

The Influence of Birth Order and Parental Expectations on Higher Education for First Generation Latina Students

Valerie Arias- FSU College of Education – Higher Education

Introduction

With only 26.6% of Latinas holding a college degree in comparison to 51.4% of white women, the barriers to higher education must be interrogated and deconstructed (Anthony et. al., 2021). As the Latina population increases in the United States, it is critical to understand which factors influence, encourage, and facilitate first generation Latinas to pursue and complete higher education.

This research project used a mixed method approach to explore the influence of birth order and associated parental expectations on college access, enrollment, and retention for first-generation Latina college students. The cross-case study highlighted the pre-collegiate and collegiate experiences of nine first-generation Latina college students in the Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement (CARE) at Florida State University. Preliminary results showed that parental expectations and familial responsibilities varied based on birth order. Six overarching themes emerged from the cross-case study analysis. These themes were categorized into the experiences of college access, enrollment, and retention, including language, lack of resources, and culture shock serving as barriers and participation in pre-college programs, high academic achievement, and CARE as assets. The findings may inform the development of programs, policies, and practices within the K-12 and higher education systems that increasingly support first generation Latina students in their pursuit and completion of higher education.

Aims of the Research

This research study aimed to explore the influence of birth order and parental expectations on college access, enrollment, and retention for first generation Latina college students. This research may be useful for several stakeholders, including parents/guardians, student affairs professionals, and K-12 teachers administrators, and college counselors supporting first-generation Latina students. Stakeholders may also use this research to deconstruct barriers to college access, enrollment, and retention by creating accessible and equitable programs, policies, and practices that serve as assets for these students.

Research Questions

This research study explores the following research questions:

1. What are the birth order experiences of first-generation Latina college students?
2. How does birth order influence parent/guardian and family expectations of post-secondary plans, including college planning, enrollment, and retention for first-generation Latina college students?
3. How can higher education institutions and student affairs professionals support first generation Latina college students in their college access efforts and college success?

Method

Research Design

The research project utilized qualitative case study methodology to evaluate the role of birth order and parental influence on Latina first-generation college students' planning, enrollment, and retention processes. The case studies were conducted through a Qualtrics survey and an individual, narrative 30-60-minute-long interview. This interview method allows for participants to share their experiences in-depth and for the researcher to "identify themes from several individuals that converge across stories describing a common experience" (Biddix, 2018, p. 147). Since the target population for the research project traditionally belongs to a marginalized community, the qualitative research methodology amplifies their lived experiences.

Participants

Participants for the research study were recruited through the Center for Academic Retention and Enhancement (CARE) at Florida State University. Students were encouraged to complete the survey if they identified as a 1) student at Florida State University 2) member of CARE 3) first-generation college student 4) Latina and 5) traditional college-age student of 18-24 years old. Following completion of the survey, qualifying students were invited to interview.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection methods include a Qualtrics survey and individual, narrative interviews. There were 63 responses to the survey, with 47 meeting the five qualifying criteria above. Four students from each academic year were invited to interview for a total of 16. Nine students consented to participate in the individual interviews.

The first half of the interview focused on learning about the student's birth order experiences during their upbringing, specifically situated within their familial responsibilities, cultural identity, and the post-secondary planning process. The second half of the interview concentrated on how their birth order and parental/familial expectations currently impact their experience as a college student, specifically their academic performance, career choice, and support systems. Each of the participant interviews were recorded and transcribed via Zoom.

Preliminary data analysis included manual coding of the individual interview notes and transcripts. Using the theoretical frameworks as a guide, within-case analysis identified key themes. This was followed by cross-case analysis to determine overarching themes.

Results



After two rounds of coding, six themes emerged from the interviews. These were categorized into the experiences of college access, enrollment, and retention with one theme serving as a barrier and another as an asset for each.

THEMES		RECOMMENDATIONS
1 COLLEGE ACCESS	LANGUAGE BARRIER <ul style="list-style-type: none">As either first or second-generation immigrants, the participants faced an English-language barrier during their college access process. PRE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS <ul style="list-style-type: none">Students in pre-college programs, e.g. TRIO, received key academic, career, and economic support in preparation for a post-secondary education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Increase Institutional Inclusion of Latina WomenAccessible Mental Health ResourcesIncrease Institutional Support for ALL First-Generation Students, especially those not within CARECreate a Safer Environment for Black and Brown Students on a Predominantly White Campus
2 COLLEGE ENROLLMENT	LACK OF RESOURCES <ul style="list-style-type: none">The first generation students completed most of their college application and enrollment processes independently with out knowledge, resources, or support. ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none">All of the participants were expected by their parents and/or guardians to graduate from high school with high academic achievement.	
3 COLLEGE RETENTION	CULTURE SHOCK <ul style="list-style-type: none">The majority of participants experienced a culture shock as a minoritized student at the predominantly white university. CARE <ul style="list-style-type: none">The academic, social, professional, and financial support that CARE provides to the first generation Latina college students were the most impactful for their retention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Facilitate Connections between Students and Latino/Hispanic Campus and Community Organizations

Discussion

The findings and recommendations above facilitate our understanding of the factors which serve as barriers and assets for college access, enrollment, and retention for first generation Latina students. Additional preliminary results highlighted the expectations of eldest and middle children to perform caretaking responsibilities for their younger siblings and complete domestic duties. In comparison, youngest children did not serve as caretakers and received support from older siblings or extended family members in their pursuit of higher education. All participants, regardless of their birth order, were expected to complete high school and experienced a double standard based on their respective cultural notions of gender.

Key References



The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant R305B170017 to Florida State University. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.



PURPOSE

PARTNERS UNITED FOR RESEARCH PATHWAYS
ORIENTED TO SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION

