

Plantando Raíces en el Nuevo Sur: Mexican-Origin First-Generation College Students' Transformational Impetus in New Destination States

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Delma Ramos¹ , Elsa Camargo², Cathryn Bennett¹ ,
and Brandi Kennedy¹

Abstract

This study examines Mexican-origin first-generation college students' (FGCS) transformational impetus within the sociopolitical context of the Nuevo South. Authors investigate transformational impetus through students' perceptions of knowledge and tools for advocating for equity and social justice in their communities. Results suggest a greater perceived awareness of equity and social justice tools for community uplift among Mexican-origin FGCS than continuing-generation Mexican-origin college students. Implications for research and practice are provided.

Resumen

Este estudio examinó el ímpetus transformacional de estudiantes universitarios de primera generación y origen mexicano (FGCS) en el contexto socio-político del Nuevo Sur. Los autores investigaron el ímpetus transformacional a través de las percepciones de los estudiantes en cuanto a conocimiento y herramientas de apoyo para equidad y justicia social en sus comunidades. Resultados indicaron una percepción mayor de las herramientas de equidad y justicia social para el levantamiento comunitario entre FGCS de origen mexicano que entre los estudiantes universitarios de generaciones continuas. Implicaciones para investigación y práctica se proporcionan.

¹University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA

²The University of Texas at Arlington, USA

Corresponding Author:

Delma Ramos, School of Education, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, PO Box 26170, Greensboro, NC 27402-6170, USA.

Email: dramos@uncg.edu

Keywords

Mexican-origin college students, first-generation Mexican college students, first-generation students, transformational impetus, community uplift, equity and social justice

Geographic areas where Mexican-origin students have a prominent legacy are more common contexts for scholarship (Rodriguez et al., 2019). However, the Nuevo South (NS), which includes the new destination states of Arkansas and North Carolina, where this study took place, is an important geographic area for advancing understandings of Mexican-origin students' educational and sociopolitical experiences, although this region remains understudied (Carrillo, 2016; Guerrero, 2017).

Between 2008 and 2018, collectively, new destination states' Latinx growth (33%) was fastest among all U.S. regions (Flores et al., 2019), transforming this region in what scholars (Carrillo, 2016; Guerrero, 2017) refer to as the NS. Especially, in North Carolina, Latinx people accounted for 9.6% of the entire state's population in 2018 (UNC Carolina Population Center, 2019). In contrast, the Latinx population in Arkansas represented 7.6% of the state's population in 2017 (Walkenhorst, 2018). When examining population estimates for Mexican-origin people in North Carolina, the state's population accounted for 56% ($n = 537,963$) of all Latinxs in the state in 2019 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). In comparison, Mexican-origin people accounted for 72% ($n = 161,614$) of the entire Latinx population in Arkansas in 2019 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019).

Purpose

Although Mexican-origin people's history and presence in the United States is extensive, racism and discrimination continue to shape their educational experiences and opportunities. Precisely, within the Latinx community, Mexican-origin people attain the lowest educational level nationally (Abrica, 2019; Ballinas, 2017). That is, in 2017 only 12% of Mexican-origin people 25 years and older held a Bachelor's degree compared to 16% of the entire Latinx (Hispanic) origin population in the United States (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020). Furthermore, educational attainment parsed by race in NS states is lower than the national average; bachelor's or higher degree attainment for Hispanic or Latino origin people is 17.6%, while the average in Arkansas is only 9.8% and, in North Carolina is 17%. Importantly, the ethnoracial categories used in these data are very broad and do not disaggregate degree attainment rates within the group "Hispanic or Latino origin," which prevents us from assessing degree attainment estimates particular to Mexican-origin students in the NS.

Furthermore, Southern epistemology (Whitaker et al., 2018) and its sociopolitical distinctions structures Mexican-origin peoples' experiences in the NS, specifically via white supremacy, racism, race evasive ideology, romanticizing of the past, and opposition to elitist intellectualism. In response, Mexican-origin college students confront systemic oppression apparent in minimal infrastructures to advance Latinxs' social,

economic, and political development (Ballinas, 2017). While there is an extensive body of research on the experiences of Latinx college students, studies highlighting Mexican-origin students' resistance are less common (e.g., Abrica, 2019; Campa, 2010). These studies, however, are situated in regions where Mexican-origin people have a long-standing legacy (Rodríguez et al., 2019).

Therefore, this study examines Mexican-origin first-generation college students' (FGCS) transformational impetus (Abrica, 2019; Abrica & Hatch-Tocaimaza, 2019; Luedke, 2020; Rodríguez, 2010) within the sociopolitical context of the NS, where our participants resided at the time of the study. Participant inclusion in this study required residence in the NS. Length of residence reported varied from fewer than 10 years, more than 10 years, or always. Authors investigate transformational impetus through (a) students' perceptions of awareness of equity and social justice tools for community uplift and (b) students' perceptions of possessing the necessary tools and knowledge to discuss and advocate for issues impacting their communities. Precisely, authors explore Mexican-origin FGCS's transformational impetus in comparison with continuing-generation college students (CGCS). Comparisons based on generation to college status are important as a growing body of research documents that Mexican-origin FGCS encounter and navigate unique challenges while pursuing post-secondary education including in college access (Nunez & Crisp, 2012), academic achievement (Mendiola et al., 2010; Pena, 2013), and educational ideologies (Cuellar et al., 2021; Espino, 2016; Kiyama, 2010). This study includes ($n = 315$) Mexican-origin college students of which ($n = 179$) identify as FGCS and ($n = 128$) identify as CGCS. Given the unique context of the NS, our study presents two points of significance. First, it addresses Mexican-origin college students' convergence and divergence of transformational impetus by generation to college status. Second, it foregrounds Mexican-origin students as a diverse college student population, particularly those residing in the NS, which disrupts homogenizing depictions of Mexican and Latinx students.

Therefore, our research questions are: (a) How do Mexican-origin students' perceptions of the sociopolitical context of the NS differ based on generation to college status?, (b) How do Mexican-origin students' perceptions of their awareness of equity and social justice tools to advocate for issues impacting their community differ based on generation to college status? and (c) How do Mexican-origin students' perceptions of possessing the necessary tools and knowledge to discuss and advocate for issues impacting their community differ based on generation to college status? All three research questions are in direct alignment with the emphasis on examining Mexican-origin FGCS's transformational impetus. Precisely, authors first situate student experiences within the NS by asking their perceptions of the sociopolitical context, then authors study students' perceptions of awareness and possessing the necessary knowledge and tools to advocate for their communities, via their second and third research questions. Collectively, the three research questions provide a more comprehensive understanding of Mexican-origin FGCS's transformational impetus within the unique sociopolitical context of the NS. In what follows, authors contextualize the importance of expanding scholarship on the experiences of this population in this region of the United States and situate this study within extant literature.

Contextualizing the Sociopolitics of the South

The U.S. South is a distinctive region of the nation; furthermore, it includes the NS, an area so-described to indicate southern states where the Latinx population is quickly growing (Carrillo, 2016; Flores et al., 2019). Framed by Southern epistemology (Whitaker et al., 2018), the legacy of slavery is one factor making the region distinct. Also, enduring modern manifestations of white supremacy and racialization of people of color are present and contested throughout the nation, yet the South remains readily perceived as different by those residing in the region, particularly by racially minoritized communities. For example, Carrillo (2016) and Wiley and colleagues (2012) reported that the South's Latinx communities are aware of society's deficit views of their ethnic group. Ideologies of white washing history and modern racialization result in hostility and violence against racially minoritized communities including Black and Latinx people (Wilhoit, 1973). Negative and disparaging positioning of Latinx communities occurs in multiple forms. Legislative maneuvers in the region racialize access to public services, such as education, housing, and health care (Carrillo, 2016; Planas, 2017; Thompson, 2013; Villenas, 2001). Demonstrative of discourses in the region oriented to othering the Latinx community, Thompson (2013) stated the sociopolitical disposition toward the Latinx population as "a drag on schools and social services" (p. 27). Importantly, this argument does not seek to minimize or compete with the national-level experiences of racially minoritized people regarding racism or concurrent movements toward racial equity. Rather, establishing the South as having a distinctive form of racism, as shaped by features of a Southern epistemology revolving around white supremacy, race evasive ideology, romanticizing of the past, and opposition to elitist intellectualism (Whitaker et al., 2018) serves to contextualize this study's investigation of Mexican-origin students' experiences, as embedded in these national struggles for justice. Furthermore, this line of inquiry seeks to contribute to an emergent and foundational corpus of literature detailing and envisioning equity with and for racially minoritized communities in the region.

