felt safe. For example, some participants described experiencing inclusive classrooms where peers of diverse backgrounds were present, and faculty acknowledged and valued their voices. This seemingly encouraged aspirational capital, or "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). When participants felt seen or represented, they were more likely to reveal additional aspects of their multiple identities or share about their bi/polycultural experiences, adding to the richness of the classroom ecology (Strayhorn, 2019). While participants may not have readily experienced acceptance or respect in all classrooms within the college context, they were able to maintain hope despite barriers due to acknowledgement of their community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

The fourth key finding: *Belonging plays a critical role in how FGC-SGI students view their identities, and subsequently, their abilities and chances to succeed* is highly related to the idea of peer support and motivation—which are generally found to be important aspects of belonging. As Strayhorn (2019) found, when individuals may be prone to feeling unwelcome in certain contexts, belongingness becomes even more important. Thus, due to their upbringings, participants were largely unsure if the college environment would repeat their previous schooling experiences or provide an avenue of inclusion. Thus, upon entering college, participants actively sought individuals who shared their feelings, or could at the least understand them, in order not to feel alone. From there, participants felt sincere and concrete support from their peers which produced feelings of motivation to persist. Participants described leaning on friends from their student organizations or classes to get through each semester, and knowing there was a place with people to go to if things got challenging. These findings corroborate the idea that "supportive relationships become critical resources that can bear on the college experience and tend to enhance commitment, connections, and retention. This is especially true for students of color" (Strayhorn, 2019, p. 17).

The literature finds that meaningful interactions with people of diverse backgrounds aids in overall belonging (Duran et al., 2020; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Ribera et al., 2017). Thus, the participants consistently noted the diversity of the institution and its appeal to their multiple identities because it gave them the space to healthily navigate their own diversities (Maestas et al., 2007). Further, students are often exploring their identities while in college and, thereby, are susceptible to being influenced by peers (Strayhorn, 2016). Thus, belongingness becomes particularly important to those who "perceive themselves as marginal to the mainstream life [of

college]" (Hurtado & Carter, 1997, p. 324). For FGC-SGI students, navigating multiple minoritized identities in spaces with White American counterparts proved challenging at times, and thus, finding a sense of belonging among niche peer groups aided in fostering feelings of community.

Findings Considering Conceptual Frameworks

It is important to highlight areas of literature surrounding social identity and ethnic identity. These areas are integral to the discussion of multiple dimensions of identity, context, and ultimately, belonging. A discussion of the connections between the findings and the primary conceptual models, RMMDI and sense of belonging, will follow.

Social and ethnic identities. As the literature determined, interactions with the larger social context contributes to the construction of social identities, particularly when dominant values determine societal expectations (Torres et al., 2009). Thus, Ethier and Deaux's (1994) bases of identity salience can be applied to FGC-SGI students as such: (1) those who highly identify with their identity group, regardless of context (e.g., participants growing up with strong, Latinx cultural identity would experience this identity as salient even at a PWI); (2) those who experience a conflict between self-perceived identity and context, for example those with minority status in their group (e.g., participants who identify as women in engineering majors were likely to perceive this identity as more salient due a historical lack of representation of women in this major); (3) those who experience conflict between past and present context (e.g., participants transitioning from predominantly White high schools to the racially diverse institution were likely to perceive the SGIS identity as more salient, in a positive manner).

Additionally, choice is not always an option when it comes to identity salience due to existing privilege and oppression structures (Patton et al., 2016). The findings show that FGC-SGI students regularly negotiated and renegotiated some or all their identities throughout their college journeys. Within some contexts, like major-specific courses, choosing which identity to highlight was not in their control (e.g., being one of few POC in a business class) and thus, the identity was made salient for them even when they desired to conceal the respective identity. For example, Samantha described feeling as though her ethnicity was unintentionally highlighted in at least one of her business classes, prompting her to feel pressured to talk about representation and why it mattered during at least one class meeting. In other contexts, the participants described being able to choose which identities were salient, or closest to their core identity, due to feelings of safety, trust, and shared experience. For example, Roxy described their elation when they realized that they were able to pick which identity to highlight depending on which student organization they were participating in at the moment. This prompted Roxy to want to further explore each of these identities because they had both the space and security to do so.

According to the literature, individuals with non-dominant ethnic roots are faced with deciding whether to acculturate to dominant culture. Acculturation begins the moment two or more cultural groups interact, and can range from assimilation, marginalization, separation to integration. As described in an earlier section, integration involves adapting bi/polyculturalism to maintain aspects of the ethnic group and acquire aspects of the dominant group, as this is a generally less stressful, more successful form of adaptation (Patton et al., 2016). The findings showed that participants experienced this process, adopting some aspects of dominant groups within certain contexts (e.g., Stephanie discussed her participation in hobbies like water rafting,

which is more often aligned with the dominant culture when primarily around her White American counterparts) while maintaining rich cultural affiliations by way of involvement in same-ethnicity student organizations (e.g., Laura described listening to ethnic music during club meetings, something she did not openly do around her peers pre-college). The literature also shows that SGIS and other immigrant-status students can experience various forms of isolation as part of the integration process which often requires further negotiation of their bi/polycultural values and beliefs, resulting in implications for their identity (Hachey & McCallen; 2018; Patton et al., 2016; Stebleton et al., 2014). The data showed that when participants' identities were made salient for them due to structures of privilege or oppression (e.g., Samantha's experience in her business course), they felt isolated and subsequent feelings of shame or awkwardness. This experience forced participants to tap into their bi/polyculturalism (e.g., highlighting their "Americanism") in order to attempt to exist within context in a manner that would honor their identities and subsequent needs. For example, Cici described feeling pressured to hide her "Hispanic accent" in spaces like classrooms with White American peers in order to better blend in and reduce feelings of awkwardness.

RMMDI. RMMDI states that context influences the development of identity, and the salience of identity depends on the contexts they are experienced within (Abes et al., 2007). Thus, the way the participants discussed and understood their FGCS and SGIS identities often reflected the context within which they were discussed. For example, when discussing challenges with the college journey, their identities were described as limiting and frustrating. Yet, when the context shifted to serving as a role model or support system for others, the identities were described with pride. Additionally, RMMDI implies that core and intersecting identities become

salient as they interact with contextual influences (Abes et al., 2007). For example, within the financial context of the college experience, the participants' core selves intersected with their FGCS identity which became overwhelmingly prominent as it centered on sentiments of self-learning and doubt. For example, Erica described how often she doubted her ability to get into college due to her FGCS status and lack of familial model when applying for FAFSA. Additionally, the overlapping contexts of family, culture, and generational status seemed to influence and shape the college experience for the participants, as participants consistently noted their parents' immigration-related sacrifices as motivating factors to succeed. Further, the RMMDI suggests that the use of a meaning-making filter allows for individuals to negotiate intersecting identities within various contextual influences. However, the ability to negotiate depends on the complexity of the filter (Abes et al., 2007). The data supports this by revealing that processes exist to negotiate conflicting relationships for FGC-SGI students attending college in the United States, and FGC-SGI students can filter out specific contextual influences to integrate these identities with other dimensions within the college environment. For example, Stephanie frequently discussed leaning on peers within the Asian Students Association to negotiate conflicts with her bi-racial identity. In spaces with peers of similar or shared backgrounds, Stephanie was able to filter other contextual influences such as her family's immigrant background, stereotypes associated with Asian women, and White American culture; allowing her to negotiate her bi-racial identity as consistent with her sense of self.

Further, it seems possible that FGCS and SGIS statuses are intersecting categories of experience that affect the entire college journey; thus, they concurrently shape college experiences of all individuals identifying in these ways. Essentially, it was not possible for

participants to completely conceal one or more of their identities, and instead, they often leaned into their one or more of their identities where possible in order to persist through specific contexts, for example, negative residence hall experiences. Sharon recalled leaning into both her American and Hispanic identities during a conflict with all White, female roommates which was mediated by a Hispanic RA. She recalled that although she felt she was being discriminated against, she felt safe knowing that she and the RA shared the same ethnic background, and as a result, the RA ensured Sharon was able to adequately share her side of the story.

RMMDI also opens possibilities for understanding how a person negotiates the complexities derived from relationships between context and identity (Abes et al., 2007), such as belonging for example. Through the meaning-making filter, Sharon, for example, was able to determine how the dorm context influenced her SGIS identity, and how it impacted her sense of belonging among her roommates. Further, the participants encountered several contexts that prompted tension throughout their college journey (e.g., Sharon's roommate conflict) that seemed to play a role in how they experienced a sense of belonging within college culture. As Strayhorn (2019) described, developing a sense of belonging takes on increased importance "in certain contexts, at certain times, among certain people" (p. 20). As a result, students function better in contexts where their needs are being met (Strayhorn, 2019). Thus, Sharon's needs, for example, were met through the support she received from the RA, and as a result, she was better able to function within the dorm context despite the conflict with her roommates.

Further, as the RMMDI determined, contexts influence identity salience and disclosure. The findings showed that participants readily disclosed some or all their identities in student organization or diverse peer contexts but often chose to withhold or conceal some or all their

identities in classrooms or dormitories where they did not feel their identities were represented or respected. Thus, to negotiate the relationship between their identities and the context, they sought support from diverse-ethnicity peers, for example, when they could not rely on their family for support due to inexperience, where they could see pieces of their multiple identities reflected. Melissa described that although her parents were supportive of her college endeavors, they could not fully understand the experience. Thus, this prompted her to seek out peers within her major in architecture who could relate with her identities and subsequent experiences in order to feel adequately supported throughout her college journey. Ultimately, in the case of these participants, the context of a new environment prompted them to seek out familiarities of their FGC-SGI identities to compensate for the lack of knowledge and/or experience, which seemingly stemmed from the intersection of these identities.

The primary premise behind *multiple dimensions of identity* attempts to illustrate the idea that identity is complicated and constantly changing, resulting in the need for negotiation internally and externally (Jones & Abes, 2013). The RMMDI allows for a view of identities as intertwined, interactive, and unique per individual and posits that repetition creates the core identity (Abes et al., 2007). Thus, identities are variable in meaning across contexts, mutually constructing, and are understood in relationship to each other (Jones & Abes, 2013; Patton et al., 2016). This means, students may experience their identity differently within different campus contexts and, over time, their identities will influence each other. The findings indicated that FGC-SGI students experienced their identities differently in different contexts (e.g., classrooms vs. student organization meetings), and depending on the context, their identities intersected

seamlessly (e.g., involvement in Latinx, FGCS-focused clubs) or they clashed and were suppressed (e.g., female and Asian identities in engineering classes).

Further, the meaning-making capacity provides a greater depiction of "not only *what* relationships are perceived among identities but *how* they come to be perceived" (Abes et al., 2007, p. 13). The more privileged an identity (e.g., heterosexual orientation), the less salient it was, and vice versa, within specific contexts and the college context overall (Jones & Abes, 2013). Further, identity salience was found to be associated with experiencing difference, which largely depended on whether the "difference" was visible or invisible according to privilege and oppression structures (Jones & Abes, 2013). For example, when a social identity was highly visible (e.g., SGIS status/ethnicity), difference was apparent and impacted how salient it was within a specific context. However, when a social identity was largely invisible (e.g., FGCS status), identity negotiations occurred to determine how to navigate and who to disclose to; and these negotiations only occurred in necessary contexts (i.e., applying for college, filling out FAFSA, etc.). However, this choice was not always a privilege afforded to the participants, given their SGIS "visibility" within most college contexts and subsequent lack of knowledge related with their FGCS status which made this identity more "visible" within certain college contexts (e.g., sharing stories with peers about parents' college experiences). Thus, the notion of salient identities being interconnected with context is presented again.

When contexts were invisible or unknown to participants (e.g., the overall college experience), systems of privilege and oppression are illuminated (Jones & Abes, 2013). Participants frequently noted feeling lost or unsure of what to do or who to go to throughout the college journey and fearing the "unknown" as precursor to inevitable failure. Participants also

frequently made comparisons to their White American counterparts who seemingly knew what to do or had a model to follow throughout the college process. This inadvertently exacerbated the burden to be the "first" and led to strategies to manage difference (Jones & Abes, 2013), including concealing the difference, living bi/polycultural lives, and selectively disclosing parts or whole self to select individuals. In particular, the findings show that participants made efforts to alter presentations of self in certain contexts, for example, by hiding their accents, pretending not to be low-income, or avoiding conversations about their parents' college experiences.

Although identity negotiation is complex and complicated, college seemingly made this process easier for several reasons. Identity construction occurs through performing it in daily interactions and in how the identities are presented to others (Abes et al., 2007). Thus, being a part of niche groups, exploring oneself, and seeing representation in various contexts provided opportunity for identity negotiation to occur and subsequently fostered belonging. The findings show that identity disclosure and identity naming equated to feeling and being seen, or a sense of inclusivity. Additionally, the dichotomy presented between ethnicity and nationality regarding the SGI identity presented an opportunity to negotiate conflict between upbringing as "American" and traditional, cultural norms related with ethnic origins that were generally upheld by the family. A dynamic such as this presents complex negotiations internally and externally. Internally, participants seemed to falter with how to define who they are while simultaneously managing external perceptions their families, communities, and others had. Subsequently, this seemed to influence identity construction, salience, and acceptance overall despite what the core identity was for the respective participant. Thus, what a person deems to be a part of their core identity may be filtered depending on contextual influences, namely, identities are variable in

meaning across contexts, are mutually constructed (or deconstructed), and can be performative given the "audience" (Abes et al., 2007, p. 14). Externally, participants sought individuals who either looked like them or disclosed sharing similar identity experiences as a means of negotiating, naming, and accepting one or more identities including those outside of FGC and SGI identities. Thus, although making friends was seemingly important to establishing belonging, it was evident in the data that making friends with those with shared identities and experiences allowed for deeper relationships to form and for the salience of identity to permeate throughout the overall college context.

Sense of belonging. Sense of belonging has been conceptualized as fundamental to identification within a group or community and is closely associated with social support (Means & Pyne, 2017). Further, sense of belonging is not static and is context-dependent (e.g., institution type; interaction type) (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017; Ribera et al., 2017; Strayhorn, 2012). For example, students may feel connected in the classroom or to faculty but feel isolated from peers (Strayhorn, 2012). The findings corroborate the literature, showing that belonging for FGC-SGI students heavily depended on specific contexts within the college environment in which participants felt valued, belonging was fostered. This also confirms literature which found that belonging derives primarily from perceptions of "valued involvement" which is based primarily on peer relationships and faculty compassion (Hoffman et al., 2002). As previously discussed, when participants felt faculty acknowledged and respected their identities, and thereby their voice, they felt a part of the classroom experience. This also corroborated Strayhorn (2019)'s findings which posited that faculty and peer encouragement, specifically within classroom settings, produces feelings of acceptance. Thus, according to the

data, when FGC-SGI students did not “see” themselves in a classroom or were not outwardly included and valued, they did not feel they belonged within this context; thereby, producing identity concealment for fear of judgment, rejection, or isolation. Melissa described the contrast between her original major in engineering and her current major in architecture as being stark. She shared that while she was in engineering, due to being a female POC, she was one of the only people who looked like her which made it difficult for her to make connections with her peers and left her feeling isolated and rejected. However, once she made the decision to switch her major, she immediately noticed differences among the diversity of her peers and faculty, prompting her to feel outwardly and inwardly included in her architecture classes.

The findings confirmed literature which indicates that students who experience forms of discrimination (Duffy et al., 2020) or engage in peer conversations on common sociocultural issues created a sense of isolation on campus (Duran et al., 2020). The participants often described feeling fearful of being stereotyped in college due to their pre-college experiences, and at times, feeling compelled to engage in behaviors like code-switching in order to conceal parts of their identity to avoid discrimination. Further, participants also described avoiding conversations which centered on finances, if/where their parents attended college, and other related areas when in groups with White American peers due to the fear of being judged. Yet, the findings contradict the literature that states that minoritized students often feel an obligation to assimilate to a PWI campus climate though it often lacks diverse resources and activities (Duffy et al., 2020; Hachey & McCallen, 2018; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Means & Pyne, 2017; Stebleton et al., 2014). The findings showed that despite the institution of study classified as a PWI, the participants largely did not feel the campus climate erred on the side of being non-

diverse due to finding niche peer groups. Thus, social integration, as described previously, was made easier for the participants overall due to their involvement with peers of shared identities.