Mexican-Origin Students in Higher Education

A synthesis of extant scholarship on the experiences of Mexican-origin college students revealed a focus on factors that shape students' access to and persistence in college; an emphasis is evident on demographic characteristics and socio-cultural values of Mexican-origin students and their families (Aguayo et al., 2011; Espino, 2016; Kiyama, 2010; Matos, 2021; Nelson & Infante, 2014; Nunez & Crisp, 2012). An exploration of the role of familial-community assets in the development of college ideologies and college going paths of Mexican American families concluded that Mexican-origin families shaped college going ideologies and paths with information and symbols found within social networks (Kiyama, 2010). Similarly, an investigation found that Mexican American students' familial educational ideologies are interconnected with culturally situated familial roles and expectations (Espino, 2016). Furthermore, in line with college access research, scholars studied college choice

among Mexican American students and found that cultural and academic capital contributed to students' decision to pursue enrollment at a 2-year or 4-year college (Nunez & Crisp, 2012). Authors highlight the importance of familial contexts and characteristics in students' determinations for college enrollment (Nunez & Crisp, 2012) and retention (Matos, 2021). Similarly, scholars examined demographic characteristics and cultural values of Mexican American students in relation to their self-efficacy (students' perceptions of their ability to succeed in college) and grade point average (GPA). Results suggested students' socioeconomic status, generation status (time of arrival to the United States), enculturation, and acculturation were positively and statistically significantly associated with college self-efficacy (Aguayo et al., 2011). Likewise, research has highlighted the importance of relationships in the academic success of Mexican-origin college students. Precisely, authors determined that the support of college counselors, mentors, academic support personnel, and supportive relationships beyond campus helped facilitate their adjustment to college (Nelson & Infante, 2014; O'Hara, 2020).

In sum, this corpus of scholarship while importantly focused on expanding our understanding of factors and stakeholders that positively shape college access and outcomes of Mexican-origin students, these studies do not necessarily emphasize students' agency and resistance navigating inequality. Succinctly, scholarship that centers Mexican-origin students' contestations of inequality shifts the focus from only *experiencing oppression* toward *addressing injustice*. Thus, we shift our literature discussion to highlight work that amplifies Mexican-origin students' experiences navigating inequality.

Mapping Mexican-Origin FGCS's Resistance to Inequality

Critical navigational skills (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998) demonstrate racially minoritized students' responses to oppressive postsecondary contexts, and Mexican-origin college students' resistance. For example, Campa's (2010) work with Mexican American community college students expands our understanding of first-generation Mexican-origin students' navigational strategies to overcome obstacles during college. Navigational skills in oppressive higher education contexts demonstrate the myriad ways racially minoritized students resist stigmatization and othering. Resistance is inherent to critical navigational skills, described as "oppositional behavior . . . based on a liberating, emancipatory, or transformative logic" (Giroux, 1983, as cited in Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998, p. 217). Resistance within critical navigational skills responds to oppression but not only to dissent: rather, this resistance prioritizes change toward equity and social justice for racially minoritized students.

Resistance is related to successfully navigating higher education. Participants in Campa's (2010) study were committed to uplifting their communities, which empowered them to achieve academic success expressed as a larger purpose for and with their families and community. In addition, Campa (2010) extended Mexican-origin students' resistance beyond campus, specifically prioritizing social inequity with their families and in their communities.

Mexican-Origin FGCS as Change Agents

Mexican-origin college students' self-efficacy and agency further evidence their applied resistance, which requires historicizing extant literature on the socio-cultural dynamics within responses to oppression. Cuellar's (2019) critical quantitative application illustrated how Latinx students facing marginalization directed capital as resistance (racial-ethnic affinity group participation, community cultural wealth utilization, and critical social inequity reflection) amid marginalization. This definition of Mexican-origin students as change agents reinforces their commitment to resist oppression in higher education, including that higher education meets this communities' expectations.

Mexican-Origin College Student Engagement

Scholarship specific to Mexican-origin college students in 4-year universities is emergent; thus, an expanded scope including community college contexts provides insight on engagement. For example, Pena (2013) investigated environmental and motivational factors of Mexican-origin males' associate's degree educational success and found multiple elements contributed to degree attainment. Most notably, Pena (2013) recommended colleges integrate student engagement within the college environment. Furthermore, Hernandez and colleagues (2012) validated a college engagement instrument with Latina/o college students ($n = 736$) and, via factor analysis, developed an argument for culturally relevant nuance regarding Latina/o engagement, especially challenging assumptions of one normative model's efficacy with Latinx populations and their "cultural roles as students and sense of agency" (p. 14). More specifically to tertiary education, Solórzano and Yosso (2001) applied critical race theory in their study on Chicana and Chicano graduate students or scholars, and they theorized the transformational power of counter-storying Chicana/o higher educational presence and experience. While student engagement literature is prevalent, research that centers racially minoritized students—without first comparing them with majoritarian white students—is scant, hence the brevity of this section.