Further supporting the literature, the findings showed that institutional support structures positively contributed to a sense of belonging for minoritized students and included those which were social identity-based such as student organizations (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Duran et al., 2020; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Means & Pyne, 2017; Ribera et al., 2017; Stebleton et al., 2014). Within these spaces, FGC-SGI students had an increased awareness of their identities, challenged internalized oppression, and were encouraged to be advocates for others (Means & Pyne, 2017). Overall, the more involved students were on campus, the more they felt they belonged. The more they felt a sense of belonging, the more engaged with campus life they were (Duran et al., 2020). More specifically, according to the literature, peer groups in particular play critical roles in the development of a sense of belonging, as these groups provide support that is often necessary to achieve both belonging and persistence (Strayhorn, 2019). According to validation theory, peers play a critical role in the development of validation which may subsequently impact belonging and thereby persistence. Peer relationships can take place in and outside of the classroom, and particularly for minoritized students, can provide a space to be oneself and to find support (Rendon, 1994). Thus, through participation in same-ethnicity student organizations, for example, the participants found support systems among their peers, and found self-disclosure to be more natural, providing them the opportunity to feel validated for their multiple identities. Subsequently, feelings of validation led to feelings of belonging.

For the participants, being bi/polycultural means balancing between two worlds and navigating the norming of their experiences according to the dominant culture. Thus, FGC-SGI

students sought diverse contexts (e.g., groups, peers, organizations) in order to feel seen, validated, and accepted. Further, social contexts where social identities (e.g., FGCS) were not welcomed (e.g., among peers who could not relate) produced feelings of isolation or loneliness (Strayhorn, 2019). Thus, a sense of belonging took on increased value in social contexts where participants were generally not supported or welcomed (e.g., specific majors like business and engineering) (Strayhorn, 2019). This supports the finding that making friends with people of shared backgrounds and identities may serve to meet a basic human need (Strayhorn, 2019). As the literature suggests, deriving a sense of belonging produces behaviors that coincide with "true membership" into a community (Strayhorn, 2019). Thus, the findings indicated shared experiences and identities produced feelings of belonging (e.g., acceptance, regard, value) which created a path for true membership into the peer community and subsequently the larger campus community. For example, Danielle described that her participation in a Latinx student organization which emphasized FGCS issues and concerns provided her a space to fully express her identities and subsequent challenges; thereby, allowing her to feel truly a part of the larger institution by way of her membership to the organization.

Consequently, not all forms of student involvement facilitate a sense of belonging. The literature found that some involvement fosters feelings of isolation (Strayhorn, 2019). The findings confirm this notion as the participants reported not always fitting in within same-ethnicity groups due to their American nationality, biracial identity, or not being true to oneself regarding identities like LGBTQ+ status due to cultural constraints. Additionally, the overall experience of belonging may be different for individuals identifying as biracial specifically, particularly within contexts with closer proximity to whiteness. This was seen through Cici's

discussion of her phenotype which was often "too White" for her Latinx peers but not among her White/American peers. She also spoke often about hiding her accent or changing her dialect to align with her White/American identity as a means of "fitting in." This corroborates Jones and Abes' (2013) findings that identity salience is correlated with the experience of visible or invisible difference. In certain contexts (e.g., among same-ethnicity peers), the further the proximity to whiteness, the more the visible difference (i.e., being biracial) impacted feelings of belonging. Therefore, the notion that experiences that impact belonging are also associated with thoughts about oneself or one's identities is again presented (Strayhorn, 2019).

To expound, when a sense of belonging is achieved, a feeling of mattering often occurs (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017). Mattering indicates that there is a shared sense of trust that all members' needs will be met as a result of the respective relationship (Strayhorn, 2019). Confirming the literature, the data shows that feelings of mattering led to validation, which proved crucial for FGC-SGI students to find their place within their institution (Hoffman et al., 2002; Jehangir, 2009; Stebleton et al., 2012). Again, this was primarily seen within same-ethnicity or diverse peer groups. Within these contexts, FGC-SGI students were adequately supported and better able to navigate the college experience, confirming Hurtado and Carter's (1997) study which found that minoritized students acquired college-ready skills through peer groups. Overall, the finding confirms past research which posits that even on campuses with high diversity, FGC-SGI students need opportunities to interact with each other (e.g., student-led organizations) to feel like they belong (Hachey & McCallen, 2018).

Findings in Light of Literature Reviewed

The determined themes and key findings seemed to imply that this student population's college experience and subsequent success depends heavily on others—whether within their family unit (e.g., older siblings), peers (e.g., those with shared experiences), or professionals (e.g., supportive faculty). The findings of this study are consistent with the literature highlighting each identity group. Yet, this study was also contradictory to the existing literature concerning internal or parental support, specifically. The literature implies that FGC-SGI students often do not feel the support they desire from their family unit due to a lack of understanding, the cost of college, and pressure to pursue specific career paths (Evans et al., 2020; Havlik et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; London, 1989; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Mukherji et al., 2007). Yet, the findings of the study indicate that this is not the experience for all FGC-SGI students, as all except one participant of this study often noted feeling adequately supported and encouraged by their family unit to pursue and complete college. Further, FGCS who also identify as SGIS experience an implicit pressure to succeed albeit the immense support they receive from their parents and home communities. This is contradictory to FGCS literature which has historically indicated that a lack of family support contributes to the pressure to succeed (Evans et al., 2020; Jehangir, 2009; London, 1989; London, 1992; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016).Thus, the phenomenon of feeling pressure to succeed to avoid disappointing parents or family while having an immense amount of family support indicates an important interplay between the FGCS and SGIS identities. Additionally, the findings revealed a positive desire to stay connected rather than break away from families or home communities which contradicts seminal FGCS literature (London, 1989) and may indicate a form of survivor's guilt which is often present in FGCS literature (Piorkowski, 1983). According to the literature, survivor's guilt can create conflict as