Theoretical Framework

The themes presented in research specific to Mexican-origin college students namely, critical navigational capital, resistance to inequality, and agency toward change—share an orientation of response to inequality central to the theory of "transformational impetus" (Abrica, 2019; Rodríguez, 2010), which theoretically frames this study. Rodríguez (2010) differentiated transformational impetus from other established concepts that account for how any student may respond to society; explicitly transformational impetus addresses students' intentions toward promoting social justice, particularly among racially minoritized students who seek to change "environments that are inherently oppressive" (Rodríguez, 2010, p. 12 as cited in Cuellar, 2019, p. 4). This distinction from social agency or student activism, frames transformational impetus as closely relevant to the experiences of racially minoritized students.

Theoretically orienting our research with transformational impetus (Abrica, 2019; Abrica & Hatch-Tocaimaza, 2019; Luedke, 2020; Rodríguez, 2010) aligns with prior applications of the theory. More specifically, transformational impetus in this study illuminates Mexican-origin students' awareness of equity and social justice tools to advocate for community uplift and students' perceptions of possessing the necessary tools and knowledge to discuss and advocate for issues impacting their communities. Precisely, this study examines students' perspectives within the NS's sociopolitical context that, broadly, denigrates racially minoritized people and, specifically, members of the pan ethnic Latinx group. As this study invites connections among generation to college status, Mexican-origin students, and understandings of equity and social justice as mechanisms of community benefit, it furthers the application of transformational impetus theory toward the "survival and resistance to racial and other intersecting forms of oppression" that Abrica and Hatch-Tocaimaza (2019, p. 511) suggest for scholars who incorporate transformational impetus theorizations in their scholarship.

The Present Study

Data presented in this manuscript stem from a larger study that examined Latinx college students' perceptions of engagement with critical perspectives to address social injustice and inequality, attending college in two new destination states (North Carolina & Arkansas) in the NS. This study includes participants who are Mexican-origin college students ($n = 315$), who identify as FGCS ($n = 179$) or CGCS ($n = 128$). Included participants lived in the NS at the time of the study and reported times residing in the region ranging from fewer than 10 years, more than 10 years, or always.

Research Sites

Data were collected at two 4-year predominantly white institutions (PWIs) in two new destination states (North Carolina and Arkansas) in the Southern region of the United States. Focusing on 4-year institutions, not 2-year or other types, was driven by scholarship that reveals legacies of ethn racially minoritized students funneled into vocational and community colleges and not 4-year institutions for higher education (Gándara et al., 2012). In addition, selected sites feature a growing Latinx undergraduate student body and curricular/co-curricular programming supporting this student population. Furthermore, both selected institutions demonstrated parity in undergraduate Latinx student enrollment relative to statewide Latinx populations, which shaped site selection.

Central University (CU; a pseudonym) is a 4-year public doctoral university with high research activity (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2011) located in the South Atlantic region of the United States. In fall 2020, undergraduate student enrollment totaled 15,995, and the proportion of students identified as Latinx represented 11% of the undergraduate student population. CU does not collect data specific to ethnic affiliation of Latinx students, thus, data on Mexican-origin students

at CU are not available for this manuscript. Also, in Fall 2019, 39% of CU's undergraduate students indicated first-generation to college status.

Western University (WU; a pseudonym) is a 4-year public doctoral university with very high research activity (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2011) located in the West South Central region of the United States. In fall 2020, undergraduate student enrollment totaled 22,825, and the proportion of students identified as Latinx represented 9.2% of the undergraduate student population. WU does not collect data specific to ethnic affiliation of Latinx students, thus, data on Mexican-origin students at WU are not available for this manuscript. Also, in Fall 2019, 25% of WU's undergraduate students indicated first-generation to college status.

Participant Selection

To identify potential participants, authors partnered with institutional research offices at both institutions in the study and requested email addresses for current undergraduates and alumni (from each institution) who identified as Latinx. These data request generated a list of 5,273 emails (current students, $n = 3,688$; alumni, $n = 1,585$). Authors sent three email invitations to each potential participant between May and July 2019. Eligibility criteria included: (a) Latinx or Hispanic identity, (b) Having lived in one of the two states in the study for at least 2 years or attended high school in one of these states, and (c) being enrolled as an undergraduate student at one of the study sites in Spring 2019. A total of $n = 544$ students participated in the study. For the purpose of this manuscript, we present a subset of data from ($n = 315$) Mexican-origin FGCS and CGCS.