it can result in ridicule or feelings of jealousy from and among family or community members, which subsequently produces an internal struggle for students attempting to pursue college who often view it as an escape from family or community (London, 1989; Piorkowski, 1983). However, the findings provide a different view of survivor's guilt; one that is less negative. The findings showed that while at least one participant explicitly noted feelings of guilt for being given the opportunity to attend college, most of the participants implicitly experienced survivor's guilt through the desire to remain connected to their families and communities, expressing their appreciation for their support systems, and the pressure to make them proud through their success in college.

FGCS literature indicates that this student population heavily relies on external support throughout their college experience, particularly to feel connected to the institution (Demetriou et al., 2017; Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; Havlik et al., 2020; Jehangir, 2009; Means & Pyne, 2017; Richardson & Skinner, 1992; Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). The literature also indicates that FGCS often feel alone in the college-going and college-attending process as their families have very little or no experience with these processes (Jehangir, 2009; Jehangir, 2010; Longwell-Grice et al., 2016; Mukherji et al., 2017). The findings confirm the literature in both regards. The participants frequently referred to classmates, roommates, and friends they made from student organization participation as their support systems and their source of belonging at the institution. In fact, some participants who were at least sophomores recalled feeling isolated or disconnected from the institution in their first semester or first year of college due to a lack of student involvement and peer relationships. This disconnection to the institution seemed to exacerbate feelings of loneliness throughout the initial college journey due to a missing familial

or parental model to rely on for navigating college. Thus, the findings confirm that, regarding FGCS identity specifically, not having a model to follow in college fostered a disconnection to the institution which fostered feelings of isolation. However, making friends and getting involved lessened feelings of isolation, and provided participants with support systems to aid with the college transition and overall journey. Overall, because the participants had considerable internal or family support, and successfully found external or peer support, once having completed at least one semester in college, FGC-SGI identities did not seem to negatively impact the overall college experience as the literature often indicates (Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; Jehangir, 2009; Mukherji et al., 2017).

SGIS literature indicates that SGIS feel a burden to succeed primarily due to parental immigration experiences (Orupabo et al., 2019), and they thrive when they relate to people who have common cultural characteristics and experiences (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020; Duran et al., 2020; Ribera et al., 2017). The findings confirm the literature in both regards. The participants often referenced feelings of pride and pressure to honor their parents' immigration to the United States. While it was exciting to be able to do what their parents immigrated to this country to do and could not, they simultaneously felt pressure to succeed for fear of disappointing their families and dishonoring their immigration sacrifices. It is important to highlight that the SGI identity often intersected with the FGCS identity with regard to the burden to succeed within the data set. The idea of being the "first" was referenced frequently across the data set and often meant both being the first in college and the first-born in the United States. This was especially seen throughout the pre-college journey where the findings showed that the participants largely failed at experiencing belonging among their classmates and peers due to their burden of being

the “first.” Thus, upon entering college, many of the participants were both impressed and excited by the institution’s diversity and the prospect of being around others with shared experiences, identities, and feelings. Thus, the findings confirm that FGC-SGI students felt most like they belonged at the institution upon finding same-ethnicity or same-experience peers who provided them with a safe space to explore and disclose their identity experiences, and who validated their sense of self.

The literature shows that minoritized identities are not always welcomed or recognized in higher education (Means & Pyne, 2017), and, at times, social identities and their intersectionality create barriers resulting in a unique experience of belonging (Duffy et al., 2020; Duran et al., 2020; Means & Pyne, 2017). Further, spaces are not always inclusively constructed for students experiencing identities at the intersection of race and generational status as minoritized students are often viewed uni-dimensionally rather than multidimensionally (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018). The findings confirm these ideas as they showed the norming of the White American experience for FGC-SGI students, prompting this student population to seek out peers and contexts where their multiple, minoritized identities and experiences were welcomed and celebrated; primarily within same-ethnicity student organizations. As Nguyen and Nguyen (2018) posited, a multidimensional lens should be used to give proper attention to the multiple statuses that influence minoritized students’ unique collegiate experiences. While not intentionally created by the institution, student-created and student-run organizations were the primary, specific contexts in which FGC-SGI students were seen through multidimensional lenses and, thereby, given proper attention to their multiple identities.

While, FGCS literature has historically framed this minoritized group using a "deficit" model as it relates to concepts such as cultural and social capital, this population thrived in several ways as it related to their multiple cultural and identity-related experiences. This was especially true when considering the multiple, intersecting social identities which include but also extend beyond FGCS and SGIS identities. Thus, the findings of this study serve to support Yosso's (2005) alternative concept of *community cultural wealth* in several ways. The findings suggest that students experiencing both FGCS and SGIS identities derive increased, richer forms of community cultural wealth while in college. For example, participants were able to derive *aspirational capital* through their ability to persist despite the pressure to succeed and lack of representation within the college setting overall. The pressure to succeed, as previously mentioned, derived from parental sacrifice and immigration-related challenges which positioned FGC-SGI students to be the first in their families to navigate college in the United States. Thus, despite the hurdles faced pre-college and during college, this student group largely maintained hope for their own futures where they will make names for themselves and bring honor to their families and their sacrifices.

Further, in alignment with *community cultural wealth* literature, the forms of capital FGC-SGI students experienced built on each other to construct rich examples of community cultural wealth. FGC-SGI students were also able to derive *navigational capital* through behaviors which included selective identity disclosure and code switching as necessary to blend in within contexts that they did not feel "seen" within. For example, within certain college contexts, like classrooms, participants learned how to navigate through careful concealment of

certain identities or using common forms of language and symbolism in the dominant culture in order to communicate with others.

The findings also indicated that FGC-SGI students derived *social capital* through their involvement and interactions with same-ethnicity communities and/or individuals who shared other salient identities (e.g., FGCS identity, LGBTQ+ identity, etc.). The findings showed that participants worked to derive social wealth through their support and encouragement of others with shared identities, such as younger family members or high school students preparing to attend college. *Linguistic capital* could be seen through the participants' ability to speak multiple languages, and their overall unique upbringing which merged multiple cultural traditions together. Additionally, the findings showed that *familial capital* could be seen through the participants' desire to succeed in college in order to give back to their communities and honor their family's immigration, as well as through the development of friendships with peers of similar or diverse cultural backgrounds. Lastly, *resistant capital* was shown in the data through the sharing of knowledge and skills for navigating college in spaces where representation lacked among same-ethnicity and/or FGCS contexts among peer groups. Thus, as the literature indicates, student involvement in college may aid with racial or ethnic identity affirmation and expression (Harper & Quaye, 2007) which may develop and strengthen various forms of community cultural wealth, and ultimately, foster a sense of belonging within the college context overall.

Limitations

Limitations to this study included areas of data collection and recruitment primarily. Although the original design sought to utilize primarily in-person interviews, nine out of 10

interviews took place on Zoom per participant preference. While this did not have a detrimental impact on the quality or depth of most of the interviews, overall, this medium did not allow for the "human" element to be as present as it may have been within an in-person context. This, coupled the study taking place at one institution and with the small number of participants, bode limitations to the adequate transferability of the data. Lastly, phenomenological research encourages researchers to conduct multiple interviews to capture the depth of the first-person perspective, and this study did not employ this practice, although option follow-up interviews were suggested to all participants. Essentially, only one interview per participant was conducted due to time constraints and lack of interest in follow-up interviews among the participants.

The original goal was to recruit participants of varying genders and gender identities as well as a variety of ethnic identities, particularly those not historically studied within this sector of higher education (e.g., Arab-Americans). These goals were not met as the final sample primarily (seven out of 10) included Latinx/Hispanic participants who self-identified as female. Additionally, the recruitment design may have unintentionally resulted in the potential exclusion of individuals identifying as White although they are considered second-generation immigrants in the United States through verbiage and definitions used during in-person and non-contact recruitment efforts (e.g., hanging fliers around the institution). For example, descriptions of qualifying factors for participation focused on "immigrant status" which may not have aligned with how White-identifying students who are of non-White ethnic origins identify their ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Additionally, recruitment primarily consisted of making in-person presentations at ethnic or culturally focused student organizations and clubs. This implied that participants were considered as highly involved in college which likely resulted in increased

feelings of belonging at the institution. Thus, those who were already involved at the institution were more likely to participate which may have potentially influenced the key findings relating specifically to the experience of belonging at the institution. This also implies that students who were not participating in ethnic or culturally focused student organizations may have been left out of the study and could have contributed something significant to the overall findings.

Additionally, according to the MMDI and RMMDI, limitations arise when using one or both models to analyze or interpret identities. For this study, these included the difficulty of assessing all identities, as the concept of "salience" generally identifies a singular identity within a specific context. Employing a qualitative, intersectional analysis allows for the emphasis on the specific and local rather than on an infinite number of categories, or in this study on specific identities (Christensen & Jensen, 2012). I focused on FGCS and SGIS identities in order to emphasize the identities deemed to be the focal point of the research questions as well as to make the data analysis process more manageable (Christensen & Jensen, 2012). Thus, FGCS and SGIS identities were considered "anchor points" (Christensen & Jensen, 2012, p. 112) of identity that I wanted to focus on. Subsequently, participants may have been primed to think and talk about these identities over other ones that they could have mentioned; however, I attempted to make space for participants to discuss other salient identities during interviews. Yet, given these efforts, some social identities may have been missing or were not disclosed due to the study's focus and/or line of questioning in the interview protocol (see the appendix). Lastly, by using the RMMDI, which posits that context shapes identity, this study may have incurred a limitation regarding the lack of consideration that identity may also shape and influence the context (Jones & Abes, 2013).

Implications

For Practice and Policy

This study has a few implications worth noting regarding practice and policy. There are several implications for the population itself. There are also implications for faculty, student affairs professionals and practitioners, as well as senior administrators and policymakers.

FGI-SGC students. First, the data showed that this student population benefitted greatly from having the opportunity to explore and engage with their identities as this both fostered belonging and encouraged persistence. Thus, having the ability to better name their identities could result in this student population seeking out targeted resources, if they exist, to meet their identity needs, which could have implications for overall college experience. Second, the finding that FGC-SGI students feel an internal pressure to set an example for future generations, particularly those within their family unit, implies that this population may work to reduce the level of uncertainty with overall processes for their siblings, cousins, etc. This could have implications for the college-going process in particular, as this population may play a critical role in subsequent generations' college applications, FAFSA applications, etc. Additionally, the finding that this population desires to provide support for peers who identify similarly to them is significant. This finding could have implications for the college navigation process as this population may create resources and opportunities for incoming FGC-SGI students to navigate the college process more easily (e.g., workshops on student loans). Thus, these implications may shift, often positively, the experiences for incoming generations of students identifying as FGC-SGI students. Additionally, this study has implications regarding the differences in college-going experiences regarding finances and financial aid for FGC-SGI students as compared to their

peers, which may significantly impact the overall college experience. It is important to note that the financial aspects of college seemed to prove quite stressful and produced doubt among the participants regarding their ability to attend college, which is in line with current literature (Evans et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2019; Havlik et al., 2020).