Data Collection

Data were collected via an online survey, "La Conciencia de Equidad en el Sur Survey (Equity Consciousness in the Nuevo South Survey)." The survey consisted of 64 items and took 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Broadly, the survey gathered insights on (a) the role of Southern higher education institutions in engaging Latinx students with critical perspectives and efforts for equity and social justice, (b) Latinx students' perceptions of their ethnic identification with the pan ethnic Latinx community, and (c) Latinx students' awareness and engagement with equity and social issues impacting their community, against the backdrop of the sociopolitical context of the NS.

To address construct validity, the survey was developed as a collaboration between authors and an advisory group of faculty and doctoral students who serve Latinx college students. Expert review from the advisory group in conversation with the literature on Latinx racialized encounters and construction in the South corresponds with validity techniques that challenge normative, positivistic quantitative methodologies (Hernández, 2015; Sablan, 2019). Furthermore, four individuals, who work or have worked with Latinx students in higher education and who were not a part of the advisory group, pilot tested the survey with multiple-choice and open-ended questions.

This manuscript centers survey items examining participants' awareness of equity and social justice tools to advocate for their communities.

Variables of interest. To measure participants' perceptions of the sociopolitical context of the NS, the authors constructed a sociopolitical context of the NS measure. This measure consisted of six survey items that broadly asked participants about their experiences feeling valued by their state and supported to access community resources to meet their basic needs through state policy. Participants were also asked about their views on establishing a community of support among members of the Latinx pan ethnic group and with other ethnic and racial communities. The six items included in this measure varied in structure from dichotomous items to items on a 5-point scale. Collectively, these items showed reliability of ($\alpha = .72$) and sociopolitical context participant scores for Mexican-origin college students ranged from 4 to 27.

Student awareness of equity and social justice tools was conceptualized in relation to students' perceptions of their on-campus engagement, as sources for these tools and knowledge for advancing social justice and equity in their communities. This focus included data related to types of engagement on campus and perceptions of participants' experience with campus engagement. The data reported on types of campus engagement serve primarily to contextualize the types of engagement experiences Mexican-origin students have on campus though the larger emphasis lies on student perceptions of these campus engagement experiences as sources for building equity and social justice tools. To these ends, we examined the following variables (a) Mexican-origin FGCS and CGCS types of campus engagement (including a student organization, student services offices, and campus events). (b) Mexican-origin FGCS and CGCS total number of campus engagement opportunities. This variable was calculated by adding all the engagement types participants selected in their responses to the previous question. (c) Mexican-origin FGCS and CGCS perceptions of campus engagement as sources of tools for engaging with issues impacting their community from equity and social justice perspectives. This information was captured in participant responses to level of agreement with "The student organizations I am part of or interact with provide knowledge and tools for me to engage with issues impacting the Latinx/ Hispanic community in the state from an equity and social justice perspective" and "The university offices and centers I interact with provide knowledge and tools for me to engage with issues impacting the Latinx/ Hispanic community in the state from an equity and social justice perspective." Both items were on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from disagree strongly to agree strongly, the average of these two items was calculated to create this variable. (d) Mexican-origin FGCS and CGCS perceptions of possessing the necessary tools and knowledge to discuss and advocate for equity and social justice issues impacting their community. This information was captured in participant responses to level of agreement with: "After being at this university for some time, I feel like I have the knowledge and tools necessary to discuss equity and social justice issues impacting the Latinx/Hispanic community in the state" and "After being at this university for some time, I feel like I have the knowledge and tools necessary to advocate for equity and social justice issues impacting the Latinx/

Hispanic community in the state.” Both of these items were on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from disagree strongly to agree strongly, the average of these two items was calculated to create this variable.

Data Analysis

With a subsample of data (from the larger study) inclusive only of the responses of Mexican-origin Latinx college students ($n = 315$), authors calculated descriptive statistics and examined comparisons between Mexican-origin FGCS and CGCS via independent samples t -tests. First, we calculated descriptive frequencies for participants' perspectives on the sociopolitical context of the NS. Then, we calculated descriptive frequencies for the types of engagement of participants and calculated counts for the total number of campus engagement types. Finally, we calculated the means for participants' perceptions of the sociopolitical context of the NS, their perceptions of campus engagement as sources of tools for engaging with issues impacting their community from an equity and social justice perspective, and perceptions of possessing the necessary tools and knowledge to discuss and advocate for equity and social justice issues impacting their community. Following descriptive analyses, the authors tested assumptions for and ran independent sample t -tests to compare group means of Mexican-origin FGCS and CGCS on their perceptions of the sociopolitical context of the NS and the latter two variables of interest.