Faculty. Higher education faculty and staff should consider encouraging identity exploration among FGC-SGI students, particularly in cases where members of the population have not previously examined or considered examining these aspects of their identity, while also readily providing support to students who might be struggling with their identities to find a place on campus where they can safely do so if it exists. Further, within the classroom context, faculty should consider altering their curriculum to ensure conversations and lessons are not primarily or consistently centered around the White American experience, as this excludes minoritized students. Additionally, faculty should be explicitly inclusive within their syllabi and learning management platforms by asking students to share and utilize, for example, their preferred names and gender pronouns. Lastly, faculty should work to educate themselves on the experiences FGC-SGI students have as a result of their intersecting identities, as means of being inclusive of all students, and should readily and genuinely listen to and support their students when they express concerns by providing them with relevant information or resources where needed.

Student affairs professionals and practitioners. Higher education personnel who design and facilitate academic interventions should consider identifying those whose sense of belonging is low (e.g., via survey), and make early efforts to foster their inclusion through involvement (Strayhorn, 2019). Additionally, these individuals could benefit from being trained

in various social and ethnic identities which are minoritized in order to design programs and other resources that will better support FGC-SGI students. Student affairs professionals could hold listening sessions where this student population has the opportunity to express their needs and desires for more inclusive, supportive programs and services. For example, financial workshops and targeted scholarships could be considered as targeted support systems for FGC-SGI students, as they often face challenges with the financial process of college. Mentorship programs could also be considered as a way of aiding with the college navigation process via other FGC-SGI students or staff. The data revealed that this student population valued homogenous spaces which were primarily found within student-created and student-led organizations. These spaces fostered feelings of community and belonging. Thus, student affairs professionals should consider providing additional opportunity and space for "safe" or "brave" spaces to exist on college campuses by including members of this population in the design and execution of spaces like these.

Senior administrators and policymakers. Administrators should consider the impact of a sense of belonging for individuals experiencing multiple, intersecting identities during campus strategic planning through assessing campus climate and student experiences (Strayhorn, 2019). This may include being more intentional during the hiring process to include candidates who have shared identities and experiences. Additionally, this could feature working with student organizations where these and other identities are highlighted in order to better understand how to provide more targeted support and resources. This could also include the promotion of identity-focused student clubs and organizations and/or including these groups as a part of strategic planning. Lastly, institutions could consider creating a master list of available support

resources, organizations, and clubs for faculty and staff members to refer to (Strayhorn, 2019) or consider creating a one-stop site for FAQs, which are often posted on social media sites like Reddit, where students can ask questions and access their answers quickly and can have confidence that the answers are accurate and reliable. Policies should be deliberately created with minoritized students in mind, particularly those that would provide these students with advantages they are not currently afforded.

For Research

This study has a few implications worth noting regarding future research. First, FGC-SGI students experience other salient social identities in combination with the identities emphasized in this study. Thus, it may be worth examining other salient identities (e.g., LGBTQ+) and their intersection with their FGC-SGI student identities within the college context. Additionally, male-identifying students who belong to the FGC-SGI student population should be targeted in future research, as they likely have experiences and perspectives which may differ greatly from their female-identifying counterparts. Further, ethnic groups, primarily Middle Eastern or Arab-American, which are historically absent from higher education, identity, and/or belonging research should be further explored regarding the area of FGC-SGI student research. Additionally, biracial students identifying as FGC-SGI students need to be more readily considered as their perspectives and experiences, while often similar, can be significantly different than their FGC-SGI peers. This is especially important in cases where biracial students are seen as “white passing” or the reverse, and where they are raised in the United States or instead raised in their country of ancestry.

It is important to note that all the participants were considered persisting, as they were currently enrolled in classes at the institution at the time of their interviews and did not give any indication they would be stopping or dropping out. Thus, future research could emphasize recruitment that would include a wider sample of characteristics within and among this student population including, but not limited to, students who are on academic probation and those who stopped or dropped out but returned to college. Additionally, recruitment could be expanded beyond same-ethnicity student organizations to broaden the population's characteristics, interests, and level of student involvement which may provide a different or wider perspective of belonging. Further, future studies could be designed to study ethnic groups comparatively to determine if there any significant differences in the ways FGC-SGI identities are experienced, and subsequently the experience of a sense of belonging. Additionally, as the data indicated, college was the first place that some participants felt supported; thus, future research could focus on what this student population anticipates the experience of support to be like post-college as well as explore early career or labor market experiences as they relate to the "battle of identity."

In terms of the data collection process, future research should focus on including observations as a form of data collection to enrich the phenomenological understanding of FGC-SGI student experiences with belonging. Observations should focus on student organizations and clubs with a particular emphasis on peer-to-peer interactions, use of cultural traditions, and discussion of identities. Additionally, phenomenological research encourages researchers to conduct multiple interviews to capture the depth of the first-person perspective, and this study did not employ this practice. Therefore, utilizing multiple interviews with each participant would provide a richer portrayal of their first-person experiences.