Results

Of the total of Mexican-origin students ($n = 315$), participants identified as FGCS ($n = 179$) while ($n = 128$) participants identified as CGCS, and eight participants did not provide generation to college status. Results suggest that the median of perceptions of the sociopolitical context of the NS was ($Mdn = 14.00$) for both groups. In contrast, mean perceptions of the sociopolitical context of the NS was slightly lower ($M = 13.95$, $SD = 4.74$) for FGCS than for CGCS ($M = 14.26$, $SD = 5.23$). Thus, the means of both groups suggest moderate to slightly favorable views of the sociopolitical context of the NS and signal a slight difference on how participants discern the unique sociopolitical context, regardless of generation to college status. This assertion was confirmed by an independent samples t -test, which revealed no statistical differences between Mexican-origin FGCS and CGCS, $t(261) = -.502$, $p = .32$.

In addition, to contextualize participant engagement in college, we first present an overview of the types of campus engagement we observed between Mexican-origin FGCS and CGCS. The most frequent type of engagement for both groups was a student organization on campus (FGCS, $n = 73$, CGCS, $n = 65$). Similarly, the second and third most common campus engagement types were the same for both groups, general student events (sporting and social events), followed by engagement in multicultural student events. Table 1 shows the type of engagement selected by FGCS in comparison to CGCS and the number of participants who selected each engagement type.

Table 1. Types of Engagement.

Type of campus engagement	FGCS	CGCS
A student organization	73	65
Student services on campus	31	28
An office or center dedicated to serving Latinx/Hispanic students on campus	31	6
Student protests or demonstrations	16	10
General student events such as sporting events/social programming	68	54
Multicultural student events	67	53
Engagement type not listed	23	11

Note. FGCS = first-generation college students; CGCS = continuing-generation college students.

Regarding the total number of campus engagement experiences of participants, of a total of six possible cumulative engagement opportunities, our results indicate that the mode for types of student engagement for both FGCS and CGCS is one engagement experience, the median is two engagement experiences, and the average is $M = 2.13$ for FGCS and $M = 2.06$ for CGCS. As this variable was not on a continuous scale, We did not estimate parametric comparisons for the means via independent samples *t*-test. However, considering the descriptive statistics presented, there appear to be minimal differences in the total number of engagement opportunities between FGCS and CGCS.

Moreover, our analyses of participants’ awareness via their perceptions of campus engagement (i.e., student organizations and campus offices) as sources to access tools for engaging with issues from equity and social justice perspectives indicate that among FGCS, 48.6% ($n = 87$) agree or agree strongly, 17.9% ($n = 32$) disagree or disagree strongly, and 19.6% ($n = 35$) are undecided. In contrast, among CGCS, 33.6% ($n = 43$) agree or agree strongly, 34.4% ($n = 44$) disagree or disagree strongly, and 19.5% ($n = 25$) are undecided. Accordingly, FGCS ($M = 3.35, SD = .97$) compared to CGCS ($M = 2.98, SD = .98$) differed significantly in mean perceptions of campus engagement as sources to access tools for engaging with issues impacting their community from equity and social justice perspective, $t(264) = 3.01, p < .01$.

Similarly, analyses of participants’ perceptions of possessing the necessary tools and knowledge to discuss and advocate for equity and social justice showed that among FGCS, 41.3% ($n = 74$) agree or agree strongly, 22.3% ($n = 40$) disagree or disagree strongly, and 22.3% ($n = 40$) are undecided. In contrast, among CGCS, 35.9% ($n = 46$) agree or agree strongly, 35.2% ($n = 45$) disagree or disagree strongly, and 16.4% ($n = 21$) are undecided. Accordingly, FGCS ($M = 3.29, SD = 1.0$) compared to CGCS ($M = 3.09, SD = 1.1$) did not differ significantly in mean perceptions of possessing the necessary tools and knowledge to discuss and advocate for equity and social justice issues impacting their community, $t(264) = 1.54, p = .12$.

Discussion

This study examined transformational impetus of Mexican-origin FGCS and CGCS stemming from their college experience, uniquely situated within the sociopolitical context of the NS. Views of the NS among FGCS and CGCS were similar and a *t*-test revealed no statically significant differences between group means. While statistical significance was not shown in our data, mean perceptions of the sociopolitical context of the NS was higher for CGCS ($M = 14.26$) than for FGCS ($M = 13.95$). When situated within literature (Carrillo, 2016; Villenas, 2001; Whitaker et al., 2018) that highlights the hostility of the sociopolitical context of the NS toward Latinxs, including Mexican-origin college students, this result provides insight into the differing experiences of Mexican-origin students in the NS as shaped by their generational college status. In addition, this generation to college difference among Mexican-origin college students may relate to differing levels of cultural or academic capital (Nunez & Crisp, 2012). For example, it can be theorized from our study that CGCS are likely to have relatively more robust networks to facilitate their lives and potentially provide a buffer against racialized and systemic oppression in the NS. Furthermore, slightly favorable views of the sociopolitical context among both groups, calls for further examination of how Mexican-origin students experience the NS, especially in connection with transformational impetus (Abrica, 2019; Abrica & Hatch-Tocaimaza, 2019; Luedke, 2020; Rodríguez, 2010) as this concept centers students' determination to challenge inequality in response to their experiences with marginalization.

Results also suggest that the most common form of campus engagement, regardless of generation to college status, is student organizations. This conclusion contributes to the literature on Mexican-origin college students as extant work does not convey common forms of campus engagement among this student population and lacks in examining Latinx student experiences in the NS, with a few exceptions (Carrillo, 2016; Guerrero, 2017; Ramos et al., 2021;). Moreover, analysis of cumulative campus engagements revealed consistent figures for both groups. However, FGCS reported a slightly higher mean number of campus engagements ($M = 2.13$) compared to CGCS, ($M = 2.06$). Nonetheless, the similarity of these results warrants further examination, specifically to understand factors that might shape campus engagement in connection to first-generation to college status.

In contrast, our results for Mexican-origin students' perceptions of their awareness of tools to advocate for their community differed based on generation to college status. Our analysis of mean comparisons showed statistically significant differences between the two groups. This result signals study participants' transformational impetus in relation to their critical navigational skills, as outlined in the work of Solórzano and Villalpando (1998), who defined student resistance to oppression as awareness of how to successfully confront marginalization.

Furthermore, results of participants' perceptions of possessing the necessary tools and knowledge to discuss and advocate for equity and social justice issues showed a higher level of agreement among FGCS compared to CGCS. Albeit no statistically significant differences were noted between the two groups, our results support notions

of transformational impetus linked to students' mobilizing for systemic change (Luedke, 2020). Thus, our results align with the idea that racially minoritized students disrupt expectations of who can engage in community uplift and demonstrate transformational impetus through their confidence in their ability to advocate for their community via tools acquired in college. Specifically, this result emphasizes an understanding of Mexican-origin students as change agents (Campa, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

Collectively, our results expand our understanding of transformational impetus among first-generation Mexican-origin college students. Specially our study demonstrates that Mexican-origin FGCS perceive the sociopolitical context of the NS as less favorable compared to CGCS, which can fuel students' transformational impetus for systemic change. Furthermore, our results suggest Mexican-origin FGCS's greater perceived awareness of equity and social justice tools and positive perceptions of possessing the necessary knowledge and tools to discuss and advocate for equity and social justice issues impacting their communities.

Implications for Research

Comparative analyses suggest similarity between Mexican-origin FGCS and CGCS specific to views of the sociopolitical context of the NS and campus engagement. Future research examining generation to college may benefit from employing inferential analysis for clarity on the predictive ability of this factor on student views and experience. In addition, research can further examine the role of first-generation to college status as a mediator among Mexican-origin college students' sociopolitical context, campus engagement, and transformational impetus. Precisely, expanding this line of inquiry can amplify understandings of transformational impetus of Mexican-origin college students as they contribute to community uplift.

Furthermore, comparative regional studies may corroborate our findings that the NS does have a distinctive impact on Mexican-origin college students' transformational impetus and college experiences. Specifically, a suggestion for scholars from this work is to prioritize the discursive and intersubjective relationships among college students' racial and ethnic identities and the sociopolitical climate. Essential to this line of inquiry are data disaggregation and within-group comparisons to further enhance knowledge of historically minoritized groups' experiences with college, particularly as influenced by the ideological dynamics in their regions.