Researcher Reflection

As described earlier, throughout the data collection and analysis processes, I was able to use suspicious interpretation to focus my perspective with an emphatic yet suspicious eye since I shared many experiences with the participants (Willig, 2017). This process was particularly important as I was close to the research topic and experienced many of the same things as the participants during my undergraduate experience. Suspicious interpretation took place primarily during my journal reflection entries where I openly described the ways in which I connected with the participants. As a result of my journaling, throughout the study process, I was surprised by several things. I experienced surprise regarding the SGIS identity in several ways. First, I was surprised by how diverse most of the participants found the institution to be, with some citing its diversity as the primary reason for enrollment. This was especially surprising considering the same participants went on to share how identity representation lacked within specific contexts (e.g., classrooms), among the student body, and among faculty and staff. I was also surprised to learn that isolation could occur even among same-ethnicity peers due a lack of representation of a variety of sub-groups within the ethnic group (e.g., mostly Mexican representation among Latinx/Hispanic peers and being Costa Rican). This aligned closely with my own experiences growing up in the United States as an Arab-American who is half Lebanese and half Jordanian. While most other Arabs were primarily of Lebanese origin, very few were of Jordanian origin, prompting me to often describe myself as “Lebanese” in certain contexts to avoid having to explain further. It was also interesting to learn that the SGIS identity can be complicated to endure and accept for a variety of reasons, including being born in the United States but raised

elsewhere or not learning one's ethnic language as their first language—prompting feelings of not being enough among cultural communities.

Furthermore, I felt surprised regarding the FGCS identity in several ways. First, I was surprised at how having a sibling model did not completely remove fear of the unknown, doubts, etc. for participants who were not the eldest in their families. As an older sibling, my younger brother relied heavily on me to help him navigate through the college journey but that was not the experience the participants described having. Additionally, I found it interesting that parental and family support was very high for almost all the participants. In fact, most participants seemed to rely heavily on their families for encouragement and motivation as they navigated college and were excited to share aspects of their experience with them. I was surprised by this, as this was not consistent with literature nor my own experiences. Further, I was surprised by how embarrassed or painful it was for many of the participants to identify as FGCS, and how they often worked to conceal this part of their identity in certain contexts where it was not readily accepted. It seemed that either participants freely shared about their FGCS background as a means of providing support or empathy to others, or actively concealed this information in order to reduce feelings of awkwardness around their peers. Finally, I was intrigued to learn that not all participants excitedly attended college but rather they attended reluctantly upon getting into an institution and/or receiving an adequate amount of financial aid. This provided me with an alternative perspective of college as a preferred path for FGC-SGI students.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a discussion of the findings as they connected to past literature in the areas of first-generation college students, second-generation immigrant students, and ethnic

and social identities as well as the conceptual frameworks of sense of belonging and the RMMDI. Additionally, the discussion focused on the four key findings and overarching themes determined during data analysis. This chapter also discussed study limitations as well as implications for the student population, higher education faculty and staff, and administration and policymakers. This chapter also covered potential areas of future research as they related to recruitment of participants, and qualitative and phenomenological research methods. Finally, this chapter provided a researcher's reflection of the interpretation of the findings from a “suspicious” perspective. Overall, this study has allowed for an important opportunity to explore sense of belonging among a student population which has not been studied previously, as well as an opportunity to better understand how FGC-SGI students experience, negotiate, and apply their social and ethnic identity experiences during their college journeys.

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APPENDIX: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Project Title: Exploring Sense of Belonging Among First-Generation College, Second-Generation Immigrant Students

Study Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of U.S. university and college students identifying as first-generation in college and second-generation immigrant in the United States with a particular focus on experiences that are associated with a sense of belonging at this identity intersection.

Research Questions:

> **RQ_1:** How do college students attending a four-year, public, predominantly White institution (PWI) experience first-generation college and second-generation immigrant identities?
>
> **RQ_2:** In what ways do first-generation college, second-generation immigrant students experience a sense of belonging during college?

Warmup questions:

- Why did you decide to pursue a college degree?
- What motivates you to attend college?
- What do you enjoy most about college/this university in particular?
- What do you enjoy least about college/ this university in particular?

Identity experience:

- Tell me about what it means to you to be first-generation in college.
    - *If not answered above:* What feelings are evoked when you think about being the first in your family to attend/graduate college?
- Tell me about what it means to you to be second-generation immigrant in the United States.
    - *If not answered above:* What feelings are evoked when you think about your family's immigration experience to the United States?
- Can you tell me some of the other identities you use to describe yourself?
- How would you describe the relationship among your multiple identities?
    - *If not answered above:* How would you describe the relationship between your FGCS identity and your other identities?
    - *If not answered above:* How would you describe the relationship between your SGIS identity and your other identities?
    - *If not answered above:* How would you describe the relationship between your FGCS and SGIS identities?

- Thinking about what we have discussed with regard to your identities, what are some key moment(s) that you would say led to how you currently identify yourself?
- Tell me about how you decide whether and how to disclose or share your identities with others.

Sense of belonging experience:

- Tell me what it means to you to "belong" at a large, public PWI like this university?
    - *If not answered above:* What does it feel like to "belong" in college as a FGC-SGI student?
- Describe to me when you've most felt like you belonged at this university.
    - *If not answered above:* What specifically makes you feel a sense of belonging in college?
- Describe to me when you've least felt you belonged at this university as a large, public, PWI.
- *If not answered above:* What specifically makes you feel like you don't belong in college?
- Given all the ways you identify, what does sense of belonging mean for a FGC-SGI student?

Wrap up and final comment questions:

- What advice would you give to a student who shares your identities to help with belonging?
- What advice would you give to faculty and administration to help support students identifying as a FGC-SGI student to belong in college?
- Do you have anything else to share with me?