Implications for Practice

Our results are of particular relevance to Student Affairs educators, specifically in relation to campus engagement. While Mexican-origin FGCS and CGCS differed only slightly but not statistically on their patterns of campus engagement, results suggest Mexican-origin FGCS are more engaged with ethnic affinity student services and multiculturally oriented events than CGCS. These results encourage Student Affairs educators to promote the development and success of affinity student groups as a productive focus for the success of Mexican-origin college students on their campuses.

Specific to transformational impetus, our results suggest statistical significance between Mexican-origin FGCS' and CGCS' perceived awareness of tools to advocate for their community through campus engagement. This finding signals the important role campus activities plays in providing students with knowledge and education to disrupt community marginalization. Thus, this contribution is relevant to Student Affairs educators with resources to orient student campus engagement to challenge inequality. Therefore, a larger focus on sustaining equity-focused opportunities for engagement on campus is warranted.

In addition, our findings advance practice related to retention efforts with Mexican-origin students. Our results support that campus engagement is a vector for transformational impetus. From this understanding, we recommend higher educational leaders consider the important function of co-curricular engagement and related supportive relationships, on and off campus, in relation to Mexican-origin students' educational attainment, notably as regards retention and completion efforts. While retention efforts that target academic support and achievement are certainly an important component of successful degree attainment, our findings also suggest that co-curricular spaces foster historically minoritized groups' access to advocacy tools and supportive relationships with like-minded others. Especially as they navigate oppressive contexts, expansive access to these tools for advancing equity and social justice from campus activities reinforces redress to the social injustices Mexican-origin students confront in broader society.

Furthermore, the evidence of transformational impetus among Mexican-origin FGCS in our study disrupts normative discourse in Student Affairs practice that frame FGCS from a deficit perspective. Our study demonstrates that first-generation Mexican-origin students are equipped to engage in equity and social justice. Thus, Student Affairs educators are urged to enhance and promote this attribute by embracing and nurturing this population's disposition toward agency and social change. Our findings promote that Mexican-origin students possess transformational impetus that is enhanced by the tools and knowledge gained in campus engagements. From this perspective, we then recommend higher education professionals to view Mexican-origin students as thought partners with whom they can co-create and co-design campus engagement opportunities. Specifically, scholar-practitioners must seek student input on their most pressing needs and concerns to design programs that are responsive to both Mexican-origin students' agency and capacity to advocate for themselves and their communities.

Limitations

In preparing our study and situating our line of inquiry within the NS, we drew on several sources of information and data. However, one source of data we were not able to locate was institutional data specifically about Mexican-origin students and their generation to college status. As institutions are not required to collect this level of data, the study does not include an evaluation within the findings that is specific to the institutional presence (or lack thereof) of first-generation, Mexican-origin students.

Subsequently, we recognize that further research that incorporates disaggregated racial and ethnic group data and within group comparisons would greatly contribute to scholarship that promotes equitable transformation of higher education, particularly with racially minoritized groups.

Conclusion

This study makes important contributions to the field of higher education by underscoring the points of convergence and distinction among Mexican-origin college students' transformational impetus via campus engagement. Specifically, Mexican-origin FGCSs are more engaged and aware of issues of equity and social justice in the NS; this signals their ability and active participation in resisting oppression. One motivation for pursuing this thread of scholarly inquiry is to foreground how first-generation and continuing-generation college students experience higher education. As a corollary focus, this research agenda seeks to contribute to scholars and practitioners' understandings and knowledge of Mexican-origin students as diversified rather than monolithic, especially those residing and studying in the NS.

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ORCID iDs

Delma Ramos  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1611-243X>

Cathryn Bennett  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4068-2969>

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Author Biographies

Dr. Delma Ramos is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Dr. Ramos' work examines the experiences of historically minoritized populations in higher education from an equity and social justice lens. Particularly, she studies issues at the intersection of race, class, and gender.

Dr. Elsa Camargo is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). Her research interests are in the areas of college access and success for minoritized students and career advancement of under-represented faculty in higher education.

Cathryn Bennett is a Ph.D. candidate in educational studies and higher education at the University of North Carolina Greensboro and research analyst in the office of institutional equity at the University of Delaware. Her research agenda foregrounds higher educational equity and access for first-generation, racially minoritized, and refugee people.

Brandi Kennedy is a Ph.D. student at UNC Greensboro and also serves as the Director of Student Outreach & Postsecondary Access at Say Yes Guilford. Her research interests include the experiences of faculty of color, Black Feminist Thought, and critical race feminism.